

**Script Crisis and Literary Modernity in China, 1916-1958**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2014

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the modern Chinese script crisis in twentieth-century China. It situates the Chinese script crisis within the modern phenomenon of phonocentrism – the systematic privileging of speech over writing. It depicts the Chinese experience as an integral part of a worldwide crisis of non-alphabetic scripts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It places the crisis of Chinese characters at the center of the making of modern Chinese language, literature, and culture. It investigates how the script crisis and the ensuing script revolution intersect with significant historical processes such as the Chinese engagement in the two World Wars, national and international education movements, the Communist revolution, and national salvation.

Since the late nineteenth century, the Chinese writing system began to be targeted as the roadblock to literacy, science and democracy. Chinese and foreign scholars took the abolition of Chinese script to be the condition of modernity. A script revolution was launched as the Chinese response to the script crisis. This dissertation traces the beginning of the crisis to 1916, when Chao Yuen Ren published his English article “The Problem of the Chinese Language,” sweeping away all theoretical oppositions to alphabetizing the Chinese script. This was followed by two major movements dedicated to the task of eradicating Chinese characters: First, the Chinese Romanization Movement spearheaded by a group of Chinese and international scholars which was quickly endorsed by the Guomindang (GMD) Nationalist government in the 1920s; Second, the dissident Chinese Latinization Movement initiated in the Soviet Union and championed

by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the 1930s. This crisis was brought to an abrupt end in 1958, when Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the People's Republic of China, relegated the Romanization system *pinyin* to an official auxiliary status, secondary to Chinese characters, thus concluding the half-century struggle between the Chinese script and the alphabet.

The final containment of the script crisis was partly a political decision of the new socialist state, and partly the result of the use of “*baihua*.” The multivalent term *baihua*—plain speech, vernacular, and a colloquialized written language—enabled an unlikely reconciliation between the phonocentric dreams of a Chinese alphabet and a character-based Chinese national language and literature. This alternative solution to the script crisis, which grew from within the Chinese script, was rehearsed in the first modern Chinese anti-illiteracy program in France during the Great War. The solution was consolidated as a colloquialized written Chinese became the staple of modern Chinese literary writing. The negotiated *baihua*—imprinted profoundly by the phonocentric-biased discourse—on the one hand registers the historical reality of the modern Chinese writing as a written language; on the other, it keeps alive the phonocentric dreams of modern China.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many individuals and institutions for years of assistance and encouragement. First of all, I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to my advisor Lydia Liu. She has shaped and inspired my years at Columbia University with her unusual intellectual scope, theoretical acumen, and her uncompromising attention to writing. She has set the example of exemplary scholarship, which I could only hope to emulate. Shang Wei oversaw different stages of this project and remained a constant source of support and encouragement. His expertise in Ming and Qing *baihua* literature enriched my understanding of the linguistic materiality of its modern variation. Bao Weihong offered me unwavering support, both intellectual and emotional, throughout the years. Her remarkable knowledge in film and media studies has steered me toward a more rigorous engagement with the relationship between media and mass literacy. David Lurie challenged some of my basic assumptions and pushed me to conceptualize my whole project in a more coherent way. He has also taught me much about Japan and Japanese writing with extraordinary rigor and fine pedagogy, which have informed my own study of Chinese writing to no small measure. Rebecca Karl raised crucial questions about my historiographical approach, compelling me to define more carefully my historical *problematique*. Her home where our writing group convened will be remembered fondly as the Hengshan Hotel of the Upper West Side. I would also like to thank Li Tuo, whom I think of as an unofficial “sixth” member of my committee, for his erudition, vision, and stimulation.

I am very grateful to the Social Science Research Council, Columbia University GSAS Travel Grant, and the Lane Cooper Foundation for funding the research and

writing of this dissertation. In Cambridge, MA, Rulan Chao Pian welcomed me to her home and shared her memories of her father Chao Yuen Ren with me. At Berkeley, Andrew Jones generously hosted my archival research at the Bancroft Library. Reference librarians He Jianye, Susan Snyder, and David Kessler made my Berkeley library days delightful and productive. In Hong Kong, aside from facilitating my research at the Chung Chi Library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Beidao treated me with hospitality, poetry, and free books. In the U. K., Richard Luckett showed me the wonders of the I. A. Richards Collection in the Old Library at the Magdalene College, University of Cambridge. Though materials regarding Basic English that I culled from Cambridge and the Institute of Education in London did not make their way into the present dissertation, they planted seeds for future work. For the Beijing leg of the research, I had the joy of returning to my alma mater – Tsinghua University. Ge Fei, Wang Zhongchen, and Wang Hui offered me brilliant feedback and urged me to rethink the epistemological implications of the script crisis. In Anhui, Yan Guizhong and Yu Rijin took care of me while I dug into the archives at the Tao Xingzhi Museum. I am also indebted to the staff and librarians at the Lu Xun Museum and the Chinese National Library in Beijing, as well as the Qu Qiubai Museum in Changzhou.

I thank the following people for responding to and commenting on prospectus, chapter drafts, and presentations: Antje Budde, Brett de Bary, Linda Feng, Razan Francis, Arnika Fuhrmann, Marilyn Ivy, Thomas Keirstead, Cornelius Kubler, Greta Marchesi, Robin McNeal, Meng Liansu, Meng Yue, Jacques Neefs, Janet Poole, Naoki Sakai, Graham Sanders, Andre Schmid, Q.S. Tong, Wang Pin, and Wu Yiching.



Sincere gratitude is due to the wonderful members of my two writing groups who tirelessly parsed through my unruly drafts and provided me with critical insights and warm encouragement: Robert Cole, Anatoly Detwyler, Arunabh Ghosh, Liza Lawrence, Jennifer Dorothy Lee, Andy Liu, Chelsea Schieder, Mi-ryong Shim, Nate Shockey, Brian Tsui, and Lorraine Wong.

My fellow classmates and friends have made graduate school hospitable and stimulating. Chang Yi-hsiang, Sayaka Chatani, Nan Ma Hartmann, Lin Shing-ting, Liu Shao-Hua, Yan Zi, and Wu Minna treated me with good food, conversation, and company. Chen Buyun, Chen Kaijun, Sara Kile, and Greg Patterson demonstrated library camaraderie toward the end of our writing days together. Gal Gvili and Myra Sun, to whom I owe special thanks, made NYC a second home to me with their companionship and friendship. I am also grateful to the many able librarians at Columbia: Seangill Peter Bae, Sasho Donovan, Rich Jandovitz, Wang Chengzhi, and Zhang Rongxiang, without whom my days and nights at the C.V. Starr Library would not have been the same.

I thank Wang Jing for his joyful presence, his belief in me, and for honoring “*facta, non verba*.” My gratitude to my parents—Rong Yueyu and Zhong Gang—is beyond words. They have selflessly tolerated my long absence from home, shared my joy in making discoveries, listened to my frustrations and complaints, and saw me through my last stage of dissertation completion with love and composure.

I dedicate this study, limited and immature as it is, to the Chinese laborers in the First World War, who were, in my mind, the real heroes of May Fourth and showed the world a viable path toward surviving the script crisis of modernity.

## INTRODUCTION

**Script Crisis and Literary Modernity in China**

First, we must consider the problem of phonocentrism as one which is not limited to the “West.”

—Karatani Kōjin<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the deader the written language – the farther it was from speech – the better: in principle everyone has access to a pure world of signs.

—Benedict Anderson<sup>2</sup>

We operate in the aftermath of a script crisis – the crisis of non-alphabetic scripts in the modern age. Challenged by the Roman or Latin alphabet, numerous other scripts sought ways to adapt themselves to the zeitgeist of alphabetizing writing. Two main reasons animated and sustained the universalizing power of the Roman or Latin alphabet: first, its perceived technological superiority in capturing speech in the written form; second, the very discourse of phonocentrism, and together with it, alphabetic universalism. Since the mid-nineteenth century, in an increasingly technologizing world, this alphabetic script has inscribed itself into the invention and development of modern information technologies such as telegraphy, the typewriter, and the computer. Together, they served and strengthened modern empires. It seemed that the Roman or Latin alphabet was to reign as the future universal script. To borrow Walter Ong’s words, there might have been “many scripts but only one alphabet.”<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, the singularity of “the alphabet” was but a trope standing in for the organizing principle—the phoneticization of speech in the written form—under which all phonetic alphabets were

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<sup>1</sup> Karatani Kōjin, “Nationalism and Écriture,” *Surface* V.201.1 (1995), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 84.

invented.<sup>4</sup> The Semitic, Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, and Roman alphabets among many others, though varying in their capacities in speech mimesis, collectively lent voice to phonocentrism – the systematic privileging of speech over writing.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the phonocentric discourse fed into the comparison of scripts, fuelled the hierarchization of the writing systems of the world, and catapulted the Roman or Latin alphabet to the top of the script hierarchy. The singularity of the alphabet realized its full meaning when the Roman or Latin alphabet became a synecdoche of the whole body of phonetic scripts.<sup>6</sup> It staked its alphabetic universalism asserting the Latin alphabet as the most adaptable script representing speech in writing, while relegating all other scripts to inferior positions in want of full phoneticization.<sup>7</sup>

This study does not intend to offer a survey of the comparative and hierarchical order of the world’s writing systems, nor does it seek to account for the construction of the phonocentric-biased discourse that creates and sustains that very order. It begins after the establishment of the universal status of the Roman or Latin alphabet and takes its cue

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Ong explains the uniqueness of the alphabet as following, “The most remarkable fact about the alphabet no doubt is that it was invented only once.” Ibid, 88.

<sup>5</sup> I am not using “phonocentrism” in the context of the Derridian discussion of “logocentrism” as a critique of Western metaphysics - “the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example, of the alphabet).” My use of “Phonocentrism” refers strictly to the theoretical thinking that supports the privileging of speech over writing, which seeks to overcome the distance between the two in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. For Derrida’s discussion of “logocentrism,” please see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 3.

<sup>6</sup> The usual eulogy of the Latin or Roman alphabet’s superiority aside, Marshall McLuhan offers a more concrete praise. According to McLuhan, the alphabet’s unique ability in representing speech lies in the breaking up of “uniform units.” In other words, alphabetic letters function as discrete units and maximize the degree of speech mimesis. McLuhan argues, “The breaking up of every kind of experience into uniform units in order to produce faster action and change of form has been the secret of Western power over man and nature alike.” Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 1964, 1994, 2003), pp.121-122.

<sup>7</sup> Florian Coulmas undermines alphabet’s claim of universality in speech representation by pointing out that phoneticization is language specific and historically constructed. Florian Coulmas, *The Writing Systems of the World* (Oxford; New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 33-34.

from the crisis that it brings upon other scripts. If phonocentrism is indeed a world phenomenon not limited to the “West” as Karatani Kōjin seems to suggest, its universality is less to be found in the universal status claimed by the Latin alphabet than in the impact of the phonocentric paradigm that is brought to bear on alternative scripts, their languages, literatures, and cultures.

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, non-alphabetic writing systems all over the world were confronted with the challenge to become “the alphabet”: the Egyptian Arabic, the Ottoman Turkish Arabic-Persian script, the Russian Cyrillic, the Vietnamese *chữ nôm*, the Japanese *kana* system, and Chinese characters.<sup>8</sup> This modern script crisis, driven by the universalizing principle of phonocentrism, was nothing short of a world phenomenon. It transformed, in one way or another, the faces of the many alternative scripts that came into contact with it. Some of the non-alphabetic scripts were overcome by the crisis and conformed to the alphabetic model, modern Turkish and Vietnamese being two of many cases in point. Some others survived the crisis but were invariably and subtly changed by their confrontations and negotiations

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy Mitchell offers a brilliant account of writing in Egypt in *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), Chapter 5. Nergis Ertürk breaks new ground in elucidating the relationship between Turkish script revolution and the making of Turkish literature and comparative literature in Turkey in *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Terry Martin surveys the script, language, and culture reforms in the Soviet Union in *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). John de Francis gives a history of modern Vietnamese script and language policies, in de Francis, *Colonialism and Language Policy in Vietnam* (Hague: Mouton, 1977); John Phan studies the pre-modern Vietnamese writing, in Phan, “Lacquered Words: The Evolution of Vietnamese under Sinitic Influences from the 1st Century BCE through the 17th Century” (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 2013). For the side of the story from modern Japan, please see Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. Brett de Bary et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Yōichi Komori, *Nihongo no kindai 日本語の近代* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2000); Lee Yeounsuk, *The Ideology of Kokugo: Nationalizing Language in Modern Japan*, trans. Maki Hirano Hubbard (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010). Last but not least, David Lurie accounts for how the Japanese language and the Chinese script worked together to define new ways of reading and writing in early Japan in *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

with the established alphabetic norm. The survival of these non-alphabetic scripts, though negotiated and compromised, contributed to the preservation of script variety in human history, while raising critical questions about the legitimacy of alphabetic universalism and the role of script in modernity.

This dissertation examines modern China's experience of the script crisis as part of the worldwide phenomenon and investigates its crucial implications for the making of the Chinese literary and cultural modernity, as a representative of the non-alphabetic world. Since the late nineteenth century, the Chinese writing system began to be targeted as the roadblock to literacy, science and democracy. Chinese and foreign scholars took the abolition of the Chinese script to be the condition of modernity. Literacy and literary reforms that attempted to preserve the Chinese script were tolerated as mere transitions toward a Chinese alphabet. A script revolution was launched as the Chinese response to the script crisis. Were it to succeed, it would have brought a sea change to Chinese writing, knowledge organization, and cultural and political consciousness of modern China. However, nearly a century of historical hindsight presents us with the survival of the Chinese script, which immediately evokes many questions: What was the scale of the script revolution and how far did it advance in alphabetizing Chinese writing? What was the medium in which it was carried out, characters or alphabet? If in characters, then what attempts were taken to reconcile such a fundamental contradiction in theory and practice? If in alphabet, were there competing versions of the Chinese alphabet animating and popularizing a Chinese alphabetic literature? Last but not least, how do we understand the impact of the script crisis on the formation of modern Chinese language, literature, and culture?

In addressing these questions, this study puts into sharp relief the overwhelming scale of the script crisis and the limited output of the script revolution, to the extent that the revolution has largely exited collective cultural memory. Despite its failure in delivering a Chinese alphabet,<sup>9</sup> the script crisis, as this study argues, was the central force that galvanized the making of a new national script, language, and literature in modern China. Therefore, the script crisis should be restored to the center stage in the study of modern Chinese literature and culture. Moreover, the same script crisis also infused Chinese literary modernity with significant historical processes such as the two World Wars, national and international education movements, the Communist revolution, and national salvation. This study delineates the provenance, mutations, and final containment of the script crisis in relation to these important historical moments that helped shape the self-consciousness of modern China. It asks fundamental questions about writing, nationalism, and modernity, while exploring the possibility of working with and against the universalizing powers of phonocentrism in the modern world.

### **One Script Crisis and Three Phonocentric Dreams**

In a speech given at the Hong Kong YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) in February 1927, Lu Xun 鲁迅, by common consensus the foremost Chinese writer, captured the sense of impending doom brought about by the script crisis in the title of his speech – “Voiceless China,” and escalated the implications of the crisis to another level:

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<sup>9</sup> The present day *pinyin* 拼音 system—arguably an auxiliary “Chinese alphabet”—bears witness to the script crisis and revolution and is the direct result of the series of alphabetization movements dedicated to the eradication of Chinese characters. However, since it was relegated to an auxiliary status to the Chinese script in 1958, it could not count as “a Chinese alphabet.” I should also note that the Chinese term *pinyin* 拼音, though now understood to be the official phoneticization system auxiliary to Chinese characters, is also used historically by advocates of the script revolution to promote the alphabetization of Chinese writing. Therefore a distinction between *pinyin* the system and *pinyin* the historical movement should be maintained.

文明人和野蠻人的分別，其一，是文明人有文字，能夠把他們的思想，感情，藉此傳給大眾，傳給將來。中國雖然有文字，現在卻已經和大家不相干，用的是難懂的古文，講的是陳舊的古意思，所有的聲音，都是過去的，都就是只等於零。<sup>10</sup>

One of the differences between the civilized and the barbaric people is that the civilized people have a script through which they could communicate their thoughts and emotions to the masses, while passing them down to the future. Though China has a script, it no longer has much to do with anyone. It writes unintelligible archaic proeses, conveys obsolete archaic meaning. All of its voices belonged to the past and amounted to zero.

Phonocentrism, endorsed by Lu Xun, thus seems to be a necessary remedy to restore meaningful voices—in a literal and figural sense—to “voiceless” Chinese writing. What it salvages, in fact, is not simply the Chinese script, but more fundamentally, the “voiceless China” whose very civilizational status is in jeopardy.

Before the crisis, the Chinese script exemplified, according to David Porter, perfect “representational legitimacy” for the leading language reformers in seventeenth-century Europe such as Francis Bacon, John Amos Comenius, John Wilkins, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.<sup>11</sup> The “voicelessness” of Chinese writing, which Lu Xun later saw as a handicap, was understood by the European thinkers at the time to be an advantage in separating speech and writing, thus creating “cross-cultural legibility.”<sup>12</sup> That the Chinese script functioned as the regional universal script in East Asia served as a

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<sup>10</sup> Lu Xun, “Wusheng de zhongguo” 無聲的中國(Voiceless China), in *Lu Xun QuANJI* 魯迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2005), Vol. 4, 12. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>11</sup> David Porter termed “representative legitimacy” to illustrate the level of approval of the linguistic legitimacy of the Chinese script as “a nearly sacred emblem” in early modern Europe. Please see David Porter, *Ideographia: the Chinese Cipher in the Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 18. For another recent study on the European imagination of the Chinese script in relation to modernism, please refer to Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Porter, 37.

prominent model for the European dream of overcoming the Tower of Babel. The European fascination with Chinese characters extended to the appreciation of other aspects of this exotic other – Chinese historical continuity, philosophical tradition, and even perceived superior moral conducts.<sup>13</sup> In short, the legitimacy discourse surrounding the Chinese script carried civilizational connotations. By the eighteenth century, however, the tables had turned. Through colonial explorations and after the establishment of the study of historical linguistics, the structuring of the world’s writing systems took an evolutionary turn.<sup>14</sup> As observed by W. J. T. Mitchell, “The history of writing is regularly told as a story of progress from primitive picture-writing and gestural sign language to hieroglyphics to alphabetic writing ‘proper.’”<sup>15</sup> The Chinese script—commonly mistaken for being pictographic or ideographic<sup>16</sup>—was deemed no longer fit to serve as the model for the alphabetic script, especially when the latter came to be seen as “the most intelligent” script of all.<sup>17</sup> The antagonism between the civilized and the barbaric,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 34-49.

<sup>14</sup> Lydia Liu points out that the “accidental discovery of Egyptian hieroglyphs” as well as other non-alphabetic scripts during the European colonial expansion in the eighteenth century gave rise to the self-consciousness of the alphabetic script. See Lydia H. Liu, “Writing,” in W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark Hansen eds., *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 317.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 113, as quoted in Liu, 318. Mitchell also cites Ignace J. Gelb’s *A Study of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952, 1963) and Gelb’s use of the term “writing ‘proper’” in proving the narrative norm of telling the evolutionary history of writing. See Mitchell, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Few scholars today would say that Chinese characters are pictographs or ideographs. The common scholarly consensus is that the Chinese script consists of logographs or logograms. See Coulmas, pp. 104-109. However, even the term logograph has also come under criticism. See Lurie, 173.

<sup>17</sup> According to Hegel, “Alphabetic script is in itself and for itself the most intelligent.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, as quoted in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 3. Numerous others followed suit (the most recent examples being Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan, and Walter Ong) in endorsing the hegemonic superiority of the Latin or Roman alphabet. Please see Havelock, *Origins of Western Literacy* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976); McLuhan, *Understanding Media*; Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991).



between the alphabetic and non-alphabetic scripts, was captured by Rousseau as follows:

“The depicting of objects is appropriate to a savage people; signs of words and of propositions, to a barbaric people and the alphabet to civilized people.”<sup>18</sup>

One can only speculate as to whether Lu Xun had read Rousseau before giving his speech on “Voiceless China,” but the correlation between script and civilization as shown in Rousseau clearly resonated with Lu Xun’s message. Inasmuch as the early modern European fascination with Chinese writing carried with it civilizational implications, the modern script crisis accompanied judgments of the same nature. On the one hand, the crisis of Chinese writing emerged as part of a civilizational crisis. On the other, the script crisis wrote itself intricately into the very discourse of civilizational hierarchy that precipitated a civilizational crisis.

In this study, I trace the onset of the script crisis to 1916,<sup>19</sup> when a young Chao Yuen Ren 趙元任 (the future father of modern Chinese linguistics) published an article “The Problem of the Chinese Language” in English in the U.S., sweeping away all objections to alphabetizing Chinese. This was followed by two major movements dedicated to the task of eradicating Chinese characters: First, the Chinese Romanization Movement spearheaded by a group of Chinese and international scholars which was quickly endorsed by the Guomingdang (GMD) nationalist government in the 1920s; Second, the dissident Chinese Latinization Movement initiated in the Soviet Union and

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<sup>18</sup> J. J. Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Incidentally, 1916 was also the year when China entered the First World War, joining the side of the Allies. I examine the Chinese presence in the WWI and its relation to the first modern Chinese anti-illiteracy program in Chapter 1.

championed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the 1930s.<sup>20</sup> Lu Xun, seven years after his lament over “voiceless China,” seemed to have found the true voice of China, casting firmly his vote for a Latinized Chinese alphabet in his 1934 article, “Chinese Characters and Latinization.”<sup>21</sup> Like Lu Xun, numerous Chinese elites and progressive intellectuals embraced the script revolution. Hardly anyone who supported the New Culture Movement objected to the future of an alphabetic Chinese. In December 1935, six hundred and eighty-eight writers, scholars, artists, and activists based in Shanghai signed off on a public letter entitled “Our Opinion on the Promotion of *Sin Wenz* (the New Script)” 我們對於推行新文字的意見 in support of a new Chinese alphabetic script. These names included: Cai Yuanpei, Liu Yazhi, Tao Xingzhi, Guo Moruo, Ba Jin, Mao Dun, and Xiao Hong among many others.<sup>22</sup>

For the first time in four thousand years of literary history, the Chinese script encountered collective enmity and came close to meeting its own elimination. It seemed, unsurprisingly, the alphabet would soon rule over its non-alphabetic other. However, the script revolution was brought to an abrupt end in 1958. In a plenary session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress, Zhou Enlai 周恩來—the first premier of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—delivered a report entitled “Current Tasks of the Script Reform,” which relegated the alphabetic system *pinyin* to an official auxiliary

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<sup>20</sup> “Romanization 羅馬化” and “Latinization 拉丁化” are two terms used historically by members of the two groups, with specific technological and political implications and cannot be used interchangeably. Chapter 2 and 3 deal with the two movements at length respectively.

<sup>21</sup> Lu Xun, “Hanzi he ladinghua” 漢字和拉丁化 (Chinese Characters and Latinization), *Zhonghua ribao* 中華日報 (China Daily), August. 25, 1934, in *Lu Xun Quanjì*, Vol. 5, pp. 584-590.

<sup>22</sup> “Women duiyu tuixing xinwenzi de yijian” 我們對於推行新文字的意見 (Our Opinion on the Promotion of *Sin Wenz*), in *Zhongguo wenz latinxua wenxian* 中国文字拉丁化文献 (Documents of the Latinization of the Chinese Script) (Shanghai: Latinxua chubanshe, 1940), pp. 153-157.

status, secondary to Chinese characters, thus concluding the half-century struggle between the Chinese script and alphabetic writing.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the half-century script crisis, what I call “three phonocentric dreams”—all three conforming to the same principle of phonocentrism, all fantastical but not unreal—came to define and inspire the series of projects that aimed to overcome the gap between speech and writing. I identify the first phonocentric dream as an increasingly technologized understanding of the Chinese script. It does not take the gap between speech and writing in characters as a merit of “a pure world of signs,” as Benedict Anderson has suggested. On the contrary, the distance between speech and script—as showcased in Chinese writing—is incomprehensible and intolerable from the phonocentric perspective of writing-as-technology, which takes writing as a medium of and instrument for speech mimesis. By divorcing Chinese writing from its other roles, such as that of textual repository or the material basis for cultural reproduction, the first phonocentric dream technologizes the Chinese script as a deficient phonetic technology.

The second phonocentric dream takes the form of the Chinese claim of alphabetic universalism. Convinced of alphabet’s superiority as a writing technology in the modern age, Chinese intellectuals (mainly advocates of the Romanization Movement) endeavor to stake their own claim of alphabetic universalism. This dream, contends for even more accurate representation of speech, as compared with the Roman alphabet, and effectively challenges the latter’s exclusive claim to alphabetic universalism. Last but not least, the third phonocentric dream challenges script revolution advocates—many of them writers

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<sup>23</sup> Zhou Enlai, “Dangqian wenzi gaige de renwu” 当前文字改革的任务 (Current Tasks of Scriptal Reform), in *Dangdai zhongguo de wenzi gaige* 当代中国的文字改革 (The Script Reform of Contemporary China) (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1995), pp. 556-569. Also, for a definition of the term *pinyin*, please refer to “Introduction,” footnote 9.

and scholars—to create a new literary language that is susceptible to being written in the Chinese alphabet and at the same time lives up to the task of creating a national literature. Together, all three phonocentric dreams help define two forms of mimetic writing: phonetic mimesis and literary mimesis. As shown in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respectively, the Chinese Romanization Movement and the Chinese Latinization Movement are two projects that seek to mimetically transcribe speech, either a standardized national language or variegated local speech. Insofar as different versions of the new Chinese script produced by the Romanization and Latinization Movements fulfill the task of phonetic mimesis, script revolution achieves considerable success. The thorny question now, however, is how to combine phonetic mimesis with literary mimesis in the realm of the alphabet. New challenges emerge as the sensitivity to phonetic representation enters the literary imagination of critical realism: How does an alphabetic Chinese—capable of representing voices of all people in their local speech—write a Chinese national literature and produce a Chinese national culture? What role does script revolution play in the course of “Chinese Renaissance” and national salvation?<sup>24</sup> The script crisis, in essence an epistemological, cultural, and political crisis, encompasses script revolution, literary and social reform, and nation building in twentieth century China.

### **The History of Phoneticizing Chinese and the Technologization of Chinese Writing**

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<sup>24</sup> “Chinese Renaissance” is coined by Hu Shi 胡適, a New Culture Movement vanguard and supporter of the script revolution. The term is the title of his speech “Chinese Renaissance” delivered in English as part of *The Haskell Lectures* at the University of Chicago in 1933 and published by the University of Chicago Press in 1934. I refer to the speech again in a later section of this “Introduction.” See Hu Shi, “Chinese Renaissance,” in *Hu Shi Quanjì* 胡適全集 (The Complete Works of Hu Shi) (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), Vol. 37, pp. 15-162. The section where Hu Shi discusses the script revolution and the literary revolution is pp. 80-100.

Before we move on to account for the script crisis proper and its solution, it bears pointing out that the phoneticization of Chinese writing and the phonetic use of the Chinese alphabet is not a unique modern phenomenon. Four historical movements that experimented with the phoneticization of Chinese writing predated the script crisis in the twentieth century. Throughout the course of phoneticizing Chinese, though an increasing awareness of the phonetic consideration of the Chinese script could be discerned, participants in the four historical movements did not engage in phonocentric enterprises that were dedicated to the abolishment of Chinese characters. It did not occur to these participants that the phonocentric discourse could be useful in optimizing Chinese writing in terms of a mimetic technology for speech transcription. Nor did the various phoneticization schemes that came out of those four movements envision themselves as anything more than auxiliary programs assisting character learning. Though a proper discussion of what one might call the “prehistory” of the script revolution will be the burden of another project, a cursory examination of these historical processes could help us delineate how pre-modern Chinese writing managed—consciously or unconsciously—the phonocentric impulses of alphabetizing Chinese.

The first was the *fanqie* 反切 system. Usually translated as “cross spelling,” it took two characters to approximate the pronunciation of a third character, using the consonant of the first character and the vowel (when applicable also the ending) of the second character. The phonetic use of characters was flexible, for it allowed one syllable to be “spelled” in unlimited ways so long as the combination of characters produced the correct phonetic attributes. This character-based phoneticization system was conceived in the Late Han period (25-220 AD), contemporary to the introduction of Buddhism into

China. Some scholars argued that *fanqie* was invented to assist the translation of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit into Chinese.<sup>25</sup> From the seventh century onward, the method was adopted by rhyme books to denote character pronunciation, the most prominent example being Lu Fayan's *Qieyun* 切韻 (601 AD).<sup>26</sup>

Second came the various pronunciation spelling schemes produced in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), which saw further development in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD). A Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk named Shou Wen 守溫 devised a thirty-letter phonological scheme. Though Shou Wen's "letters" were still characters and his phoneticization rules complied with the *fanqie* system, he established a one-to-one correspondence between syllable and character, thus creating a set of character-cum-letters.<sup>27</sup> From a linguistic evolutionary point of view, the commensurability created between character and letter in Shou Wen's scheme went one step further toward phoneticizing Chinese, as compared to the *fanqie* system.

The third was the missionaries' creation of phoneticized and alphabetic Chinese. Starting in the seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries such as Matteo Ricci and Nicolas Trigault pioneered in phoneticizing Chinese in the Latin alphabet. Ricci's scheme, recorded in his *The Miracle of Western Letters* 西字奇蹟, contained twenty-six consonants and forty-four vowels. Trigault, after Ricci's death, revised and simplified Ricci's plan and devised a preliminary spelling scheme of twenty consonants and five

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<sup>25</sup> See for example, Zhao Yintang 趙蔭棠, *Dengyun yuanliu* 等韻源流 (The Origins of *Dengyun*) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Lu Fayan 陸法言, *Qieyun* 切韻 (Rhyme Phoneticization) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guangling guji keyinshe, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, Appendix 2 "Post Script of Shou Wen's Incomplete Phonological Volume" 守溫韻學殘卷後記.

vowels.<sup>28</sup> Though these plans inspired contemporary Chinese scholars such as Fang Yizhi 方以智 and Liu Xianting 劉獻廷 to speculate as to the potential benefit of alphabetizing Chinese, they functioned as no more than character learning aids for foreigners.<sup>29</sup> Following the Jesuits, the Protestants missionaries created what I call the “alphabetic dialect Bible” – Chinese translations of the Bible in dialects transcribed in the Latin alphabet.<sup>30</sup> Since the publication of the first alphabetic Minnan dialect Bible in 1852, Protestant missionaries such as J. N. Talmage, W. A. Martin, John C. Gibson, Joshua Marshman, Robert Morrison, Walter Henry Medhurst, Karl Gützlaff, and Thomas Barclay, to name just a few, created a vast body of Chinese Bibles in both characters (*wenli* and *baihua*) and alphabet (Mandarin and dialects). These Bibles became instant bestsellers totaling 137,870 copies between 1890 and 1904 alone.<sup>31</sup> The conception of the alphabetic dialect Bible merits special attention. Its significance lies not so much in the fact that it substantiates for the first time alphabetic literacy in the Chinese context; nor that it aids in establishing a vast body of alphabetic Chinese literature in various local speech. Rather, the alphabetic dialect Bible, upon inspiring indigenous experiments in alphabetizing Chinese, unwittingly points to the inherent incompatibility between dialect-based alphabetic literacy and its aspiration for a national literature.

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<sup>28</sup> Ricci’s *The Miracle of Western Letters* was lost. His spelling plan was recovered from his essays of romanization, reproduced in *Chengshi moyuan* 程氏墨苑. Ni Haishu replicated an example of romanization from one of Ricci’s essays and Trigault’s plan in its entirety in Ni Haishu 倪海曙, *Zhongguo pinyinwenzi yundong shi jianbian* 中國拼音文字運動史簡編 (A Concise Chronology of the Chinese Alphabetization Movement) (Shanghai: Shidai shubao chubanshe, 1948), 6, 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> I discuss my preservation of the term “dialect” in Chapter 3, footnote 7. I largely reserve it in accordance to its historical usage.

<sup>31</sup> Ni, 17.

The fourth and last attempt at phoneticizing Chinese, a prelude to the full explosion of the script crisis, was the script reform at the turn of the twentieth century: the Phonetic Script Movement 切音字運動 in the late Qing, which culminated in the National Alphabet Movement 注音字母運動 in the first years of the Republic of China (ROC).<sup>32</sup> Though both the Phonetic Script and the National Alphabet Movements were entangled with foreign elements (missionary and Japanese influences), the turn-of-the-century script reform showcased the first Chinese attempt at alphabetizing Chinese; granted, it did not seek to eliminate characters. The first Chinese to propose Chinese phoneticization in the Latin alphabet was Lu Zhuangzhang 盧戇章, a Xiamen local who had considerable access to the Chinese alphabetic Bibles including the first one in the Minnan dialect. Lu created a series of Chinese phoneticization schemes in a “modified Latin alphabet”: *A Primer at a Glance* 一目了然初階 (1892), *New Script at a Glance* 新字初階 (1893), and *The Number One Phoneticized New Script* 天下第一切音新字 (1895).<sup>33</sup> These primers galvanized a stream of Chinese phoneticization plans, including: Wu Zhihui’s “Sprout Alphabet” 豆芽字母, Cai Xiyong’s *Phonetic Quick Script* 傳音快字, Li Jiesan’s *Stenographic Script for the Min Speech* 閩腔快字, Wang Bingyao’s *Phoneticized Script Notation* 拼音字譜, and Shen Xue’s *Universal System* 盛世元音

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<sup>32</sup> For a survey of the turn-of-the-century script reform, please see Ni, *Zhongguo pinyinwenzi yundong shi jianbian*; John de Francis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (New York: Octagon Book, 1972), pp. 31-54; Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 18-47; Elizabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 27-54; W. K. Cheng, “Enlightenment and Unity: Language Reformism in Late Qing China,” *Modern Asian Studies* 2(2001): 469-493; and Victor H. Mair, “Advocates of Script Reform,” in W. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (2nd ed.), Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 302-307.

<sup>33</sup> Ni, *Zhongguo pinyin wenzi yundong shi jianbian*, 32.



among others.<sup>34</sup> None of these early schemes, however, achieved wide circulation until the emergence of the “Mandarin Alphabet” 官話字母 created by Wang Zhao 王照 in 1900 and the “Combined Tone Simple Script” 合聲簡字 created by Lao Naixuan 勞乃宣 in 1905.<sup>35</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that, despite discontent with the Chinese script for its gap between speech and writing, none of these phonetic plans, regardless of whether they made use of the Latin alphabet, shorthand sign systems, or later the Japanese *kana* system, challenged the dominant position of characters as the official Chinese script. The legitimacy of characters remained unchallenged even when the newly founded Republic of China installed a “National Alphabet” 注音字母 in 1913. Its official status as the national “phoneticization script” concluded the chapter of the Phoneticization Script Movement by putting an end to the seemingly unending production of phoneticization schemes churned out by that very movement. This “National Alphabet,” comprised of thirty-seven letters based on Zhang Taiyan’s reconstructed symbols from the Chinese seal

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<sup>34</sup> Ni Haishu carefully lists and classifies major schemes of Chinese phoneticization in *ibid.*, pp. 32-53; Ni also completes the list with minor schemes of phoneticization in *ibid.*, pp. 59-62. Among the earliest phoneticization proposals, Shen Xue’s *Universal System* (1896)—his own English title—was arguably the best known, with Liang Qichao penning the preface, praising it to have contributed to the “unification of the written and the spoken.” Ni, *Qingmo hanyu pinyin wenzi yundong biannianshi* 清末漢語拼音文字運動編年史 (Chronology of the Late Qing Chinese Alphabetization Movement) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1959), 48.

<sup>35</sup> Wang’s scheme was designed for northern dialect, while Lao’s worked for the southern Wu dialect. Lao was a Late Qing scholar-official specializing in law and phonology, who also served as the President of Peking University at one point. Wang, on the other hand, was exiled by the Qing courts for his participation in the 1898 Reform. A phoneticization enthusiast, Wang devised during his two-year exile in Japan, a set of “Mandarin Alphabet” based on the Japanese *kana* system, and returned to China with the new script under the guise as a Buddhist monk from Taiwan. For biographical accounts of Wang and Lao, please see Ni, *Zhongguo pinyin wenzi yundong shi*, pp. 42-52. Li Jinxi 黎錦熙 also offers a gripping account of Wang Zhao’s adventure in *Guoyu yundong shigang* 國語運動史綱 (*The Historical Grundrisse of the National Language Movement*) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1935, 2011), 100.

script,<sup>36</sup> was decreed as the “National Alphabet” at the end of the Conference on the Standardization of National Pronunciation in 1913. It would seem that the National Alphabet bridging the gap between writing and speech should have contained the impulses to further phoneticize or alphabetize Chinese. However, before the National Alphabet Movement could consolidate its reign, the script crisis broke out in full.

The crucial distinction between the twentieth-century script crisis and the prehistory of script revolution was not merely the former’s mission to abolish Chinese characters. Much more significantly, the script crisis reevaluated character-literacy and together with it, the cultural signification of the whole body of texts that came with it. The Chinese script was increasingly devalued as a material basis for, and an integral part of, rhyme studies, evidential research, as well as the study of classical philosophy. The high threshold of literacy was becoming increasingly repulsive to Chinese intellectuals. The Chinese script was therefore slowly stripped of its cultural connotations and epistemological associations. It was eventually reduced to a technology of speech restoration and communication – a dysfunctional one, at best, seen through a phonocentric lens. So far, the technologization of the Chinese script was complete. One of the accompanying consequences was the devaluation of the Chinese text and the Chinese episteme. As Lu Xun famously put it, “I think that (youths today) should read fewer or no Chinese books.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 originally devised thirty-six consonants and twenty-two vowels. See Zhang, “Bo zhongguo yong wanguoxinyu shuo” 駁中國用萬國新語說 (A Rebuttal to the Discourse of Using Esperanto in China), in *Zhang Taiyan Quanjì* 章太炎全集 (The Complete Works of Zhang Taiyan) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1985), Vol. 4, pp. 337-353.

<sup>37</sup> Lu Xun, “Qingnian bidu shu” 青年必讀書 (Must-reads for the Youth), in *Lu Xun Quanjì*, Vol. 3, pp. 12-13.

The script crisis, now in full force, would transform, in a chain of events, the definition of Chinese literacy in terms of mass literacy, the outlook of the Chinese written and spoken languages, the formation of a new national literature, and eventually national salvation and nation building in twentieth-century China.

### **Renegotiating *baihua*: Contradiction or Solution?**

A logical solution to the script crisis would have been the victory of the script revolution culminating in the codification of a Chinese alphabet and the production of alphabetic Chinese literature. However, try as they may, versions of alphabetic Chinese and their literature never got off the ground. The closest that they came to achieving national status was when the *Gwoyue Romatzyh* (GR, or National Language Romanization) received recognition from the Nationalist government and became the “Second Form of the National Alphabet.” Instead, comrades of the script revolution looked to the other way for an unlikely solution: the problematic “*baihua*” 白話.<sup>38</sup>

The solution was rehearsed during the first modern Chinese anti-illiteracy program in France during the First World War. During the war, approximately 200,000 Chinese laborers were sent to Europe to assist the Allied troops. Among some of the laborers and YMCA volunteers emerged the first modern Chinese anti-illiteracy program, which taught what was called “One Thousand Characters” and later framed by its creator James Yen as part of the *Baihua* Movement. This program, rooted in character learning and facilitating the teaching of *baihua*, constituted an approach alternative to the script

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<sup>38</sup> *Baihua* is a conglomerate body of definitions: nonsense talk, pure talk, plain speech, vernacular, mandarin, and a colloquialized written language. It is also constantly used interchangeably with *baihua wen* - a *baihua* literature.

crisis other than alphabetizing Chinese. Its success and its convergence with the *baihua* discourse, served as a prognostication that the Chinese script was capable of generating from within solutions to the script crisis – if understood as the crisis of character literacy presumed to be elitist and undemocratic (Chapter 1).

So how could a character-based *baihua* be understood in the mind of the script revolutionaries as a solution to the script crisis? Are not *baihua* written in characters and an alphabetic future for Chinese writing mutually exclusive? Or, could it be that the use of *baihua*, in some uncanny way, does provide a solution rather than a contradiction to the script crisis? The answer, I suggest, lies in *baihua*'s nebulous body of definitions that facilitates the questionable commensurability between “vernacular” and *baihua* itself.

One of the first to forge a hypothetical equivalence between *baihua* and vernacular was Hu Shi, who was one of the most vocal supporters of a *baihua* literature (or, in his romanization, “*pei-hua*”) and at the same time a comrade of the script revolution. In 1917, Hu Shi published his landmark essay “Preliminary Discussions of the Literature Reform” 文學改良芻議 in *New Youth* arguing that the future literature of China would have to be written in *baihua*.<sup>39</sup> A year later, he chimed in with the script revolution radical Qian Xuantong in the same journal, confirming “China should have an alphabetic script in the future.”<sup>40</sup> There must be, so it seemed, some connection between literary reform and script revolution. In an English speech delivered at the University of Chicago in 1933, Hu Shi recollected his definition of *baihua* in the late 1910s:

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<sup>39</sup> Hu Shi, “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文學改良芻議 (Preliminary Discussions of the Literature Reform), in *New Youth*, Vol. 2, No. 5, January 1, 1917.

<sup>40</sup> Hu Shi, “Ba” 跋 (Postscript to “Zhongguo jinhou zhi wenzi wenti”), in *New Youth*, Vol. 4, No. 4, April 15, 1918.

And the living language I proposed as the only possible medium of the future literature of China, was the *pei-hua*, the vulgar tongue of the vast majority of the population, the language which, in the last 500 years, had produced the numerous novels read and loved by the people, though despised by the men of letters. I wanted this much despised vulgar tongue of the people and the novels to be elevated to the position of the national language of China, to the position enjoyed by all the modern national languages in Europe.<sup>41</sup>

According to the New Culture leader, *baihua* equaled “the vulgar tongue,” which has produced “numerous novels” popular among the people. This vulgar tongue along with the popular novels was thought to be comparable to European vernaculars and vernacular literatures. Therefore, the Chinese vulgar tongue ought to succeed in overthrowing the hegemony of the Latin of East Asia—the classical written language of Chinese. *Baihua*, defined as a “vulgar tongue,” was expected to usher in an age of “Chinese Renaissance,” as the title of Hu Shi’s speech manifested. The imminent task of language and script reformers was obvious: to create a Chinese alphabet and transcribe the vulgar tongue of the people.<sup>42</sup> However, Hu Shi took an unexpected turn by asserting that the task was already done. Hu Shi announced that reformers should look no further, for the vulgar tongue of *baihua* had, in fact, always been present:

It was already there, already standardized in its written form, in syntax, in diction, all by the few great novels which have gone to the heart and bosom of every man.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hu Shi, “Chinese Renaissance,” 84.

<sup>42</sup> This is precisely what the Chinese Latinization participants ended up proposing and experimenting with in the 1930s (Chapter 3). Similarly, the emerging Sinophone studies approaches the issue of all local speech’s right to representation in the same fashion as the Chinese Latinization Movement. Please see Shih Shu-mei, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2007); Shih Shu-mei, Tsai Chien-hsin, Brian Bernards eds., *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Edward Gunn, *Rendering the Regional: Local Language in Contemporary Chinese Media*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Hu Shi, “Chinese Renaissance,” 94.

As Hu Shi confesses, the “written form” of *baihua* (*baihua wen*) is not a European-style vernacular literature, but a body of classic *baihua* literature such as *The Journey to the West* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. In short, *baihua* is not a spoken language (call it a vernacular or vulgar tongue); it is instead a written language, to be learned and passed down as the legacy of “great novels.” In fact, these “great novels” of *baihua* served as writing manuals for intellectuals like Hu Shi when they learned to compose standard *baihua* prose themselves.<sup>44</sup> Not unlike classical Chinese, *baihua* was a learned written language, or a book language that existed in addition to vernaculars. Without writing, it would not exist.<sup>45</sup>

To reconcile the contradiction between the progressive Chinese intellectuals’ inheritance of the written language of *baihua* and their phonocentric projection of an alphabetic vernacular onto *baihua* or even *baihua wen*, it is crucial to acknowledge the many and inherently contradictory significations of the term *baihua*: nonsense talk, plain speech, vernacular, mandarin, a written language of *baihua*, and, by extension, *baihua* literature. While the written language of *baihua*—a colloquialized written language—captures the essence of modern Chinese writing, the rest of its connotations, associated with the “vernacular,” works to preserve the phonocentric impulses of modern Chinese literature. This becomes particularly clear when the Chinese intellectuals insisted on using the term *baihua wen* when there emerged in the 1920s a more technically accurate term *yutiwen* 語體文 (colloquialized written language) that reflects the true nature of

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of how Hu Shi learned to write *baihua*, please see Shang Wei, “*Baihua*, *Guanhua*, *Fangyan* and the May Fourth Reading of *Rulin waishi*,” in *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 117 (May, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> I borrow Coulmas’ formulation about classical languages such as classical Chinese and classical Telugu, “they share the feature which is of greatest interest for the present discussion: they are book languages that exist in addition to, and as superposed prestige varieties of, the vernaculars. Without writing they would not exist.” See Coulmas, 198.

modern Chinese writing (Chapter 4). The negotiated *baihua*—imprinted profoundly by phonocentric-biased discourse—on the one hand registers the historical reality of modern Chinese writing as a written language with its own literary tradition; on the other, it keeps alive the phonocentric dreams of modern China.

### **Chapter Outline**

This study of the Chinese script revolution is based on a variety of printed materials as well as unpublished archival materials. I examine theoretical treatises produced by major alphabetization figures, personal correspondences among Chinese and non-Chinese alphabetization enthusiasts, periodical articles published in and outside of China, textbooks compiled for the mass education movement, as well as *yutiwen* literature penned by prominent writers in spite of their allegiance to alphabetizing Chinese. The rich sources of different genres enable me to treat the Chinese script crisis not as an insulated case, but to investigate it as an integral part of the larger world phenomenon, and to connect it with wartime communication and mobilization, national mass education movements, revolution and party politics, and the making of modern Chinese literature.

Chapter 1 investigates the first modern Chinese literacy program during World War I in France. It excavates a largely forgotten episode where approximately 200,000 Chinese labor workers were recruited by the Allies and stationed in France and Britain. Between the Chinese laborers and a group of Chinese YMCA volunteers sent to assist them emerged the first anti-illiteracy program in modern Chinese history. Probing into the contractual materials that brought the Chinese workers to Europe as well as archival

sources on James Yen (one of the YMCA volunteers, creator of the literacy program and later a leading figure in international mass education movements), I bring to light how the written word was reconfigured not only as a technology for wartime communication, but also a vehicle for national enlightenment and solidarity.

Chapter 2 examines the Chinese Romanization Movement as a product of and a quest for alphabetic universalism in the age of linguistic evolution and phonetic domination. I define the romanized “Chinese Alphabet” (or GR, *Gwoyeu Romatzyh*, the National Language Romanization) as the first of the two representation schemes of phonetic mimesis. I unravel the circumstances around its birth through an investigation into Chao Yuen Ren’s early writing and his correspondences with the Swedish linguist Bernhard Karlgren. Further, I explicate how the international collaboration in search of a universal alphabet moves forward as Chao, during his sojourn at Bell Labs, endorses Bell’s project on “Visible Speech” facilitated by new technologies such as the spectrograph and speechwriter. I illustrate how scientific development in support of phonetics turns the claim of alphabetic universalism on its head.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Chinese Latinization Movement, the various *Sin Wenz* (new script) schemes it has spawned, and their ramifications for modern Chinese literature. First, it illustrates Latinization’s departure from Romanization as it puts a special premium on dialect or local speech. Then it traces the genealogy of the 1930s Chinese Latinization Movement to three historical origins: the missionaries’ dialect alphabetic Bible in the late Qing era, the establishment of modern Chinese dialectology in the 1920s, and the Soviet Latinization effort in the 1930s. Latinization, conceptualized as a mimetic representation of dialects, complicates itself as it encounters the literary



mimesis of realist writing. Xu Dishan—a Latinization advocate—and his novella “Yu Guan” provide us a rare opportunity to examine the bond between the Latinization Movement, the Proletkult (proletariat culture), and the Third Literary Revolution.

Chapter 4 introduces the key concept of *yutiwen* 語體文 (colloquialized written language) as the interplay between the Chinese Latinization Movement, the New Mass Education Movement, and the Second Sino-Japanese War. By calling modern Chinese writing its true name “*yutiwen*,” the historical contradiction is sharpened between Chinese intellectuals’ aspiration for alphabetic universalism and their practice of character composition. The theme of war and literacy in Chapter 1 reemerges and assumes new meaning, as I bring wartime mobilization during the Second Sino-Japanese War to bear on the reconciliation between *Sin Wenz* campaigns and *yutiwen* writing. Through an examination of *yutiwen* works produced by Chen Heqin, Tao Xingzhi, and Ye Shengtao, all of whom are *Sin Wenz* supporters, I account for the triangular relationship between the script revolution, national salvation, and mass liberation, and their literary embodiments as modern Chinese literature enters a new age.

Finally, a brief epilogue concludes how the script crisis is eventually contained by Zhou Enlai’s 1958 speech “Current Tasks of the Script Reform.” As the script revolution morphs into a script reform, Chinese writing becomes a multi-script entity and arguably continues to nurture the phonocentric dreams of modern Chinese literature.

## CHAPTER 1

**Combatting Illiteracy:  
The First Chinese Mass Literacy Program in the Great War**

In one corner of the Baudricourt Square in Paris, stands a monument. Tucked away quietly in the hubbub of the old Parisian Chinatown, this monument is easy to miss. Installed on the eve of the eightieth anniversary of the Armistice Day in November 1989, it commemorates the Chinese laborers who served the Allies and sacrificed their lives in the First World War. Its inscription reads:

*A la mémoire des travailleurs et combattants chinois morts pour la France pendant la grande guerre 1914-1918<sup>1</sup>*  
*(In memory of the Chinese workers and soldiers who died for France during the Great War 1914-1918) (Figure 1.1)*

It is no news that Chinese workers have labored overseas. For centuries, Chinese coolies have worked in the Mexican silver mines, laid the American railroads, and travailed in the South African gold rush.<sup>2</sup> But that the Chinese laborers served as “workers and soldiers” and gave up their lives for France and the rest of the Allies in the Great War is hitherto a story largely untold. Between 1916 and 1918, a rough estimate of 200,000 Chinese “worker-soldiers”—most of them illiterate peasants from Shandong, Fujian and Zhejiang provinces—were recruited by the Allies and sent to Europe, the majority of whom was stationed in France. Their presence and performance in the Great

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<sup>1</sup> See Figure 1.1 for a picture of the monument. The Chinese inscription reads: “紀念在第一次世界大戰中為法國捐軀的中國勞工和戰士。”

<sup>2</sup> Chen Hansheng ed., *Hua gong chu guo shi liao* 華工出國史料 (Historical Materials of the Overseas Chinese Labor Workers) (Beijing: Zhong hua Book Company, 1980), Vol. 10.

War contributed to the final victory of the Allies, won China a seat in the Versailles Peace Conference, and gave rise to the subsequent May Fourth Movement.

The laborers were not the only Chinese participants in the Great War. A group of Chinese volunteers, comprised of overseas students in the U.S. and future elites in China, was dispatched by the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association, also known as the Y) in order to assist the Chinese "troops" during their European sojourn. Together, the Chinese laborers and the Chinese Y men constituted the Chinese presence in the First World War. Between the two groups of Chinese men emerged the first mass anti-illiteracy program in modern Chinese history. Although the anti-illiteracy program was dedicated to the reading and writing of Chinese characters, few written records survived the Great War and fewer words have been written about it since then. The first modern Chinese anti-illiteracy program remains, in effect, another forgotten story.

This literacy program gained its initial momentum from the urgent need of the illiterate laborers to write letters back home. Among all forms of YMCA activities, including gramophone playing, film screening, chess play and soccer, letter writing was the most prized service.<sup>3</sup> Such service soon grew into a rudimentary literacy program and inspired a teaching method called "One Thousand Characters." Despite its foreign provenance, this literacy program—the first to emerge in modern Chinese history—led the tidal wave of a mass education movement of national and international prominence. Examined in detail, this program leads us to invaluable primary writings produced by the

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<sup>3</sup> Gu Xingqing, *Ou zhan gong zuo hui yi lu* 歐戰工作回憶錄 (Recollections of Working in the European War) (Changsha: Commercial Press, 1937), 48. Gu Xingqing was an interpreter worked and lived with the laborers.

participants of the program, thus providing us a prism to understand the relationship between war and literacy.

In this chapter, I examine the historical intersection between World War I, its immediate aftermath of the May Fourth, and the first overseas Chinese literacy program in France. I first assess the central role of literacy in wartime communication and mass mobilization through a close reading of the contracts that brought the Chinese laborers to Europe. I further the inquiry of the centrality of literacy through an exploration of the literacy program in detail. An invaluable piece of composition produced by one of the labor workers as an integral part of the literacy program further allows me to reconsider the relations between the Great War and the May Fourth. Last but not least, I examine the materiality of the writings produced during the literacy program in light of the May Fourth debate between *wenyan* (classical and literary Chinese) and *baihua* (so-called vernacular). In the following pages, taking the example of Chinese laborers and the intellectuals, I explore the dynamics between war and literacy, masses and elites, presaging the future development of Chinese language, writing, and script reform. I ponder how the written word was reconfigured not only as a technology for wartime communication, but also a vehicle for national enlightenment and solidarity.

### **War and Literacy**

In his seminal work entitled *Empire and Communications*, Harold Innis frames all empires as the products of writing, in forms of stone, clay, papyrus, parchment or paper. He professes his use of empires “as an indication of the efficiency of communication.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto, Victoria: Press Porcepic Limited, 1986), 7.

To communicate efficiently through writing dictates literacy – the ability to read and write. For Innis, the intertwinement of communication, literacy, war and empire, traces its root to the primordial materiality of the basic act of writing. Writing to code and decode, writing to command and control, and writing to structure an empire. The question is: what form does writing take?

For the special army of the Chinese laborers, the answer was straightforward: letters written in characters. For them, the necessity of long distance communication between the battlefield and home weighed significantly heavier than emotional need or mere nostalgia. When telegraphy was too expensive and telephone not yet widely in use, the laborers under military supervision were allowed only two letters per month as their means of long distance communication (Figure 1.2).<sup>5</sup> These letters became the only accessible mode of communication for the laborers to overcome space and reach home. The materiality of letter writing—embodied only in the script of Chinese characters—determined and maintained the structure of a character based literacy, however unwelcomed to the minds of the learned. Though the enlightened Y men were sympathetic to language reform and script revolution, their most valued and popular service offered to the laborers was still letter writing in the Chinese script.

Inasmuch as the will to write back and hear from home offered ample ground for psychologization, one had to reckon with the built-in mechanism of letter writing, which configured, motivated and sustained the working of the labor corps and the Chinese participation in the war. The movement of the letters symbolized in one direction the need of the labor corps to compensate the workers for their displacement, and in the other

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<sup>5</sup> Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2011), 82.

an acknowledgment of the distance that initiated the laborers' migration in the first place. More importantly, the compulsion of letter writing worked in accordance with the payment structure set out in the contracts. I argue that it was the structure of payment embedded in the contracts that conditioned the opposite directions travelled by labor and money, while the confirmation of the reciprocal relationship between labor and money in turn verified the contracts and consolidated its structure. The constant exchange of letters made sure the route remained unobstructed—the route of labor migration and of monetary reciprocation—so that labor kept pouring into the trenches and money kept reaching home. The labor-monetary cycle could hardly maintain itself without the contractual structure of payment, which prompted constant exchange of letters. In short, the affinity between the Great War and the literacy of common laborers was written into the contracts of the program.

The word “contract” was by no means used metaphorically. To avoid German suspicion and Japanese objection,<sup>6</sup> Chinese laborers—under a scheme called “Laborers as Soldiers”—were often recruited by dummy companies monitored by the British and French governments. These dummy companies, acted as representatives of the laborers, were in charge of the actual labor recruitment, and produced labor contracts between the French and British governments and themselves. These surviving contracts, as rare primary historical documents, lay out conditions and obligations for both parties between the laborers and the Allies, from transportation to work conditions, from food quota to

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<sup>6</sup> For discussions of the collaboration between China and the British and the French governments during WWI in terms of international politics, racial discrimination and regional realpolitik, please refer to Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 81-181. Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 77-94.

health care, from penalization to payment method, offering invaluable insights into the original set-up of the program. Although previous scholarship either neglects or misreads these contractual sources,<sup>7</sup> I argue that these invaluable historical records allow us a window into the conditions of the laborers during the Great War and therefore merit close reading. Take for instance the contract between the Huimin Company 惠民公司 and the French government. One particular clause merits special attention:

第四條 其作工工資，每工人每日得領法幣一法郎，由雇主直接交付於工人之手，每星期或十五天一付，按照其雇主處之定章。與同該項工作之法國工人，一律辦理。  
除以上所給每日工資外，雇主應每月付給每工人工資法幣叁拾法郎，此項月給工資，應交由公司所指定之一銀行，以便由公司在中國存續，歸工人，或其家屬或其指定之人收用。此項付款與匯款之證明，應於合宜之時，交由雇主轉付工人。  
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Article 4 The wage is one franc per day, which should be paid to the workers by the employer weekly or bi-weekly, according to the employer's payment policy. The treatment of the Chinese workers should be no different from that of the French workers. Aside from the daily wages, the employers must pay *another 30 francs* per worker every month to one of the appointed banks by the Huimin Company so that Huimin will deposit the money *in China* for the use of *the worker, his family or any person designated by the worker*. The employer must give a proper receipt to the laborer for deposits or remittances (emphasis mine).

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<sup>7</sup> For a series of mistranslation of one of the contracts, please see Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, Appendix 1, pp. 246-250. Here Xu provides an English translation of the contract between the Huimin Company and the French Government. Contrasting the original Chinese contract with Xu's English translation, a total of 28 articles in the original is subtracted to Xu's 21, omitting Articles 2, 14, 25, 27 and 28, while combining 19 with 20, and 21 with 24. Xu also rewrites Articles 4, 8, 9 and 22 with considerable distortion of the contents. For an overall and trenchant review of Xu's book otherwise, please refer to Rebecca Karl, "A World Gone Wrong," in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 33, No. 23 (December 2011), pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> The Huimin contracts are signed in both Chinese and French. I have yet to obtain the French original. The English translation of the clause is mine. For the complete Chinese contract, please see Chen Sanjing, *Hua gong yu ou zhan* 華工與歐戰 (Chinese Laborer-Workers and the European War) (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1986), pp. 191-203.

As shown in Article 4, the key issue was the two-part structure built into the wage payment.<sup>9</sup> This two-part payment structure mandated that half of the laborers' wages should be distributed directly into the hands of the laborers in France and the other half sent off to their households in China, mostly in rural areas in Shandong, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces. The payment was set up in a way that acknowledged both the actual labor and the displacement of the workers. What was at work here was a dialectics of presence and absence: the laborers in France were remunerated for their presence and at the same time their families in China were compensated for their absence. In an uncanny way, the money—the half wage of 30 francs—personified the absent laborer taking care of his family. It was the two-part payment dialectics, I argue, that crystalized the priority of literacy for the workers in the war.

The same situation applied to the workers recruited by the British. In the contract between Renji Company 仁記公司 and the British government, the two-part payment structure stated:

第八條（甲）工人工價一半在作工地點按星期支領，一半留給家屬在威海支領。

（乙）華工在作工地點應領之一半工價，由工局直接發給各華工，其在華之留支半工價由包工人按期向工局代為支領轉給各家屬，如有錯誤，由包工人負責。<sup>10</sup>

Article 8 (1) The laborer's wage is distributed weekly, half to the place where the laborer works, half to Weihaiwei for the use of his family.

(2) Half of the Chinese laborer's wage ought to be paid by the labor bureau directly to the laborer, the other half remitted to

<sup>9</sup> This two-part payment structure is distorted in Xu's translation, which puts it as "At the request of the laborer, the employer shall arrange a convenient way for remitting his money to his family in China." Xu cuts out Article 2 in the original Chinese, his Article 3 in translation is in fact Article 4 in Chinese quoted above. See Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, 246.

<sup>10</sup> Chen Sanjing, *Hua gong yu ou zhan*, 205.



the laborer' family by his supervisor, who is liable for all mistakes including late or missing payments, should they occur.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore in order to make sure his absence be duly compensated, the laborer had to maintain his frequency of long distance communication, via no other available means to him but epistolary communication. His quota of two letters per month was his sole resource to corroborate if his absence continued to support his family, which in turn determined whether his presence in Europe should continue. To write and be written to became an existential question. In order to confirm that his money traveled beyond national borders, the laborer had also to cross the boundary of illiteracy. Underneath the grandiose discursive structure of communication and empire, the insoluble bond between war and literacy was a concrete one.

This bond called for maintenance. The few Chinese interpreters and some literate workers could not, however, satisfy the overwhelming demand for long distance communication. With the war at stake, external help had to be solicited. YMCA and its War Work Council rose to the occasion. In 1918 alone, hundreds of Y men were sent and more than sixty YMCA service stations were established all over Europe.<sup>12</sup> Established in spirit of secular socialism and the social gospel movement,<sup>13</sup> these YMCA service stations provided the laborers with a whole range of services from sports programs, film

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<sup>11</sup> This translation is also mine, which differs from Xu Guoqi's translation/summary listed below. See Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, 251.

"Rates of Pay, etc.

Daily Abroad.

Labour: 1 franc

Ganger (60 men) 1 ½ fangs

Monthly in China to family, etc.

10 dollars

15 dollars"

<sup>12</sup> Gu Xingqing, 48.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of YMCA's role in the movement of social gospel, please see Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations, 1916-1952* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 22-24. Also Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 117-122.

screening and news translation. However, as the Y men who worked intimately with the laborers soon realized, these stations functioned above everything else as surrogate writing centers.

Among these Y men was James Yen 晏陽初 (Yan Yangchu). Yen was later to become arguably one of the most important educators in modern China, as well as a pioneer of international mass education and rural reconstruction. His entire career, according to his own account, owed its roots to his initial contact with the Chinese laborers in Boulogne, France. Born in 1893 in Sichuan Province, Yen first studied in Hong Kong and then at Yale University. Co-founder of the Chinese Mass Education Association and the International Institute of Rural Education, Yen's reform programs proliferated in numerous countries from France to China, from the U.S. to Cuba, from Mexico to the Philippines, from Colombia to Ghana.<sup>14</sup> In the 1930s, after the exemplary establishment of the "Ting Tsien Experiment" in Hebei Province in northern China, numerous warlords and most notably Chiang Kai-shek, the generalissimo of the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang*, or GMD), extended personal invitations to Yen and his program, to recreate and propagate the Ting Tsien miracle. Yen, a popular figure across the Pacific, won support from both the Nationalists in China and liberals in the U.S. In 1943, upon the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Copernicus' death, Yen was named one of the ten most outstanding "modern revolutionaries," along with John Dewey, Henry Ford, Walt Disney and Albert Einstein. In 1948, the U.S. Congress earmarked 10% of a \$275,000,000 economic aid to China for rural reconstruction, a commission later

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<sup>14</sup> Wu Xiangxiang, *Yan Yangchu Zhuan: wei quan qiu xiang cun gai zao fen dou liu shi nian* 晏陽初傳：為全球鄉村改造奮鬥六十年 (A Biography of James Yen: Sixty Years of Struggle for the Global Rural Reconstruction) (Taipei: Shi bao wen hua chu ban, 1981), pp. 5-7.

nicknamed the “Jimmy Yen Provision.”<sup>15</sup> As Yen himself recollected numerous times, all started on the second day of his college graduation. That day, dispatched by the War Work Council of YMCA, Yen boarded naval ship of the American Expeditionary Forces and sailed off for Boulogne, France. There he was to meet a kind of “new men” who would inspire him to find his life vocation. As Yen put it, “Before heading off to France, my plan was to educate the Chinese laborers, but who would imagine that it was the laborers that educated me. Their intellect and enthusiasm led me to the discovery of a kind of ‘new men,’ whose importance might outweigh the archeologists’ discovery of the Peking Man.”<sup>16</sup>

Yen arrived in mid-June, 1918, and immediately started his service to a Chinese labor camp of five thousand “new men” to be. Yen’s program of literacy did not install itself at one fell swoop but groped its way through three stages. The first was a spontaneous night class held in the labor camp canteen. After doing surrogate letter writing and money remittance every day for a few months, sometimes several hundred cases each night, Yen decided that it was time for a change and called a meeting for all five thousand workers.<sup>17</sup> When Yen declared that no longer would the workers have to borrow literacy from him, and that instead they would learn to write their own letters in a night class to be held in the camp canteen, the workers roared with laughter. Only a few

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<sup>15</sup> Wu Xiangxiang, “Yan Yangchu sao chu tian xia wen mang” 晏陽初掃除天下文盲 (Yan Yangchu Sweeps Clear Illiteracy all over the World). See IIRR Archive, Box 166, Butler Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

<sup>16</sup> James Yen, “Jiu Shi Zi Shu” (*Memoir at the Age of Ninety*), IIRR Archive, Box 129.

<sup>17</sup> Yen does not specify the exact time when the literacy program started. Since Yen arrived in June 1918 and the journal of *The Chinese Labor Workers’ Weekly* was founded in January 1919 as a supplement to literacy program, the program itself should start between July 1918 and December 1919. The following account of the initial development of the literacy program is based on Yen’s “Jiu shi zi shu” (*Memoir at the Age of Ninety*), pp. 118-152.

laborers were bold enough to join Yen's class that night. In the canteen, using stones as writing utensils in a primitive manner, the letter writing class became virtually a class on character learning. Its curriculum started from numerals in Chinese to Arabic numbers, from their own names to addressing their parents and family. Over a period of four months, more than forty laborers attended the embryonic literacy class and thirty-five of them "graduated" with literacy of their own.

As the canteen class thrived, the next step was the lesson of "One Thousand Characters" (also called the "foundation characters") for all five thousand workers in Boulogne. Inspired by a Confucianist classic *One Thousand Words* 千字文 (*qian zi wen*) in use for basic literacy since the Liang dynasty in the sixth century,<sup>18</sup> Yen selected approximately one thousand of the most frequently used characters from "a Chinese dictionary, some newspaper articles sent from China, colloquial expression of the laborers and the most employed characters and phrases in their letters."<sup>19</sup> Not least informed by the Confucian literary tradition, an approach to modern literacy took shape. The method was so effective that it quickly grew beyond its pilot version and developed into a large series of *Primer of One Thousand Characters* (*qian zi ke* 千字課) for peasants, city dwellers and soldiers, widely popular in the mass education movement in China from the 1920s onward.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Yen characterizes his breeding as a synthesis of the east and the west, acknowledging the importance of "3C" for his lifelong career: Confucius, Christ and Coolies. See Yen, "Jiu shi zi shu," 229.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>20</sup> Later editions of "One Thousand Characters" are based on a character list put together by Chen Heqin, a Columbia graduate with statistical expertise. Yen took pride in the fact that his statistical hunch in 1918 did not stray too far from the later mathematical calculation.

Eventually in January 1919, Yen created a newspaper titled YMCA *Chinese Labor Workers' Weekly* 基督教青年會駐法華工週報 (*Jidujiao qingnianhui zhufa huagong zhoubao*), and acted as its chief editor until his YMCA post terminated in 1920. Conceived for those advanced students in the literacy class, *The Weekly* functioned as supplementary reading material. Sponsored by the YMCA and with a circulation from 500 to 1,000, it was written, copperplate-etched, printed and distributed all by James Yen and two other editors. *The Weekly*, usually four pages per issue and included sections with titles like “Commentaries,” “China Stories,” “News from Europe and America,” “A Brief History of the Great War” and “Laborers’ Updates.” Yen proudly claimed it to be the first journal devoted to the Chinese workers<sup>21</sup>—a claim that was only partially true. Two other workers’ journals had preceded *The Weekly*, granted that they did not target the Chinese labor-soldiers in France in particular. The first was *The Magazine of Chinese in Europe* 旅歐雜誌 (*Lü ou za zhi*) in circulation between August 1916 and March 1918, and between August 1928 and December 1928, and the second was *The Chinese Laborers’ Magazine* 華工雜誌 (*Hua gong za zhi*) between January 1917 and December 1920, both of which were established by de la Société Franco-Chinoise d' Education. Similar in content and style otherwise, what escaped Yen and really set *The Weekly* apart from its predecessors was that for a brief moment, *The Weekly* featured writings by the workers. Hence the workers’ *Weekly* was for and by the workers.

In No. 2 of *The Weekly* (January 29, 1919), Yen announced a prose competition. The announcement and requirement were as follows:

論著有獎。

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<sup>21</sup> Yen, “Jiu shi zi shu,” pp. 132-133.

本會因要鼓勵能著寫的弟兄。特獎第一名以二十佛郎。第二名十佛郎。著作以六百字為限。文字以普通話為合宜。交卷須在陽曆二月十五號以前。過期不收。著好之後，可交青年會幹事先生代寄巴力。以免誤延。茲將此次論題列后。華工在法與祖國的損益。<sup>22</sup>

**Prose Competition with Prize:**

To encourage brethren who can read and write, the YMCA decided to award the first prize winner of the prose competition 20 francs, the second place 10 francs. The composition should be no more than 600 words and in *putonghua* (the common language). The deadline for submission is February 15. Late compositions will not be accepted. To avoid delay, please turn in your work to YMCA secretaries to be mailed to Paris. The topic of the composition is listed below: “The Pros and Cons of Chinese Laborers’ Being in France.”

This was not the only topic the *Weekly* proposed for prose competition amongst laborers. Other topics included: “What is the Republic of China,” “The Cause of the Decline of China,” “If the Republic were to promote education, what do you think we should do?” But it was the only one that updated the readers with its results. In No. 7 (March 12, 1919), a special section entitled “The Laborers’ Composition” spanned two pages, featuring both Yen’s commentary on the competition and the actual first-prize composition written by a laborer named Fu Xingsan 傅省三. Fu Xingsan’s article, to my knowledge the only surviving piece of writing by the laborers, merits our close attention.

**Taking China into the War: A Laborer’s Point of View**

It can hardly be overemphasized that Fu Xingsan produced this piece of writing as a member of the 200,000 Chinese “workers and soldiers” in the Great War. Fu’s article, written in the wake of the war and in the middle of the Versailles Peace Conference, is

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<sup>22</sup> *The Chinese Labor Workers’ Weekly*, no. 2 (January 29, 1919). Punctuations are added by me.

not only a firsthand documentation and reflection of the laborers' experience but also a terse and perceptive critique of the Great War and its aftermath. To do justice to this rare piece of historical record, Fu's article is henceforth quoted in its entirety in English translation:

“The Pros and Cons of the Laborers' Being in France  
Fu Xingsan

It was probably the proud heart of the German Kaiser that gave rise to the outbreak of the Great War in Europe. As the Kaiser coveted to take over the whole world, the Allies were gravely offended. They struck their drums and started the battles. My homeland China is also a member of the Allies. As much as China detested the intervention of a bullying neighbor, it could not join the Allies on the battlefield. Fortunately, the Allies came to recruit laborers and thus enabled China to participate in the war efforts. This was indeed a golden opportunity for us to assist the Allies in winning the war.

Arriving in France, the Chinese laborers were installed in the most dangerous positions. Though numerous of them were hurt, dead, shaken up and suffering illnesses, the laborers did contribute to the Allies troops and managed what we could for the final victory of the Allies. Far from being damaged, our cause has gained substantial advantages. Thus, in my mind, the pros of the laborers' presence in France outweigh the cons.

First, not all laborers who came to France are law-abiding citizens. If they have not come to France for work, they might have engaged in wrongdoings in China.

Second, the majority of the Chinese laborers are destitute. If they have not chosen to come to France, they might be suffering from frigidity and hunger. Now that they are here, not only are they themselves well-fed and well-clothed, so are their families in China.

Third, a good portion of the laborers might be ill-educated. They did not know heretofore the relationship between individuals and families, between families and countries. Now thrust at the forefront of the battlefield, they witness for themselves how others and foreigners sacrifice their lives for their own countries and families. Hence unwittingly their love for their families and a sense of patriotism is born.

Fourth, the workers used to think that foot binding was a beauty and did not know that they themselves needed to labor strenuously to provide for those foot-bound women who could

not walk nor work. In sharp contrast to these Chinese women, they now have seen female soldiers, farmers and doctors in the West and therefore have realized how much disadvantage to which they subjected themselves in the past. If they get to return home, the vicious habit of the old days will have to be reformed.

Fifth, the laborers opened up their horizons as they saw the weapons, farming devices, various machineries used in France. At the same time, they were introduced to the military strategies employed by the foreigners. If they make their way home in the future, they will enlighten their countrymen.

Sixth, when in China, our laborers used to worship idols, burn incense, revere monks, conform to the rules of *Fengshui*, and pick a so-called auspicious date (for certain things). They believed in all sorts of superstitions but did not explore the truth nor acquire true learning. Now that they have come to Europe, if they are one day homebound, they cannot be as stubborn-minded as before.

Seventh, when still in China, we thought that the Westerners were superior to us fellow Chinese. Now that we are competing with them in intelligence and physical strength, we come to the realization that they are hardly any better than we are. Given the chance to go home and equip ourselves with adequate education, dare we expect and contribute to the development of our motherland.

Finally, in the past, all we knew was to boast that our country was vast in land and rich in population while slighting the foreign nations to be scant in territory and scarce in human resource. Now as the Peace Conference was launched, China was unexpectedly denied its status as a great nation and a celestial dynasty and ranked at the bottom of countries. But a little country such as Japan was unexpectedly listed as a great nation. The peace conference went so far as to forbid China to speak at the conference. Confounded by such humiliation and instigation, the laborers suddenly awakened as if from a dream and their love for China and their will to strengthen it was finally aroused. This kind of thought would not have taken its form if we had not travelled to a foreign country. Should we not come to France, we might be still dreaming in China.

These few points are no more than my humble opinions. Whether or not they are true is subject to critique.”<sup>23</sup> (Figure 1.3)

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<sup>23</sup> Fu Xingsan, “The Pros and Cons of Chinese Laborers’ Being in France,” *The Chinese Labor Workers’ Weekly*, no. 7 (March 12, 1919). Please see Figure 1.3 for the Chinese original. The English translation, punctuations and paragraph divisions are all mine.



Arguing in favor of the laborers' presence in France, Fu styled himself in literary Chinese, first painting the geo-political backdrop of the war, then listing eight points of the benefits of laborers' presence in France. He covered a wide ground of socio-economic and political reasoning, even including a sophisticated gendered perspective and offered an explanation for Chinese rage over the Versailles Peace Conference. Fu's article—published in *The Weekly* as a part of the literacy program—adopted a mixed style of *baihua* and *wenyan*. The materiality of language is a crucial point to be returned to in the last section.

Fu opens with a historical background to the laborers' presence, with the forgotten episodes of China's difficult entry into the war implied. He illustrates in a succinct manner the cause of the war: "It was probably the proud heart of the German Kaiser that gave rise to the outbreak of the Great War in Europe." As the Kaiser coveted the whole world, "the Allies were gravely offended." From the beginning, Fu seizes the crux of the war: a power clash amongst imperialist forces. To demonstrate China's effort in repositioning herself within the global power play, Fu hastens to add, "My motherland is also a member of the Allies." He goes on to signal the limitation of that membership, "As much as China detested the intervention of a bullying neighbor, it could not join the Allies at the battlefield." As we begin to wonder what makes China a member of the Allies without the right to fight, Fu informs us with a twist, "Fortunately, the Allies came to recruit laborers and thus enabled China to participate in the war efforts." Fu's opening lines raise as many questions as they answer about the European Great War and China's participation in it. What drove China into the Great War amongst European powers? How

did it gain its membership and why did it not lead to battles? If Chinese “could not join the Allies at the battlefield,” what did its membership entail?

What Fu assumed as common knowledge and left out is a history of China’s stalled entry into the Great War. Seen as a golden opportunity that might reshuffle the world order, the Great War stirred up great expectations for China to reinvent itself through its participation and hopefully lead to a seat for China in the subsequent peace conference. As Sun Yat-Sen remarked, “Europe will not have time to bother about the East... This is our chance to rise up and make our stand.”<sup>24</sup> But as a semi-colonial young republic, China’s formal entry into the war was hardly welcome. Between 1914 and 1916, the Allies rejected at least twice China’s petition to fight in the war. Not only did its declaration of war on Germany have to be sanctioned by the British and the French, its aid to Britain, France and Russia in the form of labor forces also had to be kept a secret until August 1917, more than a year into the launching of the so-called program “Laborers as Soldiers.”

As early as August 1914 only one month into the war, president of the Republic of China Yuan Shikai 袁世凯 made the first attempt to take advantage of the war, offering the British 50,000 Chinese troops to join forces and take back Qingdao, a Chinese territory under German lease. Yuan’s naiveté was brusquely dismissed by the British, who in turn swiftly invited Japan to join the Allies under the 1902 Treaty of Anglo-Japanese Alliance, allowing the latter to take over Qingdao in November 1914.<sup>25</sup> Records show that the second known attempt at joining the Allies was made in November

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<sup>24</sup> Marie-Claire Bergere, *Sun Yat-Sen*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 262. Quoted in Xu, *China and the Great War*, 85.

<sup>25</sup> Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, pp. 90-91.

1915, when a U.S. military attaché in Beijing received a confidential report to the Allies, entitled “China Proposes to Join the Allies against Germany.”<sup>26</sup> This time China aimed at the shortage of weapons on the Allies side, especially targeting the Russians. To show sincerity, a shipment of some 30,000 rifles were transferred into British hands along with the Chinese petition to the French and the British asking them to formally urge Japan into allow China to enter into the game. Japan remained dissuaded and even threatened its Allied friends by its brief flirtation with the Germans for alliance, bargaining for even more privileges in Shandong than the Allies had promised. Japan in the end proved too important to lose for the Allies and China’s second bid to the war was aborted.

As the war dragged into the third year and as tanks were deployed for the first time in human history in the Battle of Somme, the growing dearth of labor forces exacerbated and finally started to hurt the British and even more so the French. Thereupon the program of “Laborers as Soldiers 以工代兵 (*yi gong dai bing*)” came about.<sup>27</sup> Between May 1916 and November 1918, through dummy agencies like the

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<sup>26</sup> I. Newell, “China Proposes to Join the Allies against Germany,” November 17, 1915. National Archive (College Park): RG 165 Records of the War Department, General and special Staffs, entry 296 Box 324. As referenced by Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 107.

<sup>27</sup> The materialization of the scheme of “Laborers as Soldiers” is full of intrigues, a detailed account of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. What is presented here is a synthesized generalization. For further historical accounts of the turnout of the program, including the Chinese negotiation for a written contract from the French and the British, the British and French competition in recruitment, the colonial racist treatment of the laborers etc., please refer to the following sources. Chen Sanjing, *Ou zhan hua gong shi liao*. Zhang Jianguo and Zhang Junyong eds. *Wan li fu rong ji 萬里赴戎機* (Over There: The Pictorial Chronicle of Chinese Laborer Corps in the Great War)(Jinan: Shandong hua bao chubanshe, 2009). Gloria Tseng, PhD dissertation, “Chinese pieces of the French mosaic: The Chinese experience in France and the making of a revolutionary tradition,” (University of California, Berkeley, 2002). Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, pp. 114-126. Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front*, pp. 10-54. Stephen G. Graft, “Angling for an Invitation to Paris: China’s Entry into the First World War,” *The International Historical Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (February, 1994), pp. 1-24.

aforementioned Huimin Company,<sup>28</sup> 140,000 to 200,000 Chinese laborers—the majority of whom were illiterate peasants from Shandong, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces—were sent off to Europe. The lower figure of 140,000 counted 100,000 laborers under the British command,<sup>29</sup> 40,000 under the French, from whom the American Expeditionary Forces borrowed 10,000 in 1917. The higher number added up all laborers serving in the Allies’ camps all over France, Britain, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Africa from 1916 to shortly after 1919 to a total of 200,000.<sup>30</sup>

Fu Xingsan was one of the 200,000 Chinese laborers. Having laid out the historical premise of the laborers’ presence, Fu continues his account of laborers’ life, “Arriving in France, the Chinese laborers were installed in the most dangerous positions.” Some of the laborers arrived in France by way of the Suez Canal and around the Cape of Good Hope, more through a secret path to and across Canada in order to avoid attacks from the German submarines. They “were installed in the most dangerous positions” to shoulder all kinds of dirty work. They dug trenches and foundations, worked in munitions

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<sup>28</sup> The Huimin Company, the first private company set up for this purpose, was established by Liang Shiyi and under the director of the Chinese Industrial Bank. Liang Shiyi 梁士詒, one of the most powerful figures in the Beiyang regime under Yuan Shikai, is credited as the brain behind the scheme of “Laborers as Soldiers.” For an account of his life, please refer to Feng Gang et al., eds., *Minguo Liang Yansun xiansheng shiyi nianpu* 民國梁燕孫先生士詒年譜 (The Life Chronology of Liang Shiyi) (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1978).

<sup>29</sup> Aided by British missionaries and taking Weihaiwei—a British colony in Shandong—as the headquarters for the recruitment, the British mission operated along the similar lines as the French one. For details of the British recruitment, please see Michael Summerskill, *China on the Western Front: Britain’s Chinese Work Force in the First World War* (London: Michael Summerskill, 1982), 39. As well as Nicholas John Griffin, PhD dissertation, “The Use of Chinese Labour by the British Army, 1916-1920: the ‘Raw Importation’, Its Scope and Problems” (University of Oklahoma, 1973), 191.

<sup>30</sup> Chen Sanjing, *Hua gong yu ou zhan (The Chinese Labor Force in the First World War)* (Taipei: Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica, 1986), pp. 34-35. It is worth pointing out that even the higher estimate of 200,000 does not include the laborers recruited by the Russians before 1917, most of them northeastern Chinese farmers going over the border seeking employment in forestry work and some turned laborers for the Russian army. Studies on Chinese laborers in WWI Russian are somewhat limited. Please see Zhang Jianguo ed., *Chinese Labourers and the First World War* 中國勞工與第一次世界大戰 (Zhongguo laogong yu diyici shijie dazhan) (Jinan: Shandong University Press, 2009), pp. 109-136.

plants and arsenals, repaired roads, built railways, cleared and drained camps as well as flying fields, and transported supplies. After the war many of them worked on detecting bombs and burying deserted bodies, and in some cases they participated in post-war reconstruction.<sup>31</sup> Though not indentured to engage in direct military conflicts, the laborers had to fight the German troops at times when the Allies deserted their labor camps in face of German advancement. Although “numerous of them were hurt, dead, shaken up and suffering illnesses,”<sup>32</sup> the Chinese laborers released the Allies troops from wartime labor and into military combat. Fu reassures us in a humble voice that “the laborers did contribute to the Allied troops and managed what we could for the final victory of the Allies.” It might be the power struggle amongst China and the rest of the Allies that sent the laborers to Europe, but it was the laborers who actually took China to the war and into the Versailles Peace Conference. Fu concludes his opening paragraph establishing his argument, “Far from being damaged, our cause has gained substantial advantages. Thus, in my mind, the pros of the laborers’ presence in France outweigh the cons.”

As a matter of fact, there was more to the presence of the laborers than the collective image of the self-sacrificing coolies. Around the time when Fu was writing in the wake of the Armistice, a group of laborers, following a meeting with Woodrow Wilson and Wang Zhengting – a Chinese delegate to Versailles, sent a gun to the Chinese

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<sup>31</sup> Live Yu-Sion, “The Contribution of Chinese Workers during the First World War in France: Memory of Facts and Occultation of Memory,” in Zhang Jianguo ed., *Chinese Labourers and the First World War*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> An uncertain estimate of 20,000 Chinese workers died for the war, for whom thirty-two cemeteries were built in France alone. Aside from those who died and those who remained in France for residence, most of the laborers under the British supervision made it home in 1920 and those with the French in 1922. See Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front*, pp. 90-91. Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, pp. 144-145.

delegation threatening them lest they sign the treaty.<sup>33</sup> After the Great War, more than thirty thousand Chinese laborers joined the Soviet Red Army.<sup>34</sup> At least ten laborers made their way to the Spanish Civil War, with Tchang Jau Sau and Liou Kin Tien being the only tractable names.<sup>35</sup> A particular laborer named Zhang Changsong 張長松 stayed in France after the Great War and fought with his French-Chinese son in the anti-fascist underground movement in the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> The laborers with their words, deeds and lives presented a weighty critique of the Great War and its international political aftermath.

### **(En)Countering the War: Fu Xingsan v.s. James Yen**

After demonstrating at the macro level of international geopolitics that Chinese participation, which boils down to the laborers' destitution and determination, brings China no harm but only gains, Fu moves on to discuss point by point the laborers' activities on different levels. The first three points are laid out as personal gains in terms of legal obedience, financial solvency as well as access to literacy and knowledge. The next three points touch upon gender equality, industrialization and religious practice. These first six points cover the issue of development either on a personal-familial level or

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<sup>33</sup> Documentary, *Hua gong jun tuan* 華工軍團 (The Legion of Chinese Labor-workers), Episode 6.

<sup>34</sup> Li Zhixue, "Di yi ci shi jie da zhan zhong de fu e hua gong" 第一次世界大戰中的赴俄華工 (The Chinese Labor-workers in Russia during WWI) in Zhang Jianguo ed., *Chinese Labourers and the First World War*, pp. 109-118.

<sup>35</sup> Ni Huiru, *Gan lan gui guan de zhao huan: can jia Xibanya nei zhan de Zhongguo ren, 1936-1939* 橄欖桂冠的召喚：參加西班牙內戰的中國人 (The Call of Spain: The Chinese Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War) (Taipei: ren jian chu ban she, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Documentary *Hua gong jun tuan*, Episode 5.

on a social stratum. The last two points, however, take a different lead and escalate the argument into political commentaries, thus echoing Fu's own opening paragraph.

This shift in content is signaled and assisted by a concomitant shift in narrative perspective. In the first four sections on delinquency, poverty, ignorance and gender-discrimination, third person narrative is employed. Fu addresses those who fall into the traps of the abovementioned four categories as “they 他們” or “the Chinese laborers 華工.” Creating narrative distance, Fu is able to objectively describe the undesirable situation of the laborers in China and argue that their displacement has worked toward the benefit of themselves and their own society at large. From the fifth point on, subtle shift takes place. In the absence of a formal subject, albeit words like “self (自己)” and “one's own country (本國),” one can hardly tell if the section is meant to be read in the point of view of the first person plural or as a third person narrative. If it is the former, then Fu is speaking in his own voice, appraising the prospects of transplanting the experience of European industrialization in China. If it is third-person narrative, what Fu does is virtually free indirect speech, rendering the laborers as the go-between for the cause of Chinese industrialization. The ambivalence extends to the sixth point, where Fu's wording of “we/our laborers 我們工人,” though offering a sense of sympathy and identification, cannot be determined as the first person plural perspective. Only in the seventh point, does Fu come out to identify himself as the first person narrator speaking freely of “we 我們” and “we Chinese 我們華人,” before the text quickly slips back into ambiguity in the eighth point, using “the Chinese laborers 華工” and “our country 我國” simultaneously. The question is what is at issue in the seventh point so close to Fu's

heart that he puts aside temporarily his narrative caution and draws out his political commentary. The seventh section reads:

第七、從前在祖國時。以為西人高於我們華人。今日與他們賽腦力。賽筋力。方知道他們不比我們高。若回祖國。再加以教育。敢望將來祖國的進行。<sup>37</sup>

Seventh, when still back in China, we thought that the Westerners were superior to us fellow Chinese. Now that we are competing with them in intelligence and physical strength, we come to the realization that they are hardly any better than we are. Given the chance to go home and equip ourselves with adequate education, dare we expect and contribute to the development of our motherland.

Here Fu takes on the myth of European superiority in full capacity. As Fu suggests at the beginning, the Great War was in its essence a European war made global because of colonialism and imperialism. Though formally not a colony to any particular country, Chinese laborers were initially treated as colonial subjects by the French in tandem with other laborers summoned from French colonies, all being supervised by the Service of the Organization of Colonial Workers (*le Service d'organisation des travailleurs coloniaux*) under the French Ministry of War and Ministry of Colonies.<sup>38</sup> The sense of European superiority with its readiness to exploit its subjugated and “inferior” others and its unwillingness to share the fruit of victory, forced the Chinese activities of “Laborers as Soldiers” into anonymity for a long time without being duly recognized. As put squarely by John Jordan, then British ambassador to China, the Chinese attempt to

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<sup>37</sup> Fu Xingsan, “The Pros and Cons of Chinese Laborers’ Being in France.” Punctuations mine.

<sup>38</sup> After the Chinese government protested against the colonial treatment by the French government, the command of the recruitment was transferred to the French Ministry of Transportation. Annie Kriegel, “Aux origines francaises du communisme chinois,” *Preuves*, Vol. 209-210 (August-September 1968), 27. In Gloria Tseng, 7.



rank on par with European powers is nothing but “a wild dream.”<sup>39</sup> Such was the historical reality, but Jordan had it right that some “wild dream” did come about.

Fu’s clear reasoning poignantly captures the discourse of western supremacy. Before the first encounter, Fu and other Chinese workers “thought that the Westerners were superior to us fellow Chinese,” but after “competing with them in intelligence and physical strength,” Fu comes to recognize the myth of Western superiority. The word “to compete 賽” effectively puts the European soldiers, workers and commanders back on the same starting line with the Chinese laborers. In a competition rather undreamt of, to the laborers’ surprise, the supposedly superior do not gain an upper hand—either physically or intellectually—as easily as the myth would have them believe. Writing in dignified humility, Fu undermines the myth of western supremacy and calls for confidence, “dare we expect 敢望” the development of a new China. Fu was not the only one who saw the laborers’ abilities in “competing” with the Europeans, there were commanders of the Allies who worked with the Chinese laborers who also sang praises of Chinese capabilities as being commensurable to the best European workers. For instance, the British commander Douglas Haig observed, “Our experience with the Chinese labour in France has shown us that in all classes of routine work, both skilled and unskilled, Chinese men can labour as efficiently, if not more efficiently, than the best European workmen and with a persistence without rival. They are content with a far smaller wage,

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<sup>39</sup> Jordan to Gray, 25 July 1916, Public Record Office (London), Wo.106/35, in Xu Guoqi, *Wen ming de jiao rong: di yi ci shi jie da zhan qi jian de zai fa hua gong* 文明的交融：第一次世界大戰期間的在法華工 (Convergence of Civilizations: Chinese Labor Workers in WWI France) (Beijing: Wu zhou chuan bo chu ban she, 2007), 22.

accustomed to less food, and expect fewer comforts.”<sup>40</sup> *The Far Eastern Review* praised the laborers’ presence to be “possibly as one of the most important aspects of the Great European War.”<sup>41</sup>

Fu’s political analysis continues. After tackling the issue of Western superiority, Fu moves onto the Versailles Peace Conference. Contrasting Versailles’ different tractations of China and Japan—placing the former among the “little nations” and the latter as a “great” one—here Fu explains the logic behind the Chinese fury.

第八、從前只知道糊糊塗塗說大話。說我國地廣人多。外邦地少人稀。現在和平會一立。竟將中華天朝大國的名目取消了。列在末尾。小小日本。竟稱強國。并不准我國在和會有發言權。華工經此番的淘汰激勵。如夢方醒。忽然就發起了那強國愛國的心來。這種思想。是來外國而有的。若不來法國。恐怕仍在中國做夢。<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in the past, all we knew was to boast that our country was vast in land and rich in population while slighting the foreign nations to be scant in territory and scarce in human resource. Now as the Peace Conference was launched, China was unexpectedly denied its status as a great nation and a celestial dynasty and ranked at the bottom of countries. But a little country such as Japan was unexpectedly listed as a great power. The peace conference went so far to forbid China to speak at the conference. Confounded by such humiliation and instigation, the laborers suddenly awakened as if from a dream and their love for China and their will to strengthen it was finally aroused. This kind of thought would not have taken its form if we had not travelled to a foreign country. Should we not come to France, we might be still dreaming in China.

As a member of the Entente Allies, China had high hopes for the peace conference, where promises made by the Allies were to be fulfilled. The agenda of the

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<sup>40</sup> Gu Xingqing, *Ou zhan gong zuo hui yi lu*, pp. 61-62. Douglas Haig’s remark is quoted in the English original.

<sup>41</sup> *The Far Eastern Review*, 15, no. 4: 126-7, also quoted in English. *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>42</sup> Fu Xingsan, “The Pros and Cons of Chinese Laborers’ Being in France.”

Chinese delegation at the conference was four-fold. The top priority was the return of Qingdao. Second, the Chinese delegation demanded the annulment of all Sino-Japanese treaties based on the Twenty-one Demands. Third, they lobbied for the guarantee of Chinese economic freedom. Last but not least, they sought the exposure and abolition of all secret treaties that China had signed under duress.<sup>43</sup> On January 18, 1919, three days after the launching of *The Chinese Labor Workers' Weekly*, the conference commenced. As the meeting wore on, the 1917 Lansing-Ishii Agreement between Japan and the U.S. was exposed, with the U.S. recognizing Japan's special interest in China.<sup>44</sup> The Council of Four—Britain, France, Italy and the U.S.—continuously failed to register Chinese protests against Japanese encroachment on the Chinese territory and sovereignty.<sup>45</sup> Eventually when the peace conference allotted Shandong to Japan, China as a member of the Allies had to admit that Versailles was a betrayal “in the house of our only friend”<sup>46</sup> who pointed “a dagger at the heart of China.”<sup>47</sup> On June 28, 1919 the signing day of the Treaty of Versailles, the Chinese delegation, the only delegation absent, refused to sign yet another unequal treaty.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Feng Chen, ed., *Liang Shiyi shi liao ji* 梁士詒史料集 (Historical Materials of Liang Shiyi) (Beijing: Zhong guo wen shi chubanshe, 1991), pp. 277-279.

<sup>44</sup> Reginald Wheeler, *China and the World-War* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 102.

<sup>45</sup> After the Italian delegation withdrew on April 21, 1919, the Council of Four became the Council of Three. See Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, ed., *Shantung: Treaties and Agreements* (Washington, DC: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1921), 116-117.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Bonsal, *Suitor and Supplicants: The Little Nations at Versailles* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1946), 239. Quoted in Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front*, 262.

<sup>47</sup> This is Wellington Koo's formulation. Koo was the chief spokesman of the Chinese delegation. Using the metaphor of dagger, he was explaining to the house the Japanese presence in Shandong would be a lethal danger to the China. Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002), 334.

<sup>48</sup> For the actual Treaty of the Versailles and its aftermath, please refer to, Lord Riddell et. Al, *Treaty of Versailles and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).

A note on the time of Fu's composition should be made. Fu's treatise on the peace conference was written between the first announcement of the prose competition on January 29 and its submission deadline of February 15, 1919. Within this brief period, though the five seats of the Chinese delegation in the House of the conference were reduced to two, the first rounds of Sino-Japanese debate on the Shandong question ended in the favor of China.<sup>49</sup> Writing at the beginning of the conference, Fu was well informed about the House's belittlement of China. But Fu could not have foreseen the outcome of the Shandong issue when April came and the peace conference ceded Shandong to Japan. Using the word "unexpectedly 竟" twice in a few lines, Fu already keenly captures the absurd sense of betrayal in the House's disproportional treatment of different nations, their territories and their contribution to winning peace. As a Chinese laborer who contributed to the peacemaking but was hardly acknowledged by the peace conference, Fu unwittingly writes as a representative of the bullied little nations. The denouncement of the ungrateful western nations and their "unexpected" betrayal justifies an expression of rage.

As bubbles of the Wilsonian Fourteen Points popped, the peace conference dashed all Chinese hopes of regaining privileges ceded to Germany.<sup>50</sup> The harsh contrast between the conference's treatment of China issues and the scale of sacrifice borne by the Chinese laborers outraged students and workers in Europe and China. As telegrams were exchanged between Paris and Beijing, Chinese rage erupted in both cities and eventually

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<sup>49</sup> MacMillan, pp. 330-333.

<sup>50</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 40-41.

culminated in demonstrations on May Fourth and its subsequent eponymous movement. On May 4, 1919, the laborers' rage and the students' fury joined forces and stormed the streets of Beijing.<sup>51</sup> Together, they pressured the Chinese delegation to boycott the Versailles Treaty—the first unequal treaty since the First Opium War in 1840 that China refused to sign—in protest against Versailles' betrayal of Chinese contribution to the war, a sacrifice borne by none other than the Chinese laborers. As Cai Yuanpei asked, “Who else in China but the laborers have shed blood on European soil?”<sup>52</sup> The fact that the massive student movement rooted its anti-imperialist presentiment in workers' travails signaled a new alliance between the working class and the intellectuals in Chinese society. Rather than portraying it as but one of the factors leading up to the May Fourth, I wish to make clear that it was the sacrifice of the laborers that conditioned the outbreak of the May Fourth, which in turn changed the course of modern Chinese revolution.<sup>53</sup>

Fu anticipated a popular May Fourth trope of the “dream” while evoking a different interpretation. In response to the unfair treatment that China received at the peace conference, the laborers “woke up as if from a dream 如夢方醒” and resolved to love and fortify their country. The question was what dream and whose dream? Was it the dream of the Chinese celestial state, already shattered by the clash of empires brought

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<sup>51</sup> For details of the May Fourth Movement, please see: Chow, *May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, pp. 4-7. Lin Yu-sheng, *Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), pp. 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> Cai Yuanpei, “Sacred, the Laborers,” in *The New Youth*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (October 15, 1918).

<sup>53</sup> I suggest that the laborers not only impacted a political movement came to be known as May Fourth, but also contributed to the making of the literary revolution. For a collection on the interpretation of May Fourth, please refer to Yu Yingshi et. Al, *Wu Si Xin Lun 五四新論* (New Commentaries on the May Fourth) (Taipei: Lian jing chu ban shi ye gong si, 1999).

by the First Opium War? Or was it the dream of the unassailable prowess of the European civilizations that admonished the rest of the world into emulation and submission?

Fu interestingly lumped together both dreams and his critique thereof in the last point. As he lamented that the laborers should not boast of China as a great nation, he immediately criticized the Allies' belittlement of China. If he gestured toward the enlightenment of the laborers, he also contextualized the laborers' experience in the wake of the disenchantment of European superiority. Upon closer reading, the disillusionment of both dreams was already embedded in his previous discussion of white supremacy. To dispel the dream of Western superiority, one must wake up from the celestial illusion. If the dialectic of double-awakening applied to the laborers, it also worked for China. Echoing Fu's conclusion that "Should we not come to France, we might be still dreaming in China;" we might also say, "If it were not for Europe, China might still be dreaming."

Fu was not alone in making this claim. Liang Qichao 梁啟超—the political philosopher and former state treasurer among other prestigious posts<sup>54</sup>—shared similar sentiments. Reporting from Paris after witnessing massive destruction and material deprivation in post-war Europe, Liang wrote in his *Reflections on the European Journey*, "Who could have thought that the rich ones, the British, the French and the Germans would bemoan their destitution just like us and live under debt? Who dare say that the fiery European nations and their comfortable-living people would one day unexpectedly have no coal and rice? ... Even for us who are used to leading a simple and clumsy life,

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<sup>54</sup> It is curious that scholars tend to overlook Liang's political capacity as a state official. In fact, when Liang was the state treasurer, he was one of the highest-ranking politicians who advocated that China should make an effort to join the Allies in the war. He also facilitated the Paris-Beijing cable communications that prevented the Chinese delegation from signing the Treaty of Versailles. Please see Ding Wenjiang, *Liang Qichao nian pu chang bian* 梁啟超年譜長編 (The Long Genealogy of Liang Qichao) (Shanghai: Shanghai ren min chu ban she, 1983).

the situation is already arduous and embarrassing. One can only imagine what will become of those Europeans who enjoyed for so many years of material comfort... How will they live?”<sup>55</sup> Not unlike Fu Xingsan, using the same word “unexpectedly 竟,” Liang was shocked into rethinking the superiority myth of the European Civilization. He went on to realize in his *Reflections* that it was this civilization itself that had made the war. What was perceived previously as an antidote to China’s backwardness had for itself catastrophic side effects. The disaster of the war and the betrayal of Versailles marked a historical juncture in modern Chinese history. It was an unusual moment since the First Opium War when Chinese intellectuals were made to question if the European civilization was a genuine prescription for the Chinese ailments, and started to speculate that the cure to the world gone wrong might be a rejuvenated and revolutionized China.<sup>56</sup>

To return to the prose competition of *The Weekly* on “The Pros and Cons of Chinese Laborers’ Being in France,” Fu’s first-prize winning essay seemed to have answered Yen’s question thoroughly and satisfactorily. Meticulously organized, Fu sandwiched his microcosmic scope of his treatise between macroscopic concerns of global order. Fu, through dialectical reasoning, established the case that the laborers’ presence in France worked undoubtedly toward the benefits of China, covering a whole spectrum of perspectives, from the personal, familial to the social and political. It even gestured toward a critique of the war and a reflection on the relations between the East and West, a heated topic amongst the most critically-minded intellectuals worldwide after the Great War. If the laborers’ presence in France presented a case of overwhelming

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<sup>55</sup> Liang Qichao, *Ou you xin ying lu* 歐遊心影錄 (Reflections on the European Journey) (Hong Kong: San da chubanshe, 1963), pp. 5-6.

<sup>56</sup> Please see Rebecca Karl, “A World Gone Wrong.”

advantages on all levels, why then did Yen list “pros” and “cons” back to back in the title of the topic? In short, what was Yen’s intention?

On the front page of the same issue announcing the prose competition, we read Yen’s commentary which is the earliest and longest prose surviving in Yen’s papers,<sup>57</sup> entitled “Congratulations on the Lunar New Year: Three Points of Happiness and Three Points of Concern 恭賀新年：三喜三思。”<sup>58</sup> Yen first greeted the laborers on the joyful occasion of the lunar New Year. The three points of happiness were: first, in defiance of the long tradition of Chinese insularity, the laborers successfully ventured to Europe;<sup>59</sup> second, their labor in Europe earned them many praises from the Allies; third, after trials of life and death, the laborers survived the Great War.<sup>60</sup> Like Liang Qichao and Fu Xingsan, Yen wrote from Paris after the Armistice and during the Versailles Peace Conference. But unlike Liang and Fu, Yen spared no word on his own take on the war and moved directly onto his three points of concerns.

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<sup>57</sup> Yen, “Jiu shi zi shu,” Box 129, p. 134.

<sup>58</sup> This long piece was actually the opening article of *The Weekly*. It started in the first issue and continued onto the second where the prose competition was announced. The launching date of *The Weekly*, January 21, 1919 was right before the Chinese lunar New Year, hence the New Year greeting. Please see James Yen, “Gonghe xinnian: san xi san si” 恭賀新年：三喜三思 (“Congratulations on the Lunar New Year: Three Points of Happiness and Three Points of Concern”) in *The Chinese Labor Workers’ Weekly*, no. 1 (January 21, 1919) and No. 2 (January 29, 1919).

<sup>59</sup> On a tangential note, Xu Guoqi plays a reprise of Yen’s first point in his *China and the Great War*, portraying the laborers as the ambassador between China and France and by extension the world, leading China out of “self-imposed isolation for centuries” and into a new world order. See Xu, *China and the Great War*, 22. A worldview as such risks a remiss of the fact that China was hardly out of the world order when the laborers joined the rank and files of the Allies and it was precisely that particular order that necessitated all the “little nations” struggle from within, China included.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



Set in a Confucianist order, Yen's three concerns include: concern for oneself 思身, for one's family 思家 and for one's country 思國. First he advises the laborers on the concern of oneself:

如果你回國後。不理正經.....不知不覺的就把你那苦心苦力所掙的血汗錢耗費完了。受饑受寒。恐不可免。同胞呵、小蟲螞蟻。尚知夏天為冬天預備籌畫。可以人而不如蟲乎。<sup>61</sup>

If you go back to China and do not behave properly..., you will waste your money earned with painstaking labor (literally, bitter heart and bitter strength) without knowing it. It is inevitable that you will starve and suffer from the cold. Alas my countrymen, even little bugs and ants know to prepare for the winter in the summer, how can man not measure up to insects?

Then comes the point on defending the family:

所有的一切亡業敗家的嗜好。或是在中國帶來的。或是到法國來纔學的。都應該勉勵全行斷絕。舊年吸煙捲的。今年應立志不吸。舊年賭博的今年應誓絕不賭。<sup>62</sup>

You should strenuously kick all habits that will ruin your property and your family. It does not matter if you brought the bad habits over from China or you picked them up here in France. For instance, if you smoked in the past year, you should resolve to quit this year. If you gambled last year, you should swear that you will never do it again this year.

It should be clear by now that the “cons” in Yen's formulation refers to the laborers' personal behavior, which might do harm to themselves, their family and most importantly to the image of China in the eyes of the foreigners. Yen's last point states:

你們在法國。就算是中國全國全族的代表。外國人以你們作為的好歹。就定我們中國全族的是非。若在本邦本土做了什麼不好的事。是你們姓李的姓王的一人丟臉。但是若你在外國做了壞事。那外國人既不知道你張王李趙的名字。他祇曉

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, no. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

得說「興隆瓦」（法國人稱中國人）這樣。「興隆瓦」那樣。所以各位同胞呀。若一個中國人在法國受了軍賞營牌。那我們中國人都算是英雄豪傑了。若一個中國人在工廠碼頭上偷了罐頭牛肉。那我們「興隆瓦」都是強盜匪徒了。由此看來、我們中國國體的榮辱。都全在你們各位作為的好歹。你們在外國作為行事。豈可不慎上加慎嗎。<sup>63</sup>

In France, you are the representative of the entire country of China and the whole nation of Chinese. Foreigners judge the right or wrong of our nation on whether your deeds are good or bad. If you have done something indecent in your own land, you lose the face of your family of Li or Wang. But if you commit something improper, the foreigners will not know your surname of Zhang, Wang, Li or Zhao. All he knows is that the "chinois" has done this and that. Therefore my fellowmen, if a Chinese receives a medal from his camp, then all of us Chinese are heroes. If a Chinese steals a can of beef, then all "chinois" are bandits. Put this way, the glory and humiliation of the nation of China is all dependent on your deeds. Can you not be discreet and extra discreet while working and living in a foreign land?

The above quote, far from being merely Yen's admonition to the laborers, underscored his own concern for self-image, mediated and construed in the eyes of the foreign others. What was strange was not that there were laborers who smoked, gambled or stole, but Yen's suggesting a comparison of them to little insects. How could such unworthy men kindle Yen's love of them, which led him to his life vocation? Subscribing to the popular discourse of racism at that time while holding dearly China's image, Yen overlooked the laborers' contribution in putting China on the map of the war in the first place and worried about being implicated by some laborers' uncivilized behaviors. The question was how could these country bumpkins be the "new men" who "educated" Yen and whom Yen admired so effusively as he himself confessed? The question that haunted Yen and the Y men at the beginning of *The Weekly* was: how to enlighten the laborers,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

the coolies and the underprivileged and make them respectable in the foreign gaze? Yen's and the Y men's project was one of enlightenment.

The word "enlightenment" was not used in the eighteenth-century European sense that it was a program of "disenchantment that would replace religious superstitions with truths derived from the realms of nature."<sup>64</sup> Nor was it so much a call to the "Chinese Enlightenment" coined by Vera Schwarcz, disavowing "the unquestioning obedience to patriarchal authority."<sup>65</sup> What concerned Yen and his fellow Y men was the very materiality of enlightenment – basic literacy and mass education. As mentioned earlier, Yen's lifelong commitment to the "3Cs"—Confucius, Christ and Coolies—was built upon basic literacy in a traditional and Confucian definition, which facilitated mass education spreading the gospels of Christian love. While "Confucius" and "Christ" served and saved the "Coolies," the "Coolies" in turn functioned as the object and instrument of the materialization of Confucian knowledge and Christian love.

Literacy, therefore, was not only a gateway to wartime communication, but also a ticket to enlightenment. It was no surprise that Yen valued the will to learn and to be enlightened more than anything else. When it came to those slothful laborers who refused to come to YMCA to receive lessons from the Chinese and American college graduates, Yen lamented that they were missing "the best thing" that could happen to them during their sojourn abroad.<sup>66</sup> It was also interesting to note that the most treasured story for Yen from his days in France was one of the first donations he received. Accounted many

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<sup>64</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> *The Chinese Labor Workers' Weekly*, no. 7.

times in Yen's various speeches and articles, the story was a laborer writing to tell Yen ("Mr. Yen, big teacher") how much he had learned from the journal and that he made a donation of 365 francs to *The Weekly*, which was all his savings for three years.<sup>67</sup> It was in this context that Yen poured out unreserved epithets for the "new men." My intention here is not to downplay the invaluable selflessness of the laborer, which was as noble as their hard labor devoted to the cause of the war. Nor do I wish to exaggerate Yen's patronization of the laborers whom he claimed to love. Rather, what needs to be clarified here is that Yen's emotions were spurred not by the unimaginable sacrifices the laborers made for China and the Allies, nor by their critical and intelligent thinking exemplified by Fu Xingsan. Rather, above all else, Yen applauded the laborers' willingness and capacity to be enlightened, first in terms of basic literacy.

### Orality and Literacy

Seemingly contrary to his concern for literacy, James Yen in his writings from the time of *The Weekly* and shortly afterwards, invested heavily in the concept of *baihua* and its different hypothetical equivalences. Yen thus appeared to be emphasizing the oral over the written. Before I could return to Yen's enlightenment project, which had its roots in the literacy program, a close reading of Yen's own writing would illuminate his

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<sup>67</sup> The same story is quoted in "Jiu shi zi shu," *Yan Yangchu quan ji* 晏陽初全集 (The Collected Works of James Yen) (Changsha: Hunan jiao yu chu ban she, 1992) and *Yan Yangchu wen ji* 晏陽初文集 (The Selected Works of James Yen) (Chengdu: Sichuan da xue chu ban she, 1990) and Pearl Buck's *Tell the People* to give a few examples. Yen quotes the letter in English to Pearl Buck in *Tell the People*, "Mr. Yen, big teacher: Ever since the publishing of your paper I began to know everything under the heavens. But your paper is so cheap and costs only one centime a copy, you may have to close down your paper soon. Here please find enclosed 365 francs which I have saved during my three years labor in France." Yen continues to say, "That is the kind of thing that touched me. I determined to use my life to enlarge his life. The word 'coolie' became for me a new word. I said, I will free him from his bitterness and help him to develop his strength." See Pearl Buck, *Tell the People: Talks with James Yen About the Mass Education Movement* (New York: The John Day Company, 1945), 8.

confusion over the concept of *baihua* 白話.<sup>68</sup> As the debate between *baihua* and *wenyan* 文言 (classical/literary language)—central to the New Culture Movement—being stripped to its core, we could see how literacy and the issue of literary writing are again restored to the center. It enabled an understanding of the elites’ “the access to mass mobilization” through basic literacy.

Yen’s confusion stems from his interchangeable use of the following terms: “spoken language,” “mandarin (*guanhua* 官話),” “common language (*putong hua* 普通話),” “common mandarin (*putong guanhua* 普通官話),” “pure talk”<sup>69</sup> and vernacular. One might understand these convoluted terms as attempts to bridge the literacy program for the laborers with later “language reform.” But one is also impelled to ask: does the imagined equivalence among these different terms stand a firm ground? If yes, why does *baihua* assume so many names? If not, what does their different naming tell us about the agenda of a “language reform” that seems to be advocating many “languages”<sup>70</sup> or “styles of languages” at the same time? To answer these questions, one must contextualize each term and their relations to *baihua* and examine how they each fare in the larger categories of orality and literacy.

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<sup>68</sup> The term *baihua* sometimes also spelt *paihua* or *peihua* due to its many valences can be translated as “pure talk,” “spoken language,” “plain talk,” or “nonsense talk.”

<sup>69</sup> A term used by Edgar Snow, “Awakening the Masses in China,” in *New York Herald Tribune*, Sunday, December 17, 1933. Snow writes, “... Only since 1917, when the ‘New Tide’ movement began, has *paihua* (pure talk), the vernacular used by more than four fifths of all Chinese... It was ‘pure talk’ that Dr. Yen taught the workers in France to read and write. It was ‘pure talk’ that the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement adopted as its vehicle for educating rural China.”

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Kaske argues that the difference between *baihua* and *wenyan* is not a matter of style but language. See Elizabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

In “China’s New Scholar-Farmer”—one of a series of three pamphlets written by James Yen for the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement<sup>71</sup>—Yen hypothesized the equivalence between *baihua* and “spoken language.” Writing a decade after the 1919 literacy classes, Yen summarized the model literacy program of “One Thousand Characters” in English as follows, “The system of teaching Chinese illiterates, which had its humble beginnings behind the firing lines of the battle-fields of France, consists of the following features: a) four readers written in Pei Hua (spoken language) based upon thirteen hundred ‘foundation characters’ scientifically selected out of more than two hundred different kinds of literature and publications containing upward of 1,600,000 characters...”<sup>72</sup>

The four readers—the fundamental basis to all later adaptations of the “One Thousand Character” series—were written, according to Yen, in a spoken language of “thirteen hundred foundation characters.” Such a muddle-headed formulation invited simple questions: Could any spoken language be measured by and constituted in characters? Could anyone speak characters? What did a script have to do with a discussion of different styles of spoken language or languages? Was not the distinction between spoken language and written language a necessary one in conceptualizing the relation between literacy reform and language reform? Writing in 1929 when *baihua* has secured its victory over *wenyan* in modern Chinese literary writing, Yen ascribed his literacy reform to the tutelage of the *baihua* revolution. What Yen was driving at was to

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<sup>71</sup> Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement was founded in 1923 on the campus of Tsinghua University in Beijing. Yen was appointed as its general director.

<sup>72</sup> Though Yen put “160,000,000 characters,” what he meant was “1,600,000 words.” James Yen, *China’s New Scholar-Farmer* (Beijing: Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1929), 1. The pamphlet-trilogy was consisted of *New Citizens for China* (1929), *China’s New Scholar-Farmer* (1929), and *The Ting Hsien Experiment* (1931).

pit himself in the same enclave of intellectuals who chose the right side in the struggle between *baihua* and *wenyan*. These intellectuals, by advocating a new written language that eschewed *wenyan* and emulated the spoken language, successfully coined the so-called Chinese “vernacular.”<sup>73</sup> Whether the new written language was written in the old characters or a new alphabet was a separate issue.

It should be clear that *baihua* did not limit itself to the spoken realm, as it also served as a written language. In a literary tradition, *baihua* could be defined as “plain prose” in contrast with the overly florid literary language represented by *wenyan*. Albeit “plain,” *baihua* literature has been of extraordinary literary merits: *baihua* poetry thrived in Tang dynasty, while *baihua* fictions in Ming and Qing dynasty—among them *The Water Margin* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*—reached the acme of Chinese fiction writing. When the May Fourth and New Cultural figures took up the dichotomy between *baihua* and *wenyan*, it was drawn out of its literacy and literary realm, and with the assistance of the misleading concept of “vernacular” it was stretched into the world of the oral. But the May Fourth pundits who dreamed to “write my mouth with my hand” forgot that some of them learned to write *baihua* not from their mouths, but from their copies of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.<sup>74</sup> In short, *baihua* has also been a learned written language.

Having filled in the logical gaps of Yen’s formulation and established *baihua* as both a spoken and written language, our next inquiry leads us to the very nature of *baihua*

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<sup>73</sup> The vernacular is closer to the ideas of “dialect” than a loosely unified spoken language of mandarin, which does not amount to *baihua*. If to place the concept of vernacular with its Italian origin in the Chinese context and is wrong-headed, then to equal vernacular with *baihua* is simply wrong.

<sup>74</sup> For example, Hu Shi the leading advocate of a Chinese literary revolution admitted he acquired *baihua* as a written language from *baihua* fictions and through constant writing practice. Please see, Wei Shang, “*Baihua, Guanhua, Fangyan* and the May Fourth Reading of *Rulin waishi*,” in *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 117 (May, 2002).

that Yen and *The Weekly* adopted in their immediate context. Granted that it was the written *baihua* that they championed; by definition, the written *baihua*—a recording or emulation of the spoken *baihua* materialized in the script of characters—rebelled against the classical and the high literary language of *wenyan*. Ergo the question is: did the *baihua* that Yen and *The Weekly* endorsed successfully resist the literary and classical temptation of *wenyan*?

In the first announcement in the first issue of *The Weekly*, Yen sent out a call for essays in a distinct style:

知我駐法同胞，無論在青年會任干事，或在工營中當翻譯、以及在工廠碼頭作僱工，都是急公好義的人。必愿擔任義務，為本報謀進步發達。不至坐觀成敗，置之於不顧。況事方萌芽，需助為急，非得同胞諸先生的贊助，萬難辦得有成效的。著作不拘短長，本報無不歡迎的。但文字以用官話為合宜、題論以進德智為標準……<sup>75</sup> (emphasis mine)

Knowing that our countrymen in France are all gentlemen serving the public and favoring righteousness, be they Y men in the Association or interpreters in the labor camps or workers in the factories or on the piers; (they) would not sit around and speculate the success or failure of our journal. They must be willing to shoulder obligations and enable the advancement and development of our enterprise. Now that all just commenced and in dire need of help, our enterprise cannot thrive without all your gentlemen's assistance. We welcome all writings regardless of length, preferably in mandarin (*guanhua*) and for the promotion of moral and intelligence...

In the original Chinese, the style of Yen's opening notice which set the tone of the journal of *The Weekly*, was a mixture of *baihua* that strived to register hints of the everyday spoken language (e.g., 的) and *wenyan* which contained a free use of single

<sup>75</sup> *The Chinese Labor Workers' Weekly*, no. 1. The original microfilm is missing and this paragraph is quoted in James Yen, "Jiu shi zi shu," 133.



characters (e.g., 知, 謀, 置, 況), idioms (e.g., 急公好義) and four-character-formulation (e.g., 需助為急). Yen termed such language as “mandarin” (*guanhua*).<sup>76</sup> One should also note that this mandarin, written in a literary and quasi-classical style, had not much to do with the plain written *baihua* and even less with the spoken *baihua*. But if Yen were to settle with his framing of “mandarin”—a fairly accurate characterization of the language in *The Weekly*—we would not have the problem of jumbled terminologies. Interestingly, Yen quickly shifted his definition of style in the second issue of *The Weekly*. In the announcement of the prose competition as quoted previously in the section of “War and Literacy,” the call of compositions states that “文字以普通話為合宜”<sup>77</sup> that proeses should be written in the “common speech 普通話.” If we take into account the fact that mandarin has not always been a common speech that all people in different dialect zones spoke, that in Qing dynasty emperors founded “mandarin schools” for high-ranking officials with a poor command of mandarin; we should understand the precarious ground laid between “mandarin” and the “common speech.”

Furthermore, there was another twist to this maze of definitions. In the seventh issue of *The Weekly*, Yen shifted gears one more time. As he announced Fu Xingsan being the winner of the first prose competition, he warned against those who wrote in a literary language and demanded all to follow a “common mandarin 普通官話.”

特告注意

在前報我們已經說得清楚。所有的一切論著。必須要用**普通官話**。但是此次寄來的論說。十居八九。都是用**文話**。你們

<sup>76</sup> Mandarin or *guanhua* is by definition the speech of the officials, which changes during the course of history with difference capital cities.

<sup>77</sup> *The Chinese Labor Workers' Weekly*, no. 2.

都知道。工人中讀書識字的不多。通文理的更少。若把文話登在報上。實在是廢工廢錢了。我們也說過。著作不得過六百字。此次寄來的論。有九百有一千的。自此以後。若寄來的論說。有用文話的。或是過了字數的。無論你著得如何的美好。我們都不讀你的論說。你若不遵規矩。是你自己吃虧咯。<sup>78</sup>

#### Special Notice

In our previous issues, we have made clear that all composition should adopt common mandarin (*pu tong guan hua*). But nine out of ten essays we received this time were written in literary language (*wen hua*). You workers all know that there are not many among you who can read and write, even fewer who know literary composition. If we print the literary language in our journal, it would be a waste of effort and money. We have also said that essays should not exceed 600 characters. But compositions mailed this time had 900 or 1,000 characters. From now on, mailed essays however well written, if employing literary language or exceeding the character limit, will not be read. If you do not abide the rules, then you will have to bear the losses.

Put in that way, Yen antagonized the “common mandarin” against the “literary language,” but neither was there a commonly recognized mandarin in the then warlord-fractioned China, nor did Yen himself style his admonishment in a non-literary or anti-classical style. His frequent use of single-character words like “若 (*ruo*, if)” and his habitual evocation of the idiom-structure “十居八九 (*shi ju ba jiu*, eight or nine out of ten)” could not be glossed over by his attempts at some colloquial auxiliaries (e.g., 咯). Therefore, by writing in a mixed style Yen turned his own opposition between the common-mandarin-*baihua* and the literary-classical-*wenyan* on its head. To anticipate our reading of Yen’s “One Thousand Character” series, one could safely say that writing in allegiance to the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, no. 7.

spoken language was never a real concern for Yen, neither in France in 1919 nor in China in the 1920s and onwards.

Reminiscing almost six decades later, Yen finally spoke clearly about his muddled use of language in *The Weekly*.

這段文字，是當時的一種“官話”，既不是文言，也沒完全做到“我手寫我口”。標點符號，僅限於豆點“、”和圈“。”。<sup>79</sup>

This paragraph of written prose is a kind of “mandarin” at that time. It is not *wenyan*. Nor does it measure up to “my hand writing my mouth.” And punctuation only limits itself to comma “、” and a full circle stop “。”.

Here Yen confessed that as long as the language in use served the purpose of character-learning, it mattered little if it should be named “mandarin,” “common speech,” “common mandarin” or *baihua*. Once the phonocentric perspective adopted by Yen and his May Fourth contemporaries was eschewed, it became clear that the question of language was but secondary to the issue of script, hence orality secondary to literacy. In other words, the real stakes lay in none other but characters, one thousand of them nonetheless. A constructed discourse of *baihua* figured no more than an instrument in facilitating the dissemination of literacy, itself an enlightenment move. The posthumous affinity that Yen assigned to the origin of his mass education program with the New Culture *baihua* movement, signaled their common interests in serving a larger project of modernity.

As Yen embarked on his lifelong mass education movement, the system of “One Thousand Characters” (also “Foundation Character System”) proliferated. The list of the

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<sup>79</sup> Yen, “Jiu shi zi shu,” 132.

“One Thousand Characters” was checked up by Chen Heqin 陳鶴琴 and his program of “Determination of the Vocabulary of the Common People” which was based on a database of half to one million words—including repetitions of the same characters—in the *baihua* literature throughout Chinese history.<sup>80</sup> In 1923, based upon this final vocabulary, four readers called *People’s Thousand Character Lessons* 平民千字課 (*ping min qian zi ke*) were prepared (Figure 1.4).<sup>81</sup> The two characters “*ping min*,” rendered plainly as “people” can be translated as either “common people” or “equal people.” Before long, with the institutional help of The National Association of the Mass Education Movement and Christian Literature Society, numerous “Thousand Character Lessons” propagated, ranging from the “One Thousand Characters for Peasants (1926),” “One Thousand Characters for Townspeople (1926),” “One Thousand Characters for Soldiers (1928)” to “People’s Religious Primer (1932)” and “Rural Religious Readers (1933)” fostering a “People’s Literature 平民文學.”<sup>82</sup> Organized within the framework of “One Thousand Characters,” these literacy classes set their objective as teaching the maximum amount of characters in the minimum amount of time. Together with his colleagues, Yen developed five teaching approaches: (a) The mass method 羣眾教授; (b)

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<sup>80</sup> Accounts differ in regard to the scale of data Chen gathered for the study, ranging from half a million to close to one million. For a discussion of Chen’s study of the frequency of characters and Chen’s *yutiwen* project, please refer to Chapter 4.

<sup>81</sup> Zhu Jingnong and Tao Xingzhi eds., *Pingmin qianzi ke* 平民千字課 (People’s Thousand Character Lessons) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1923), 4 vols. James Yen discussed the creation of the first edition of *People’s Thousand Character Lessons* in *The Mass Education Movement* as Bulletin No.1 of The National Association of the Mass Education Movement (Peking: The National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1924), 3. See also *Yan Yangchu quan ji*, 35. However, Yen did not explain why he was not involved in the compilation of the first edition of *People’s Thousand Character Lessons*.

<sup>82</sup> To be sure, not all those textbooks were written by Yen. Yen drafted the first edition of “People’s Thousand Characters” which was later revised and published in 1923. For the actual textbooks, IIRR Archive, Box 131, Box 132.

The individual class method 單班教授; (c) The chart method 掛圖教授; (d) People's reading Circles 平民讀書處; (e) People's station for character enquiry 平民問字處.<sup>83</sup> In short, all efforts evolved around characters and character-based literacy – the ability to read and write the script of characters, while the issue of *baihua* or *wenyan*, stood as a separate and secondary one.

This brings us back to the centrality of literacy. The capacity of literacy meant an access to knowledge, social mobility and power, while illiteracy connoted the exclusion from all the above. To teach the ability to read and write is to enable one to see and to reason. It was the material basis for the enlightenment project that Yen and his Y men were striving at back in WWI France. Incidentally, one of the favorite tropes emerged from the “One Thousand Characters” brought the question of enlightenment alive. In a sample lesson given in *China's New Scholar-Farmer*, we see a picture with the theme “Blindness 盲” (Figure 1.5). On the right, a long-gowned blind man holds out a letter to a peasant-looking person on the left. Part of the text reads, “The life of the blind man is bitter: the life of the illiterate man is also bitter.”<sup>84</sup> So effective was the trope that it became a speech-opener at mass rallies mobilizing the illiterate to take one-thousand-character classes. In Yen's proud account of their first mass assembly in Ting Hsien, one of his colleagues launched the trope into a tirade:

You can't read the books of your own country! You are blind. A blind man cannot be a patriotic man, and he cannot help his village. Think of

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<sup>83</sup> James Yen, “The Mass Education Movement,” 4.

<sup>84</sup> James Yen, *China's New Scholar-Farmer* (1929), 11. Reprinted by permission from *Asia* (February 1929). This particular lessons on blindness was not included in the first edition of *People's Thousand Character Lesson* (1923), but was very likely used in Yen's Foundation Character classes. The text quoted here is already in English.

your China, of your village! ... Why are you blind? We are going to cure your blindness. We are a group of doctors come to help cure you...<sup>85</sup>

The illiterate masses, likened to the unfortunate blind, were by no means equal to their enlightened teachers. Through the trope of “blindness”, Yen created an image of the handicapped illiterate who was deprived of eyesight. The ability to see, significantly enough, happened to be the most valued sensory faculty since the enlightenment and especially after the invention of scientific racism, which postulated the “European eye-man” at the top of the hierarchy of senses.<sup>86</sup> Through discursive repetition and reification, the image of the illiterate masses was subjugated by the image of the literate doctors who were capable of curing the ills of the blind. Fuelled by that rhetoric, the gesture of granting literacy to the masses granted Yen and his colleagues the access to mass mobilization.

With the access to mass mobilization, Yen structured his program of “Awakening the Masses in China”<sup>87</sup> in three tiers: literacy program, rural reconstruction and citizenship training, with literacy at its foundation and citizenship at the top. In *New Citizens for China*, the first of the three pamphlets written as part of a fundraising effort,<sup>88</sup> Yen made it clear that “it is their (the intellectuals’) bounden duty to accept the

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<sup>85</sup> James Yen, *China's New Scholar-Farmer*, 13.

<sup>86</sup> David Howes ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005), 11.

<sup>87</sup> I am appropriating Edgar Snow’s title of his article “Awakening the Masses in China.” After his coverage on James Yen in Ting Hsien, Snow ventured out to the hinterland of the Red China and wrote his *Red Star over China*, which featured a comparison between James Yen’s mass education program and the one of the Communist Party. See also John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>88</sup> Yen’s benefactors included a wide array of major American philanthropists: the Rockefeller family, the Carnegie family, the Ford Foundation and the Milbank Memorial Fund to list a few. For the account books of Yen’s fundraising, please see IIRR Archive, Box 11. For an account of Yen’s U.S. fundraising trips, please see Charles Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University

challenge and seize the opportunity to educate China's illiterate millions for democracy. It was for this purpose that the Chinese Mass Education Movement has been organized, the slogan 'Eliminate illiteracy and make new citizens for China.'"<sup>89</sup> An adequate training of citizenship for a democratic China—with a heavy liberal and reformist imprint—had to be implemented in conjunction with the proliferation of literacy, which was the key to accessing mass mobilization.

Crystallized by wartime communication, and contested by the mass-elite interplay, the importance of literacy was restored to the center stage. It bears emphasizing, nonetheless, that a character-based literacy was motivated not by the intellectuals but the laborers behind the battlefield yearning to write home. It was the laborers' collective choice that lent a leverage point to their intellectual counterpart to gain through them the access to mass mobilization. As the history of Chinese language and script reform would unfold, efforts to reinvent new leverages—either romanized (Chapter 2) or latinized (Chapter 3)—were often obstructed by the collective will of the masses and the tenacity of the characters. While the writings of Fu Xingsan and James Yen attested to the centrality of literacy against the backdrop of the Great War, they also illuminated the decidedly contrasting roles that literacy assumed in the dynamic duo between masses and elites. What for the illiterate laborers a much sought-after technology of long distance

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Press, 1990), pp. 19-20. Since his years at Yale, Yen has always been well connected. Through his affiliation with YMCA and Yale University choir, he was a college friend of Henry Luce, co-founder of *Time* and *Life* Magazine, which supported Yen's numerous campaigns in years to come. Yen also acquainted Charles Taft, son of William Taft, former Governor of the Philippines and the 27<sup>th</sup> President of the U.S. At the invitation of Charles Taft, Yen become perhaps the first if not only Chinese student who joined the Skull and Bones Society. Charles Taft later served as a trustee of IIRR, but IIRR's relation to William Taft is so far unknown. Please see "Jiu shi zi shu" and *Yan Yangchu zhuan*.

<sup>89</sup> James Yen, *New Citizens for China* (Beijing: Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1929), 2.

communication was for the literate intellectuals a topic of censure and an access to mass mobilization. What for Fu Xingsan and his fellow laborers a medium of critical thinking and a means of national solidarity, became for the James Yen and his cohort a path to a reformist and liberal enlightenment.





Figure 1.1: WWI Monument in Baudricourt Square, Paris commemorating Chinese laborers. Photo Courtesy of Diana King.

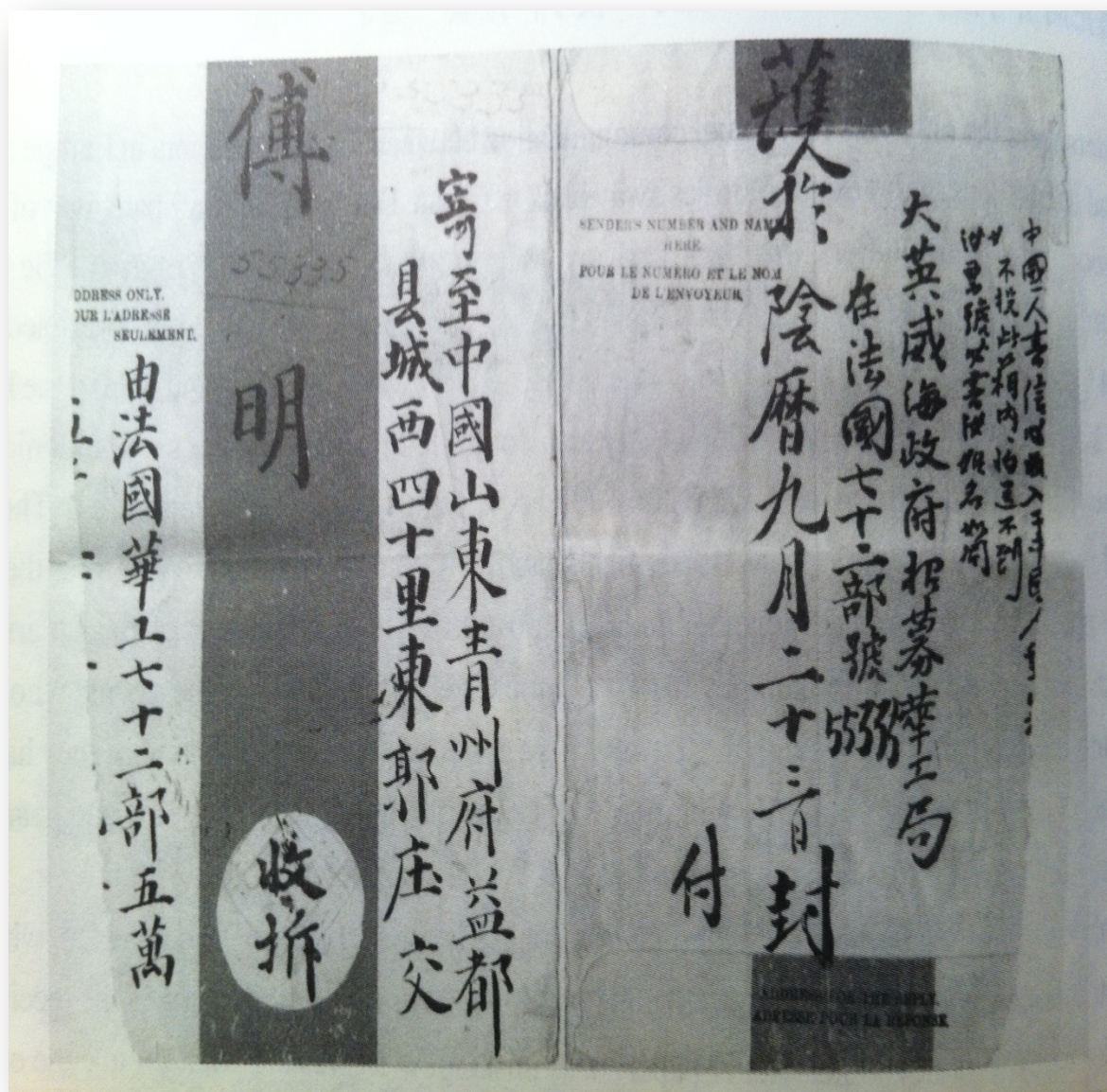


Figure 1.2: an example of a laborer's envelope. *Zhongguo laogong yu diyici shijie dazhan*.

主後千九百一十九年三月十二日禮拜三

此論有九百有一千的。自此以後  
 若寄來的論說有用。或過了字數  
 的。無論你著得如何。美。我們都不  
 的。論說。你若不遵規矩。是你自己  
 下次。的。題。論。如。左。交。卷。須。在。四。月。五。日。前。  
 「中國衰弱的緣故」 傅省三

歐戰的開端。大都是因德皇起了驕傲的心  
 志。想併吞全球。所以動了聯軍的大怒。就鳴  
 鼓而攻。起。來。了。我。祖。國。亦。在。聯。軍。數。內。深。恨  
 強鄰。干涉。不。得。到。陣。前。對。敵。華。聯。軍。到。中。國  
 來。招。工。將。我。華。人。加。入。戰。團。這。實。在。是。我。國  
 能。助。聯。軍。得。勝。的。一。大。機。會。華。工。來。到。法。國  
 的。斃。命。的。驚。出。病。來。的。很。多。卻。我。們。為。了。我  
 們。的。聯。軍。出。了。力。盡。了。我。們。為。聯。邦。的。本。分。那  
 捐。的。了。據。兄。弟。者。來。華。工。在。法。還。算。是。益。處  
 多。損。處。少。第。一。來。法。的。華。工。不。都。是。良。民。他  
 們。若。不。到。法。國。來。作。工。必。在。祖。國。作。亂。第。二  
 華。工。太。半。都。是。貧。民。他。們。若。不。到。法。國。來。作  
 兵。恐。怕。要。受。飢。寒。了。既。到。法。國。自。己。豐。衣。足  
 食。家。眷。也。有。奉。養。第。三。華。工。中。大。概。無。不。識  
 的。不。少。從。前。不。知。身。與。家。的。國。係。家。與。國。的

到。係。一。到。陣。前。看。見。外。人。為。國。為。家。犧。牲。性  
 命。自。己。不。知。不。覺。的。就。生。出。一。番。愛。國。愛。家  
 的。心。來。第。四。從。前。華。工。只。知。道。女。子。纏。足。為  
 美。不。知。身。作。牛。馬。為。的。是。要。供。養。那。些。不。能  
 走。路。不。能。幹。事。的。女。人。現。在。既。看。見。西。洋。的  
 女。兵。女。農。女。醫。等。與。本。國。的。女。輩。比。較。真。是  
 從。前。吃。虧。不。少。若。返。祖。國。定。要。改。去。舊。日。的  
 惡。習。第。五。在。法。國。所。見。的。單。器。農。器。機。器。并  
 外。國。人。的。戰。畧。增。廣。自。己。的。見。識。不。少。將。來  
 回。國。可。以。開。導。本。國。的。人。第。六。從。前。在。祖。國  
 我。們。工。人。只。知。拜。木。偶。燒。香。紙。敬。佛。道。看。風  
 水。擇。吉。日。信。種。種。的。邪。說。異。端。不。求。實。理。不  
 求。實。學。既。來。歐。洲。將。來。回。國。定。不。能。如。昔。日  
 的。頑。固。第。七。從。前。在。祖。國。時。以。為。高。人。高。於  
 我。們。華。人。今。日。與。他。們。賽。腦。力。賽。筋。力。方。知  
 道。他。們。不。比。我。們。高。若。回。祖。國。再。加。以。教。育  
 敢。望。將。來。祖。國。的。進。行。第。八。從。前。只。知。道。糊  
 糊。塗。塗。說。大。話。說。我。國。地。廣。人。多。外。邦。地。少  
 人。稀。現。在。和。平。會。一。立。竟。將。中。華。天。朝。大。國  
 的。名。目。取。消。了。列。在。末。尾。小。小。日。本。竟。稱。強  
 國。年。不。准。我。國。在。和。會。有。發。言。權。華。工。經。此  
 番。的。淘。汰。激。勵。如。夢。方。醒。忽。然。就。發。起。了。那  
 強。國。愛。國。的。心。來。這。種。思。想。是。來。外。國。而。有  
 的。若。不。來。法。國。恐。怕。仍。在。中。國。作。夢。這。幾。種  
 思。想。不。過。是。兄。弟。的。愚。見。不。知。是。否。

Figure 1.3: Fu Xingsan's article, *The Chinese Labor Workers' Weekly*, no. 7 (March 12, 1919).

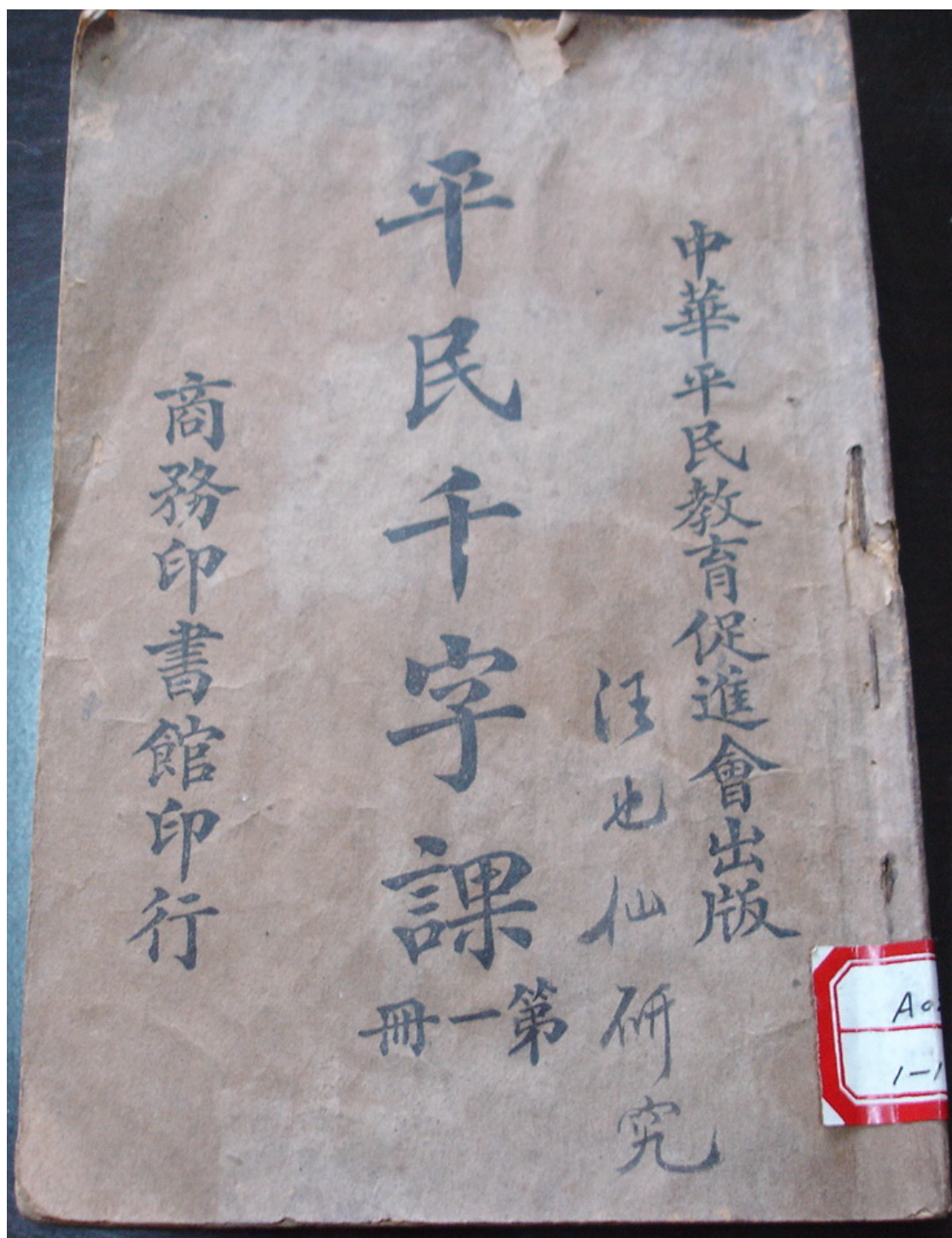


Figure 1.4: *People's Thousand Character Lessons* (1923), Vol. 1.



Figure 1.5: “Blindness 盲,” *China’s New Scholar-Farmer*, 11.

## CHAPTER 2

**The Quest of Universalism:  
The Chinese Romanization Movement, *Gwoyew Romatzyh*, and Visible  
Speech**

From June to December 1926, Philadelphia hosted the Sesquicentennial International Exposition to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the *United States Declaration of Independence*.<sup>1</sup> This world fair attracted twenty-five foreign countries. China was one of them. Among the exhibition pieces from the far orient was a large chart furnished with drawings and illustrations, titled *Diagram Showing the Evolution of Chinese over the Last Four Millenniums* (sic) 國語四千年來變化潮流圖.<sup>2</sup> Its author was Li Jinxi 黎錦熙, a prominent Chinese philologist, key proponent of the Chinese Romanization Movement and its chief historian. Li laid out, in the ambitious diagram, the genealogy of Chinese—both as a language and as a writing system—from the eighteenth century BCE to the twentieth century CE. He traced the development of writing in Chinese from the “hieroglyphs,” the seal script to the free running hand, accounted for foreign influences upon the formation of the Chinese language, singling out Sanskrit via translations of Buddhist sutras, and included for his purpose missionary schemes of Chinese Romanization since the Ming Dynasty. Drawing the chart to its conclusion, Li stated positively that Chinese in the twentieth century—his original

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<sup>1</sup> The Sesquicentennial International Exposition also commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Centennial Exposition, which was held in Philadelphia in 1876. Please see *The Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition* (Philadelphia: s.n., 1926).

<sup>2</sup> Li Jinxi, *Diagram Showing the Evolution of Chinese over the Last Four Millenniums* 國語四千年來變化潮流圖 (Guoyu si qian nian lai bianhua chaoliu tu) (Beiping: Wenhua xue she, 1926, 1929). This piece of work was solicited by the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education 中華教育改進社 (*zhonghua jiaoyu gaijin she*) founded in 1921 in Beijing, with James Yen being one of its founding members.

Chinese term “*guoyu*” whose connotation of “national language” was not translated but placidly assumed as “Chinese” in the English title— was experiencing and would eventually evolve toward the “Identification of the spoken and the written language (言文一致 *yan wen yi zhi*).”<sup>3</sup>

Before making sense of Li’s well-constructed evolutionary history of the “national language” of Chinese, one has to ponder, however briefly, the implication of showcasing the history of the Chinese language in a world expo, one that celebrated the independence of the United States nonetheless. In a Heideggerian fashion, an international exhibition creates a “world picture (Weltbild).” Such an exhibition, as Armand Mattelart has observed, functions not unlike other modes of communications. Through organizing the representation of the world, it effectively organizes the world itself.<sup>4</sup> Li’s exegesis of the evolutionary history of the Chinese language compresses and visualizes the “world” of Chinese—a “national language,” its literature and culture—over the past four millennia and into a two-dimensional “picture” (圖 *tu*) in its most literal sense. Philadelphia’s decision to include a “picture” as such exemplifies the will of the international expo to sketch the Chinese national language into the “world picture” among other artifacts of the world. The submission of the picture to the world fair accordingly epitomizes the submission of the Chinese national language to the family of world languages and to its governing rules of historical linguistics and language evolution.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. The English title of the chart as well as phrases such as “*Guoyu*,” “Chinese” and “identification of the spoken and the written language” are all Li’s original formulation.

<sup>4</sup> Please see Armand Mattelart, *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1994); Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977).

Li was no pioneer in his endorsement of linguistic evolution. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the convergence of biology and linguistics set the tone for a new chapter in the study of languages. When Max Müller introduced “natural selection” among words and languages in his *Lectures on the Science of Language* in 1861, linguistics started to mold itself into a branch of natural sciences. This new modus operandi of the science of linguistics was further affirmed by Charles Darwin’s response to Müller in his *The Descent of Man*. Writing in 1871, Darwin the authority on evolutionary theory, quoted Müller’s use of the “struggle for life” in “each language,” thus giving sanction to the idea of linguistic evolution.<sup>5</sup> Through Yan Fu’s translation of T. H. Huxley’s work among others, the theory of evolution and linguistic evolution spread to and found a firm foothold in China.<sup>6</sup> As early as, if not earlier than James Yen’s experiment with the literacy program of “One Thousand Characters” in the labor camps in France during the First World War (Chapter 1), more radical-minded intellectuals including Li grew increasingly discontent with the tentative reform measures of reducing Chinese characters to lower the bar of literacy. They saw the alphabetization of the Chinese characters as the final telos to the script evolution. The crisis of the Chinese script, as they perceived it, was a blessing in disguise. Provided that China followed the scientific direction of the script evolution, i.e. alphabetization, she would be able to rid herself of linguistic backwardness and cultural ailments, a process exemplified by Meiji Japan and her movement of *Genbun itchi*. In fact, Li Jinxi’s original English formulation

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1872), 58.

<sup>6</sup> James Reeve Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 1983).



of the “identification of the spoken and the written language (*yan wen yi zhi*)” was a literal translation of the Japanese neologism. Though different in pronunciation, “*yan wen yi zhi*” and “*Genbun itchi*” share the same characters/*kanji* formulation (“言文一致”). Inasmuch as the modernization of Chinese was concerned, the unification of the spoken and written language was the most expeditious and scientific method, which was to materialize in and only in the alphabetization of the characters. If the cause of human evolution dictated linguistic modernity, then Romanization was to be the future of Chinese writing. With great expectation and deep conviction, Li relegated the “National Romanization” (Li’s English wording) to the most advanced stage of writing systems, as if it were the end of linguistic evolutionary history.

This chapter endeavors to highlight the trajectories of the Chinese Romanization Movement against the backdrop of contemporary developments in Chinese language. Though much-eclipsed by the *Baihua* Movement and the New Culture Movement, the Chinese Romanization Movement, I argue, as part of a larger enterprise of alphabetizing Chinese, preconditions some fundamentals of the formation of modern Chinese language and literature. I begin by tracing its initial momentum gained from the imagination of linguistic evolution in the late 1910s. An examination of the early writings of Chao Yuen Ren 趙元任, the arch-theoretician of the movement and Li’s close friend, shows that it is the scientific thinking of phonetics that informs and legitimizes the Chinese Romanization Movement as a movement against the Chinese script. Privileging the realm of orality, the movement crosses over from the territory of script reform to that of language reform. It embroils itself in the codification of two so-called “national languages,” testified by the production of two gramophone records of two different

versions of “national pronunciation”. Throughout the 1920s, the movement flourished under official auspices and foreign support, culminating in the invention of the *Gwoyue Romatzyh* 國語羅馬字 (National Language Romanization), which was credited to Chao Yuen Ren. I unravel, through an investigation of the correspondences between Bernhard Karlgren and Chao, the circumstances around the birth of the Chinese alphabet. A close reading of one of the first primers written in the *Gwoyue Romatzyh* titled *The Last Five Minutes* further illustrates how the new Chinese alphabet, under the sway of linguistic evolution and the universal alphabet, claims its hold on orthographical and alphabetic universalism. Finally, as the movement endorses new technological advancement such as the spectrograph, it reveals its self-image as a symbolic system. The spectrographic image, though bearing the imprint of alphabetic universalism, betrays an effort to circumvent, however unsuccessfully, the phonocentric limits inborn to the scripts of modernity.

### **The Case of Alphabetizing Chinese**

Before establishing the case for “alphabetizing Chinese,” one needs to define the very concept. There are, I suggest, three forces of alphabetization that developed in tandem with each other driving toward what one might call the “de-characterization” of the Chinese script.

Firstly, defined in its narrowest sense, the alphabetization of Chinese meant the transcription of Chinese sounds into the Roman or Latin alphabet, which happened as early as the first meetings of the East and West.<sup>7</sup> From the Ming dynasty to the late

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<sup>7</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, *Mandarin Primer: An Intensive Course in Spoken Chinese* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), 11.

nineteenth century, there were, according to Bernhard Karlgren—a leading figure of Chinese philology from Sweden—“as many Romanization schemes as days in the year.”<sup>8</sup> Numerous missionaries and scholars contributed to the long list of Romanization schemes, for instance: Matteo Ricci, Nicolas Trigault, Thomas Wade, Herbert Giles, Henri Lamasse, Ernest Jasmin, A. Dragunov and Bernhard Karlgren himself among others. Created by non-Chinese, these transcription systems were designed to record Chinese and its various dialects, for the purpose of studying and teaching Chinese characters. Envisioned as auxiliary systems, these Romanization schemes therefore did not seek to subvert the reign of characters.

Entering the twentieth century, the alphabetization of Chinese took on a second and more revolutionary mission: the installment of a Romanized or Latinized alphabet in place of the script of characters. Characters were increasingly seen as a roadblock to the modernization of China in realms of science, culture, and politics. For the first time in the past four millennia, as Li’s diagram indicated, the Chinese script began to encounter overwhelming domestic enmity. Chinese elites and progressive intellectuals, despite their vast and sometimes antagonistic ideological differences, tacitly reached a consensus that the eradication of characters was the prerequisite for a modern China. The tide of alphabetization proved so inundating that hardly anyone who claimed allegiance to the New Culture Movement objected to a future of alphabetization. Figures who supported alphabetization included Chiang Kai-shek, Cai Yuanpei, Wu Zihui, Chao Yuen Ren on the one side and Qu Qiubai, Lu Xun and Mao Zedong on the other. As a result, the anti-character trend bifurcated into two politically divided sub-movements: the Chinese

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<sup>8</sup> Bernhard Karlgren, *The Romanization of Chinese: a paper read before the China Society on January 19, 1928* (London: the China Society, 1928), 1.

Romanization on the right and the Chinese Latinization on the left. Though debates between the two movements were belligerent, they shared a common *raison d'être* in the elimination of characters and the institution of an alphabet. This modern script of alphabet, call it Romanized or Latinized, fashioned itself not as an auxiliary or transcription system but as an independent writing system. Its aspiration was linguistic commensurability with all other Indo-European languages and scripts.

The third strain of alphabetization proposed a wholesale revolution of script and language. Radical scholars such as Qian Xuanton 錢玄同—another leading Chinese linguist and member of the Romanization coterie—recommended substituting, on top of the Chinese script, the Chinese spoken language with other languages, for instance, French, English, and most popularly Esperanto. The level of linguistic violence was not perceived so much as self-colonization, but rather as a necessary sacrifice that the Chinese language should bear to bring about linguistic modernization. Moreover, the choice of Esperanto suggested to many the true calling of internationalism and anarchist revolutionary ethos. Therefore, the Esperanto Movement, though heretofore largely characterized as a separate linguistic and political movement, should be understood as extending the limits of alphabetization from the realm of literacy to orality. It resonated, on the one hand, with the first brand of alphabetization as transcription, while creating a continuum with the second mode of alphabetization as the eradication of characters.

In his audacious article in the journal *New Youth* entitled “Questions Regarding the Future of the Chinese Script,”<sup>9</sup> Qian appealed to the once-and-for-all liquidation of

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<sup>9</sup> Qian Xuanton, “Zhongguo jinhou zhi wenzi wenti” 中國今後之文字問題 (Questions Regarding the Future of the Chinese Script), in *New Youth*, Volume 4, No. 4, April. 15, 1918; also in *Qian Xuanton Wenji* 錢玄同文集 (The Collected Works of Qian Xuanton) (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1999), Vol. 1, pp. 162-170.

the Chinese language and its writing system. In their stead, Qian petitioned for the adoption of Esperanto, an international auxiliary language created by Dr. Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof in 1887. Qian exalted the man-made language as “grammatically concise” and “etymologically precise.”<sup>10</sup> “Esperanto (эсперанто)” in Russian, one of the native languages of the inventor Zamenhof, means “the one who hopes;” while *Espero* in Esperanto simply means “hope.” The Chinese transliteration of Esperanto, *aisibunandu* 愛斯不難讀, suggests its comparatively easy mastery; while its translation of Esperanto, or rather a slippage of translation, as *shijieyu* 世界語—literally the “world language”—acknowledged openly Esperanto’s hidden ambition as a universalizing world language. Qian, as an Esperantist hopeful, had great expectations for this particular brand of “world language” in China. If endorsed, it would symbolize China’s admission to the family of world languages, thus entitled to universal communicability. If sympathy and interest in Esperanto was not so expansive among Chinese intellectuals and literary figures, Qian’s subversive proposition could have been easily dismissed as preposterous revelry. Luminaries like Cai Yuanpei founded one of the first Esperanto Schools in China; Lu Xun donated to the Esperanto Society in Shanghai; Hu Yuzhi, Zhou Zuoren and Ba Jin all had varying degrees of command of the language and translated literary works from Esperanto into Chinese.<sup>11</sup> As Mao Zedong took an interest in the instrumental role that

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<sup>10</sup> *Qian Xuantong Wenji*, Vol. 1, 167.

<sup>11</sup> Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren’s collaboration in translating Esperanto literature with the Russian Esperantist and anarchist writer Vasili Eroshenko is well documented. Please see Zhou Zuoren Diary, February 24, 1922. Lu Xun, Preface to the *Collection of Eroshenko’s Fairy Tales* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1922.7). Please also see, Andrew F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), Chapter 5.

Esperanto might play in disseminating the ethos of Communist revolution, the Esperanto Movement turned into the vanguard of true internationalism.

Though previous scholarship treats Esperanto as a separate movement on its own terms,<sup>12</sup> I suggest that to comprehend Esperanto in China, one has to restore historical context to the movement. Intimately connected to the script crisis, the movement was catapulted, by the will to eliminate Chinese and its characters, into extreme alphabetization. Although never fulfilled, the linguistic anarchism metamorphosed into a vision of revolutionary internationalism. The Esperanto Movement in China, rather than representing a break with previous attempts to alphabetize Chinese, instead continued and developed in the same vein of alphabetical imagining. If previous endeavors of alphabetization focused on written Chinese, then the Esperanto Movement as well as other propositions to replace Chinese with different foreign languages, merely opened up the possibility of “alphabetizing” the “Chinese language.” Although a failed enterprise, the very concept of imposing a foreign language onto Chinese threw into sharp relief the difference between the written and the spoken. At the same time it heightened the association, however arbitrary and constructed, between orality and literacy. The Esperanto Movement brought forth a poignant question: If the Chinese script was indeed unworthy and its alphabetization desirable, then why falter in front of the Chinese spoken language? That is to say, where does alphabetization stop and where do the Chinese sound and script begin?

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<sup>12</sup> Gerald Chan, “China and the Esperanto Movement,” in *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 15 (Jan., 1986), pp. 1-18. For an overall history of the development of Esperanto, please refer to Peter G. Forster, *The Esperanto Movement* (The Hague; New York: Mouton, 1982).

Perhaps more than any other historical event in the *longue durée* of the alphabetization movement, the Chinese Romanization Movement straddled all three streams of alphabetization. Its chief concern was the liquidation of characters, and the movement allowed all three modes of alphabetization of Chinese to develop, overlap and even conflict with one another. The overarching logic that held together the seemingly convoluted episodes was a belief grounded in the primacy of the alphabet, its attributed phonetic accuracy and its capacity to scientifically alphabetize Chinese.

Granted that the movement did not gain full momentum until the mid-1920s, its theoretical groundwork was laid a decade earlier. To my knowledge, the earliest and most scholarly writing on the subject of the “alphabetization of Chinese” emerged in 1916.<sup>13</sup> In the May and June issues of *The Chinese Students’ Monthly*—a journal published by Chinese overseas students in the New England area in the U.S.—Chao Yuen Ren presented the pioneering article in its English original “The Problem of the Chinese Language: Scientific Study of Chinese Philology.”<sup>14</sup> This article marked the inauguration of the scientific study of modern Chinese philology and Chinese phonetics, sweeping away all theoretical objections to the Romanization of Chinese.

Chao Yuen Ren, then twenty-four years old, was to become the father of modern Chinese linguistics and one of the world’s leading linguists of the twentieth century. As the foremost theorist of the Chinese Romanization Movement, he was credited as the creator of a Chinese alphabet *Gwoyeu Romatzyh*, the crown jewel of the movement.

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<sup>13</sup> It bears pointing out that 1916—the height of WWI—saw both the beginning of the Chinese “Laborer as Soldiers” program, which led to the first modern Chinese anti-illiteracy program in France (Chapter 1); as well as the first theoretical effort in Romanizing Chinese, which took place in the U.S.

<sup>14</sup> Yuen R. Chao, “The Problem of the Chinese Language: Scientific Study of Chinese Philology,” in *The Chinese Students’ Monthly*, 1916, Vol. 11(6), pp. 437-443; Vol. 11 (7), pp. 500-509; Vol. 11(8), pp. 572-593. “The alphabetization of Chinese” is Chao’s original English formulation.

Scientific in mind, Chao was friends with Norbert Wiener, Ernest Lawrence, and Warren Weaver and was part of the Cybernetics Group. He was also a prolific composer and masterful translator of Lewis Carroll. With his many talents, Chao's decision to devote himself to linguistics did not come easily. After majoring in mathematics and physics as an undergraduate at Cornell University<sup>15</sup> and switching to philosophy for his doctorate study at Harvard University, Chao was still musing on which field of academia he should devote his talent and intellect. His linguistic turn did not happen until 1916. In his diary of January 1916, he weighed his options, "I thought that I am essentially a born linguist, mathematician and musician..."<sup>16</sup> Taking courses in all those subjects and particularly infatuated with a linguistics class taught by Charles H. Grandgent, Chao confessed a month later in his diary that, "I might as well be a philologist as anything else."<sup>17</sup> Thus a philologist, one of the first who laid the foundation for the study of modern Chinese philology, was born. To understand Chao's imprints on the conceptualization and practice of the Romanization of Chinese, one has to bear in mind his multi-faceted intellectual make-up.

The 1916 article was Chao's first published article on the problem of the Chinese language, as well as the first systemic examination of and theoretical preparation for the

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<sup>15</sup> Chao is said to maintain the highest record of overall averages at Cornell many years after he graduated. *Zhao Yuanren Nianpu* 趙元任年譜 (Chronicles of Chao Yuen Ren) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2001), 75.

<sup>16</sup> "Yuen Ren Chao papers, 1901-1982," Carton 35, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Charles H. Grandgent, the author of *An Outline of the Phonology and Morphology of Old Provençal* (Boston: Heath, 1905), was a chief comparative philologist in the early twentieth century in the U.S. He studied with Paul Meyer, who was himself a French comparative philologist and a colleague of Ferdinand Saussure at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, the headquarter of nineteenth century philological and historical sciences.



Romanization of Chinese.<sup>18</sup> It should be read, on the one hand, as a personal academic manifesto of Chao's new devotion to linguistics, phonetics, and the study of symbolic systems; and on the other hand, as the inauguration of the Chinese Romanization Movement as well as the study of modern Chinese philology and phonetics.<sup>19</sup> Chao laid out his thesis in three parts: Part I surveyed the general problem of the scientific study of Chinese philology; Part II examined the important subject of Chinese Phonetics; the last part was devoted entirely to proposing reforms in the Chinese language, with special reference to "the alphabetization of Chinese."<sup>20</sup> The first two parts advocated "scientific, or historical research" and the last "constructive reforms."<sup>21</sup>

In the first part of the article, Chao delineated four areas for the study of the Chinese language: "(1) phonetics, (2) grammar and idiom of the dialects, (3) Etymology, including the study of characters and (4) Grammar and idiom of the literary language,"<sup>22</sup> singling out the urgency of the development of Chinese phonetics. Chao confessed that

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<sup>18</sup> Chao published other articles before 1916, mainly in Chinese in the magazine *Science* 科學, which he co-founded in 1915. Related to the concerns of this chapter with language and writing, *Science* was also the first to discuss the use of punctuation in Chinese writing. Please see Hu Shi, "Lun judou he wenzi fuhao" 論句讀和文字符號 (On Punctuation and Writing Symbols), in *Science*, Vol.2, No.1, 1916.

<sup>19</sup> It is remarkable to note that Chao maintained the tenets of reforming the Chinese script he proposed in the 1916 article throughout his entire career, which lasted for more than half a century. To list a few of his later articles on the same issue, "Fandui luomazi de shida yiwen" 反對羅馬字的十大疑問 (Ten Objections to Romanization), *Guoyu yuekan* 國語月刊 (National Language Monthly), Vol. 1, No. 7, 1922-1923; "Guoyu luomazi de yanjiu" 國語羅馬字的研究 (The Study of National Romanization), Vol.1, No. 7, 1922-1923; "Xin wenzi yun dong di taolun" 新文字運動底討論 (Discussions on the New Script Movement), *Guoyu yuekan*, Vol. 2, No.1, 1924; *Mandarin Primer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948); "Preliminary Design for a system of General Chinese," in *Year Book of the American Philosophical Society*, 1967, pp. 478-482.

<sup>20</sup> Chao's original English formulation. Chao, "The Problem of the Chinese Language: Scientific Study of Chinese Philology," 438. The article was originally in four parts, with Chao writing Part I, II and IV and Hu Shi contributing Part III. In order to present Chao's argument of "the alphabetization of Chinese" in its own consistency, I have chosen not to include Part III by Hu Shi on the teaching of the Chinese language.

<sup>21</sup> Chao, "The Problem of the Chinese Language," 437.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 438.

his inspiration came from contemporary studies of phonetics, “I was struck by the extensiveness and thoroughness with which work had already been done by scholars, especially in the field of phonetics.” But he was “quite disconcerted to find that they were all American, English, French, and German Scholars.”<sup>23</sup> In order to set the study of Chinese phonetics on par with its Indo-European others, Chao first had to hold the Chinese language up to these foreign languages, a project that fell in line with the zeitgeist of historical linguistics and comparative grammar. In his discussion of “etymology,” Chao dropped the character-based philological approach in traditional studies of etymology exemplified by the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* 說文解字 and instead mused on the phonetic value of characters:

“A very interesting and important part of etymology is the question of the origin of Chinese words. Various Occidental philologists have conjectured a common origin between Chinese and Indo-European languages... if we look over the list of hundreds of words that have been regarded as being cognate with Indo-European words we cannot but consider the fact as established.”<sup>24</sup>

For Chao “the problem of the Chinese language” lay not so much in the lack of the study of the Chinese language, but in the historical negligence to the Chinese speech and the concomitant theoretical and technical backwardness in recording and analyzing sound speech. In Part II, Chao surveys the work done in the Chinese classical philological tradition, for instances *Kangxi Dictionary*, *The Book of Rhymes*, and *Pei Wen Yun Fu*.<sup>25</sup> In Chao’s appraisal, though each deserved due respect, none of them was adequate in

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>25</sup> *Kangxi Dictionary* 康熙字典 (The Kangxi Dictionary) ; *Shiyun* 詩韻 (The Book of Rhymes); *Pei Wen Yun Fu* 佩文韻府 (Rhyme Treasury of the Admiring Literature).

performing the task of phonetic modernization. The same critique applied to the method of *fan-ts'ieh* (Chao's spelling, also *fanqie* 反切, usually translated as "Cross Spelling"), an early phonetic *pinyin* system that uses two characters to approximate the pronunciation of a third character. Though "admirable as it is," it had defects that were "fatal to its applicability to the scientific study of phonetics."<sup>26</sup>

Chao continued his search for an adequate system for the modernization of Chinese phonetics. As if anticipating his conclusion of "alphabetization Chinese," Chao enumerated four auxiliary phonetic systems developed in the late Qing and puts them under the category of "Chinese Alphabet:" (1) the mandarin alphabet (官話字母 *guanhua zimu*), (2) Chinese short-hand (速記法 *suji fa*), (3) The system of the Committee on Unification of Pronunciation (讀音統一會 *duyin tongyi hui*), and (4) Chang Ping-Ling's system (章炳麟 also Zhang Bingling).<sup>27</sup> Finding defects with all four of these systems, Chao turned toward the West, where "three of the most important" systems captured his attention: (1) the International System of Phonetic Transcription; (2) Bell's a priori system of "visible speech" as in A. M. Bell's *Visible Speech*; and (3) Jespersen's system

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<sup>26</sup> Chao, "The Problem of the Chinese Language," 505. The *fanqie* system is a principle used to determine the pronunciation of a new character by using two other characters whose pronunciation is known to the reader. This method was invented in around the third century and was extensively employed in Lu Fayan's *Qieyun* 切韻 (601 A.D.). The first character gives the initial of the new pronunciation, while the second fulfills the rest of the sound. Chao illustrates the concept by extending it to the idea of "English *fanqie*." Taking the pronunciation of "by" for example, to arrive at "bai," instead of becoming "bi-wai," it goes through a process of "*fanqie*" succinctly laid out by Chao in the following formula: "(bi-i)+(wai-w)=b+ai=bai." Ibid, 507.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 506. Zhang Bingling's system was later revised and established as the National Alphabet (注音字母 *zhuyin zimu*). For a survey of the history of Chinese short-hand systems developed in tandem with Japanese and English short-hand methods, please see Li Jinxi, *Guoyu yundong shigang* 國語運動史綱 (The Historical Grundrisse of the National Language Movement) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1935, 2011), pp. 98-99.

of letter numerals and indices in Otto Jespersen's *Lehrbuch der Phonetik*.<sup>28</sup> In these Western systems Chao saw new possibilities, "The international system is the simplest and easiest, though it needs considerable modification for use in our language... Jespersen's system is most flexible and capable of fine distinction such as would be necessary for the study of our language."<sup>29</sup>

The task of faithfully representing the Chinese sound—the initial, the medial, the vowel proper, the final consonant, and the tone of the vowel—Chao concluded, fell on the alphabet. In the last part of the essay, Chao listed a total of fourteen reasons in favor of "Arguments for Alphabetization." They are worth listing in full:

- (1) An alphabet is more adequate to our growing language.
- (2) It makes unification of dialects easier.
- (3) Pronunciation will be self explanatory.
- (4) We have only one or two score signs to learn instead of several thousand signs.
- (5) Assimilation of foreign words is necessary to the growth of thought and language.
- (6) An important case of assimilation is that of technical terms.
- (7) Translation of proper names with an alphabet would be simpler...
- (8) Foreign languages will be a little easier to learn if our own language is written with an alphabet.
- (9) The Chinese language will be a little easier for foreigners to learn if it is alphabetized.
- (10) Alphabetic Chinese is easier to print.
- (11) Alphabetic Chinese can be typewritten as fast as English.
- (12) Indexes, catalogues, dictionaries, directories, filing systems, etc., will be greatly helped by the use of an alphabet.
- (13) Telegraphs and secret codes can be more easily despatched[sic] with an alphabet.
- (14) ... the teaching of the blind and deaf..."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 507.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 508.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 582-584.

As though this theoretically sound and technologically savvy fourteen-point treatise were not enough to establish the case for an “alphabetic Chinese,” Chao continued to inundate the readers with his responses to sixteen foreseeable objections to alphabetization.<sup>31</sup> As one reason followed another, he assures us that far from injuring the heritage and integrity of Chinese, an alphabetized script would lift the heavy burden of literacy for the people, enrich and empower the Chinese language – first the spoken then the literary language, and finally set China on the hopeful trajectory of linguistic modernization.

The case of alphabetizing Chinese, in Chao’s defense, seems to have established successfully its chief objective as a script reform. But new challenges arose forthwith. While the self-legitimizing preoccupation with speech and its representation gives an edge to phonetic-alphabetic transcription over characters, the quest for phonocentric scientificity begs substance: Which speech to transcribe? This leads to the entanglement of speech and script, or what I call the “alphabetic symbiosis of speech and script.” Inasmuch as the alphabetic script redeems its value mainly through its phonetic loyalty to the speech it transcribes,<sup>32</sup> the sole decision in adopting the alphabetic script for speech transcription first requires a careful recalibration of the speech it spells. For the script reform to proceed meaningfully, a necessary first step of “the standardization of pronunciation” is therefore in order with a view to the preservation of various “dialects.”<sup>33</sup> Though it seems that the codification of the national pronunciation puts on

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp. 587-591.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 573.

hold the alphabetization of the Chinese script, it is in actuality the script that finds itself implicating the speech in the enterprise of alphabetizing Chinese.

### **The “Alphabetic Symbiosis of Speech and Script”: Codifying Two National Pronunciations**

While the privilege of speech over script prepared the ground for the emergence of an alphabetic Chinese, it was the urgency of the script reform that mandated an intervention in the realm of orality. Such intervention was to be voiced in the codification of *guoyu* 國語 (national language) and *guoyin* 國音 (national pronunciation).<sup>34</sup>

If we harken back to Li Jinxi’s diagram on the Chinese national language discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the slippage in translation or rather non-translation of its title is of interest. The character compound of “國語 (*guoyu*)” is not translated but rendered as the plain English term “Chinese,” thus effectively smuggling the connotation of the “national language” through and into its hypothetical English equivalent. This character compound, itself a roundtrip loanword from Japanese, marks the codification of the Japanese national language “國語 (*kokugo*),” a historical episode not least informed by the ascendance of Japan as an imperial power whose presence in Taiwan and Korea urged the unification and standardization of spoken Japanese on the archipelago before Japan could practice linguistic Japanization 皇民化 (*kōminka*) in the

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<sup>34</sup> To be sure, *guoyu* does not equal *guoyin*, with the former meaning the literary and spoken language system of Chinese (*langue*) and the latter as a pronunciation of the national language (the phonetic attributes of the *parole*). For the consideration of the Romanization exponents on the issue of *guoyin* however, they sometimes use *guoyu* and *guoyin* interchangeably, thus confusing the Saussurian distinction between “langue” and “parole.”

two colonies.<sup>35</sup> Appropriating the same compound structure, Li's act of "translingual practice" as Lydia Liu coins it, amounts to an effort of transplanting the success story of Japan and its establishment of the national language in China without replicating Japan's historical path of colonial conquests.<sup>36</sup> The three-way hypothetical equivalence amongst "Chinese," "*guoyu*" and "*kokugo*" does not signal so much Li's attempt to conceal the constructed-ness of the Chinese national language, as the degree of naturalization in conceptualizing a national lingua franca, sanctioned by the imagination of nation states.

Granted that *guoyu*, in its extended definition, includes both the spoken and the written language as evidenced in Li's prophecy of the "identification" between the two in his diagram, the shifting focus toward the spoken language in the *guoyu* evolution is hard to miss. As early as 1916, Li Jinxi and other scholars started petitioning to change the subject heading on the teaching of Chinese from "*guowen* (national prose)" to "*guoyu* (national language)," anticipating the official standardization of *guoyu*. Such a petition did not materialize until January 1920, when the Education Ministry of the Beiyang government officially mandated that all national schools abandon the subject title of "*guowen*" and adopt "*guoyu*," thus vouching for the domination of speech over script and prose.<sup>37</sup> Such codification of the Chinese national language was not least problematic in its decidedly uncritical endorsement of phonocentrism, but even more so in the very

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion of the standardization of the Japanese national language in relation to Japan's imperial expansion and Japanization, please see Komori Yōichi, *Nihongo no Kindai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Also, the hypothetical reciprocity between the English, Chinese and Japanese forms what Liu calls a "super sign," which can be appropriated in this case: "Chinese/*guoyu*/*kokugo*." For a discussion of the "super sign," please see Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 31-69.

<sup>37</sup> Li Jinxi, *Guoyu yundong shigang*, 133, 161.

conceptualization of the “national language” embodied in and articulated by the two versions of the national pronunciation.

The first version of the pronunciation of the national language was decreed by the Committee on the Standardization of National Pronunciation 讀音統一會 (*duyin tongyi hui*) in 1913, as a result of a six-month marathon conference on the very issue.<sup>38</sup> Eighty participants from twenty-three provinces convened and contested over a number of dialects as candidates for the national pronunciation. The magnitude of chaos and level of belligerence were symptomatic for the newborn Republic of China seeking to recover from an empire asunder. The decision, after much travail, was rendered on an eclectic and artificial system, which strove to scientifically accommodate the maximum amount of dialectal varieties and to achieve the paramount degree of unity for the new imagined community. It regulated the pronunciation of over 6,500 characters, keeping some of the oldest consonants from the Wu dialect and the most ancient endings from Cantonese, while including the so-called fifth tone – the checked tone.<sup>39</sup> This 1913 version of the “national pronunciation,” though theoretically-sound, was not announced until 1918 and was only made official with the publication of the *Dictionary of the National Pronunciation* (國音字典 *guoyin zidian*) in 1919, and promoted with a phonograph series

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<sup>38</sup> The Committee of Standardization of National Pronunciation 讀音統一會 (*duyin tongyi hui*) (1912-1916) was later substituted by the Committee of National Language Research 國語研究會 (*guoyu yanjiu hui*) (1916-1923), which morphed into the Committee of the Unification of National Language 國語統一籌備會 (*guoyu tongyi choubei hui*) (1919-1923). The Conference on the Standardization of National Pronunciation lasted from December 1912 to May 1913, agreeing finally upon an artificial national pronunciation and the thirty-nine-letter National Alphabet 注音符號 (*zhuyin fuhao*). For the detailed drama of the conference as well as a history of the three organs related to *guoyu*, please refer to Li Jinxi, *Guoyu yundong shigang*, pp. 121-139.

<sup>39</sup> Li, *Guoyu yundong shigang*, 124, 150.



of *National Language Records* done by none other but Chao Yuen Ren in 1921.<sup>40</sup> Its ominously stalled inauguration was soon followed by controversies over its impracticality, depriving this newborn national pronunciation a chance to capture the ear of the nation. Instead, the debates between the national pronunciation (*guoyin*) and Pekingese (*jingyin*) pushed the Beijing dialect to the forefront of the competition, establishing the latter as the archenemy of the nascent national pronunciation.<sup>41</sup>

In a May 1922 letter from Chao Yuen Ren to Li Jinxi, Chao informed Li on the new development upon the battlefield of Pekingese and the national pronunciation, which Chao referred to as the national language.<sup>42</sup>

“A while ago, Commercial Press contacted me and asked me to devise aside from the sixteen-lesson phonograph of the national language, another set of Chinese phonographs for foreigners together with an English explanation. I thought why not try my hand at a practical scheme of Romanization. W. B. Pettus, the president of the College of Chinese Studies in Peking is now in the U.K. At his college, they only teach Pekingese. His reasoning is that for one he could find Pekingese

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<sup>40</sup> This series of phonographs are called *Guoyu liushengji pian* 國語留聲機片 (National Language Records). Before Chao, another language reform activist Wang Pu attempted at being the speaker for these records but not successfully. In Chao’s “First Green Letter,” Chao talks about Wang Pu’s Pekingese pronunciation being not “correct” for the old national pronunciation, “The original speaker is a Peking native. His pronunciation falls short of being perfect in retaining some Peking localisms which have been eliminated in the standard, especially his using (inverted e) of Peking in place of the full (o) of correct mandarin.” Chao, “First Green Letter” in *Zhao Yuanren Quanji* 趙元任全集 (The Complete Collection of Zhao Yuanren) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2007), Vol. 16, 315. Green letters are a series of correspondences either written or printed on green paper that Chao sent out to his friends all over the world. During Chao’s lifetime, he sent five in total and left a sixth letter unfinished. These letters, humorous in tone, usually include his life update, his new intellectual interest and at times lengthy discussion of academic issues.

<sup>41</sup> For the debate between the national pronunciation and Pekingese, please see Li, *Guoyu yundong shigang*, pp. 152-159. For an analysis of the debate, please refer to Murata Yujiro 村田雄二郎, “Goshi jiki no kokugo tōitsu ronsō - ‘hakuwa’ kara ‘kokugo’ e” 五四時期の国語統一論争——「白話」から「国語」へ (The Debate of the Unification of the National Language during May Fourth: From Vernacular to the National Language), in Kotani Ichirō ed., *Tenkeiki ni okeru Chūgoku no chishikijin* 転形期における中国の知識人 (Chinese Intellectuals in the Transitional Period) (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1999), pp. 3-39.

<sup>42</sup> Both Chao and Li used “national language” and “national pronunciation” interchangeably. The fact that the old and new national pronunciations came to stand for two national languages marked the dominance of phonocentric understanding of Chinese language.

teachers easily, for another the national language (*guoyu*) only exists on paper with no teachers to hire. I wrote to him earlier saying that if there were phonographs of the national language, this conundrum could be solved. Then we will have one more force working in favor of the national language. Pettus says that he will visit me in Cambridge in a week or so...”<sup>43</sup>

This was the earliest indication of Chao’s intention at a Romanization system in accordance with the 1913 national pronunciation, followed by a tentative but concrete Romanization treatise in Chao’s article “The Study of the Chinese Romanization” published later that year.<sup>44</sup> What was equally noteworthy was that this letter was also one of the first documentations attesting to the pressing need for domestic and foreign efforts to form an alliance in defense of the 1913 national pronunciation. In spite of its official support, the national pronunciation that “exists on paper,” quickly lost its appeal in the competition of “the survival of the fittest” due to its difficulty and artificiality. Even Chao himself, the voice of the national pronunciation and a self-appointed guardian of the national language, had to acknowledge the amount of effort exerted in making the phonograph records. In his “Second Green Letter,” Chao described his experience in making the first batch of the *National Language Records* in New York City in 1921:

“Much more interesting was the experience of making phonograph records. After much correspondence back and forth across the Pacific Ocean, my manuscript was finally in its last revision. Then I had to make trips to Columbia Gramophone Company in New York... I was born to speak Pekingese, learned some other dialects while young, and acquired a central New Yorkese after a prolonged stay in Ithaca. Here comes a sort of High Chinese, something like the standard Parisian of the Academy, or the High German of the German stage, something which nobody speaks but which I

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<sup>43</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, “Taolun guoyin zimu de liang fengxin” 討論國音字母的兩封信 (Two Letters discussing the National Alphabet), *Zhao Yuanren Yuyanxue lunwen ji* 趙元任語言學論文集 (Collection of Chao Yuen Ren’s Linguistic Essays) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, “Guoyun luomazi de yanjiu” 國語羅馬字的研究 (The Study of the National Romanization).

was expected to speak with such fluency as to stand the test of a machine, which caricatures whatever is only slightly characteristic. So I looked up every doubtful word in the New National Dictionary and red-inked the pronunciation on the MS (manuscript), tried different expressions and made tempo and dynamic marks...”<sup>45</sup>

Chao's *National Language Records* were not the only phonographs made for the national language. Both Lao She 老舍 and Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 made their records of the national language, though Chao's remained the official version. What constituted a “much more interesting” experience was not so much that Chao was lending us an ear in hearing the official national language that “nobody speaks,” but rather the scientific syncretism that went into the phonographic making of “High Chinese.” Not incommensurable to its German (Hochdeutsch) and French counterparts, this painstakingly calculated “High Chinese” with fine nuances of the checked tones and the ancient consonants made “only slightly characteristic,” was to proudly “stand the test of a machine.” Not unlike learning to operate a machine, Chao approached and commanded High Chinese as a piece of machinery. His human-machine relationship started, therefore, not from the rim of the phonographic speaker, but from the abstract phonetic sound that High Chinese produced through the mechanism of Chao's body. To deliver the most accurate enunciation for mechanization and automation, Chao had to adjust his body to the effect of the machine. As the machine extended its reach from the phonograph via High Chinese into Chao's body, such a human-machine relationship was rendered thoroughly a holistic one.

However scientific and precise the old national pronunciation and Chao's rendition of it might be, the old utopian orality was far from straightforward and

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<sup>45</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, “Second Green Letter” in *Zhao Yuanren Quanjì*, Vol. 16, 328.

excessively more difficult to navigate compared to its Pekingese counterpart. As Max Müller's law of linguistic evolution prevailed, "The better, the shorter, the easier forms are constantly gaining the upper hand."<sup>46</sup> In due course of the linguistic natural selection, the "easier" Pekingese triumphed. In 1923, the Committee on the Unification of National Language agreed upon the adoption of the new Pekingese pronunciation, though the official abolishment of the old national pronunciation did not take place until 1932. In May 1924, Chao was commissioned to make a second set of records of the national language with the Columbia Gramophone Company to be released by the Commercial Press, bearing the title of the *New Phonographs of the National Language* (Figure 2.1).<sup>47</sup> As Chao told his friends in his Third Green Letter, "This time, I used a pure Pekinese pronunciation, instead of the National Pronunciation or Kuo Yin, as—between you and me—I think the pure Pekinese of an educated native of Peking has a better chance of success in the future than the Kuo Yin pronunciation. However, my attitude towards this is not yet well defined enough for a public statement."<sup>48</sup>

Chao, the erstwhile loyal exponent of the old national pronunciation, had to acknowledge however reluctantly that the old pronunciation was fighting a losing battle, and that Pekingese as the new national pronunciation and hence new national language was steadily expanding its territory. If by mid-1924 Chao had recognized the phonetic cachet of Pekingese enough to remake the national language phonographs, he was also prepared to revise his 1922 Romanization scheme. As Chao proceeded to develop and

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<sup>46</sup> Max Müller quoted by Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man*. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1872), Vol. 1, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, "Yuen Ren Chao, Chinese Linguist, Phonologist, Composer and Author," in *Zhao Yuanren Quanji*, Vol. 16, 109.

<sup>48</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, "Third Green Letter," *ibid*, 368.

perfect his Romanization system, the Romanization Movement entered another stage, producing the most phonetically accurate form of alphabetic symbiosis of speech and script.

### **A Manual for *Gwoyeu Romatzyh***

*Gwoyeu Romatzyh* (abbreviated as GR) was no doubt the pinnacle of the Chinese Romanization Movement. *Gwoyeu Romatzyh*, in the GR system itself, literally meant the “National Language Romanization Script.” Designed to reflect the new national pronunciation based on the Beijing dialect, it received official recognition in 1928 when the GMD government named it the “Second Form of the National Alphabet.”<sup>49</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, its credited creator, commemorated this climatic event in his diary on October 5, 1928 writing in the very new national alphabet, “G.R. yii yu jeou yueh 26 ry gong buh le. Hooray!!! (G. R. was officially announced on September 26. Hooray!!!)”<sup>50</sup>

So far as the triple exclamation marks screamed across the ecstasy of Chao and his fellow advocates for Romanization, they also signaled the difficulty in earning GR its official approval. If Bernhard Karlgren was right that there are “as many Romanization schemes as days in the year,” then what made GR more worthy than the rest of the schemes for it to have been made the state-endorsed Romanization system? Being a superior system and the acme of the Chinese Romanization Movement, how far, if at all, did GR take the Romanization Movement closer toward its telos of eradicating characters? As historical hindsight informs us, GR is no longer the orthographical norm in practice

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<sup>49</sup> The order was decreed by Cai Yuanpei, then the President of the University Council 大學院 (daxueyuan) on September 26, 1928. For the complete official announce of the endorsement of GR, please see *Zhao Yuanren Nianpu*, 154.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. The English translation in the parenthesis is mine.

and characters are still alive. One is baffled on two fronts. On the one hand, why did not the pinnacle of the Romanization Movement deliver the promise of character elimination? On the other, why did not the supreme orthography form prevail in the test of time and become the present *pinyin* system? To understand the climax of the Chinese Romanization Movement followed by its ineluctable ebb, we need to probe the circumstances surrounding the birth of GR.

A piece of important correspondence, from Bernhard Karlgren to Chao Yuen Ren, on the very issue of the creation of the Chinese alphabet, surfaced during archival research.<sup>51</sup> This token of exchange, as a piece of historical documentation, helps us contextualize the moment of creation of the Chinese Romanization system. It also sheds light on the ultimate pursuit of GR as an alphabetic writing system. As I suggest, while the quest for alphabetic universalism gave life to GR, it is at the same time the obtainment of that goal that led astray the Chinese Romanization Movement from its initial task of character elimination, thus precipitating the eventual decline of GR. To pay due respect to the historical document and for the purpose of later discussion of GR, I quote in full the letter from Bernhard Karlgren to Chao Yuen Ren dated February 24, 1925:

“Dear Mr. Chao,

I have hesitated for a long time to answer your last kind letter – because I was not sure what to advise in the matter in question. My philological experience insists on telling me that the evolution of a living language can never be led in a certain direction through a decision to speak in a certain way. You cannot make up, artificially, a language forming an average between a group of strongly divergent dialects and then make it to be freely spoken (you have made this experience yourself, as you told me). I believe the one way is to chose a living language as a

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<sup>51</sup> Carton 5, Bancroft Library. Chao’s mail to Karlgren which solicited Karlgren’s response in this particular letter was not found in the archive.

norm and then make ever larger groups of people adopt it through the influence of those who speak it naturally as their mother tongue. There can be very little question as to which this language should be in China. That is decided, not by philology but by history. Just as Parisian must be the normative French, whatever its merits may be when historically viewed, in the same way Pekinese has to be ‘High Chinese’, even if there are other dialects which have deviated less from the older stages of the language. This, however, does not mean that you should not eliminate extreme Peking *t’u hua*, particular vulgar phrases or the peculiar pronunciation of certain individual words (e.g. *kau-sung* for *kau-su*)<sup>52</sup>; such normalization is the rule also regarding Parisian for instance.

As a control and support for this ‘high Chinese’ Pekinese you should make it a phonetically written language with a new and flourishing literature. I fail to see the use of inventing new and complicated phonetic characters for this. There is one thing which more than anything else would help to bring new China in contact with and make it really useful to and appreciated by the rest of the intellectual world: a common script, making it easy and natural to read the new Chinese literature and reproduce it, print it as quotations in western works. This can only be done by writing New high Chinese with Roman letters. The Japanese are beginning to realize a similar truth for their part. You will finish by doing so for yourself. The sooner you do it, the less loss of work and valuable time. The writing system should be as simple as possible, with few diacritical marks (except the tones). It does not matter if it does not reproduce the pronunciation shades quite closely, if it is only logical and consistent. On one or two points it seems advisable to be conservative and write historically, with a view to the language as a whole, thus 經 *king* and 井 *tsing*, 行 *hing* and 星 *sing* according to etymology.

As a matter of fact I think that the system used in the Peking column of my new dictionary is about as simple and in the same time as scientific as you can ever make a practical system. There are very few peculiar signs, and all exist in every ordinary printing stock. X, r, ts etc.<sup>53</sup> are used since a hundred years in all western scientific literature and hence well known as to their phonetic value.

What the kuo ě<sup>54</sup> movement should do is to publish extensive texts (of high literary value) in this or some similar simple system and get them spread, read and loved. And what you should do next summer is to read these texts into the phonograph with as exact Peking pronunciation as you

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<sup>52</sup> Footnote explanations within Karlgren’s letter are all mine. “*t’u hua*” in the present *pinyin* scheme is spelt “*tu hua*(土話)” which means strongly local and idiomatic expressions. “*Kau su*” is “*gaosu* (告訴),” while “*Kau-sung*” is transcription of the Pekingese pronunciation of the word.

<sup>53</sup> The part of “x, r ts” is written not entirely legibly with a pencil and is my guess.

<sup>54</sup> “Kuo ě movement” means Guoyu movement, i.e., the national language movement.

can make it. Interested people will compare your living record with your written representation, they will know what to read into the latter – and your New High Chinese is born! Above all: do not make too many primers about the new language, but make primers on all subjects (history, literature, geography etc.) written in the new language, and good new Chinese literature (fiction and thought) in it, and you will succeed.

I am afraid that my advice is not so tempting as it is sound. But one word of warning: if people like you, who can understand and appreciate the difference between a logical and scientific alphabetic writing and a clumsy and illogical missionary system, if you do not step forward in time and lead the movement in such a practical and reasonable direction but use up your force in utopian endeavors to carry through something still more desirable[sic] and historically elaborate – a new artificially made language – then evolution will go its own way over your heads and carry through, with the force of necessity, something infinitely inferior still, e.g. a modern literature written in Wade’s system! Videant consules!<sup>55</sup>

I will not say more than this because I believe that leading young spirits in every country have to work out the best course for their own country without being too much meddled with; I have written just enough to let you see what I would imagine be the best.

With many kind wishes,

Ever yours,

B. Karlgren.”<sup>56</sup>

In a friendly advisory tone, Karlgren first of all laid bare his position in the contention between the old and new national language, casting his vote firmly for Pekingese. Then after vouching for the universality of alphabet as a “common script” and proving its necessity, Karlgren introduced and promoted his own Romanization system in his 1923 *Analytic dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese* as a candidate for a practical Chinese alphabet. He concluded by urging Chao to produce primers in the new common script so that the historical opportunity to change the face of the Chinese script would not slip into inferior hands. Clearly a strong proponent for the Romanization movement, Karlgren refused to confine himself to pure academic pursuits in terms of philology and

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<sup>55</sup> “Videant consules” means “let the consuls see to it” in Latin.

<sup>56</sup> Carton 5, Bancroft Library. The underlined emphases are Karlgren’s original.



phonetics. Demonstrating precision in judgment and sophistication in foresight for the future of the movement, Karlgren came across as an authority on the issue of Chinese Romanization, so much so that when GR came out in 1928 he felt comfortable enough to launch open critiques against it for its impracticality and imprecision in phonetic description.

When asked if Karlgren's negative appraisal of GR damaged the cause of Romanization, Chao answered, "I don't think it had much effect because Karlgren's contact with Chinese were mostly with the technical personnel in phonology."<sup>57</sup> Chao might be right in stating that Karlgren's criticism did little detriment to GR and the Romanization Movement at large, given that GR did not gain wide acceptance in the first place despite official support from the GMD. Chao, however, seemed to have forgotten his own contact with Karlgren, which lasted as long as half a century, while he himself was by no means a mere "technical personnel in phonology."

The first contact dated back to 1924, when they met in person in Gothenburg, Sweden in the summer of that year on Chao's way back from the U. S. to Beijing for an appointment at Tsinghua University.<sup>58</sup> They established a life-long connection and collaboration, which bore important fruits for the development of Chinese philology and phonetics. The dialect survey led by Chao and Academic Sinica was an enterprise not least informed by Karlgren's *Études sur la phonologie chinoise*. Chao came across this magnum opus in 1921 and was later invited personally by Karlgren to translate it into

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<sup>57</sup> Chao, "Yuen Ren Chao, Chinese Linguist, Phonologist, Composer and Author: With an Introduction by Mary Haas, An Interview Conducted by Rosemary Levenson" in *Zhao Yuanren Quanjì*, Vol. 16, 124. In 1924, Chao was the youngest of the four so-called "Great Mentors" in the newly founded Institute of National Learning at Tsinghua University. The other three mentors were: the late-Qing reformist and thinker Liang Qichao, literary scholar and poet Wang Guowei, as well as archeologist Li Ji.

<sup>58</sup> *Zhao Yuanren Nianpu*, 126.

Chinese. The significance of the quoted correspondence, however, lies not so much in marking the provenance of an important intellectual collaboration, as in highlighting the circumstances—epistemological and historical—that brought about such collaboration.

The timing of the letter was not insignificant. The year 1925 was a time when Chao was caught in between the old national pronunciation and the rise of Pekingese. As mentioned earlier, Chao devised a practical Romanization system, the predecessor of GR, for the old national pronunciation in the early 1923. His initial research was published in the special issue of “Character Reform” in the *National Language Monthly* as “The Study of the National Romanization.”<sup>59</sup> Despite his confidence that his Romanization scheme based on the old pronunciation would become a true “Chinese alphabet,” Chao had to admit the ascendance of Pekingese and recorded the *New National Language Records* in 1924. It was not until 1926, with the help of the Society of a Few Men 數人會 (*Shuren hui*),<sup>60</sup> that Chao finally revised his original scheme in accordance to the new national language and named it “*Gwoyeyu Romatzyh*,” which was made the “Second Form of National Alphabet” in 1928.

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<sup>59</sup> In a reprisal of his 1916 article, the first treatise of what later to develop into “*Gwoyeyu Romatzyh*” opened with ten objections to Romanizing Chinese script followed by Chao’s rebuttal point by point. The article then went on to lay out the general spelling rules of the Romanization system, followed by twenty-five principles in using the new system. Chao finished off by offering for discussion ten points of uncertainties and nine measures to promote his Romanization system. Please see Chao Yuen Ren, “Guoyun luomazi de yanjiu.” For a succinct summary of the Romanization system that spells the old pronunciation, please refer to Chao’s “Xin wenzi yundong di taolun” 新文字運動底討論 (A Discussion of the New Script Movement) in *The National Language Monthly*, Vol. 2 (1), 1924.

<sup>60</sup> Chao explains the Society of a Few Men as following, “Among members of that committee (the Committee on Unification of the National Language), a few of them formed a little group called Society of a Few Men... based on the preface of Lu Fa-yen’s book, 601 A. D. Ch’ieh Yün the primary source for ancient Chinese of 601 A. D., because in the preface they said, ‘We few men decide and it is decided,’ so we called ourselves the Society of a Few Men; some of them would rather have called it Society of a Handful of Men.” Chao, *Zhao Yuanren Quanji*. Vol. 16, 110. For the 1926 edition of GR, please see *Gwoyeyu Romatzyh*, Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education Bull. 4, Vol. IV, 1926.

Given the circumstances and Karlgren's response, it would not be difficult to deduce "the matter in question" upon which Chao wrote to seek Karlgren's advice. To put it in the most general terms, Chao wrote to Karlgren soliciting his input on how to best further the Romanization Movement. Chao, the Chinese "leading young spirit" to appropriate Karlgren's words, took the initiative in seeking advice from a foreign expert on Chinese language who at the same time happened to be a supporter of the Romanization Movement. Whether Chao asked for Karlgren's opinion out of sincerity or politeness was beside the point. Their shared investment in the Romanization Movement was enough validation for Karlgren to answer the invitation to "advise in the matter in question" with due gravity and avidity. Throughout the letter, Karlgren employed often the imperative mode of speech. Evoking nine times the modal verb "should," twice "do not," and using expressions such as "can never" and "can only." Karlgren voiced his judgments authoritatively and his instructions definitively. To a remarkable extent, his judgments on Pekingese were soon corroborated, while his instructions on the common script and the proliferation of its primers, were also timely followed.

After assuaging what seemed to be Chao's frustration with the failure of the old national pronunciation, Karlgren stated plainly, "Pekinese has to be 'High Chinese.'" Once settling the disputes of which speech was to be transcribed as the national pronunciation, Karlgren proceeded to deal with the script, "As a control and support for this 'high Chinese' Pekinese you should make it a phonetically written language with a new and flourishing literature." Karlgren must have known that he was preaching to the choir, but what he went on to say brought forth the true stakes of converting Chinese to alphabetic universalism. He continued, "There is one thing which more than anything

else would help to bring new China in contact with and make it really useful to and appreciated by the rest of the intellectual world: a common script, making it easy and natural to read the new Chinese literature and reproduce it, print it as quotations in western works. This can only be done by writing New high Chinese with Roman letters.”

The hypothetical equivalence Karlgren drew between the “common script” and the “Roman letters” found its historical standing in the quest of a unifying alphabet, whose beginning could be traced to the “debabelization” in the realm of Biblical imagination. The basic assumption of a unifying alphabet stipulated that in defiance of all forms of differences in languages, there must be a universal structure that would unite them all. Generations of grammarians and linguists worked on the subject of the “general grammar.” Their contribution culminated in the Jansenist school of Port-Royal Grammar in 1660, paving the way for the rise of comparative grammar. Under the tenets of “general grammar,” later generations of thinkers forged ahead formidable efforts in search of a universal alphabet. For a few instances, Leibniz explored the feasibility of a calculus providing a general linguistic symbolization; Humbolt speculated about a universal form dominating all heterogeneity of human languages; while George Dalgarno devoted much of his life to the “art of signs” (*Ars signorum*, 1661) and John Wilkins wrote the seminal piece *Essay towards a real character and a philosophical language* (1668) influencing Jeremy Bentham who in turn impacted C. K. Ogden’s *Debabelization* and inspired the latter to invent Basic English (acronym for British American Scientific International and Commercial English) as the new universal form, for both language and script.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Roy Harris and Talbot Taylor eds., *Landmarks In Linguistic Thought Volume I: The Western Tradition From Socrates To Saussure* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. xiv-xviii. Please also see Wilhelm von

It is interesting to observe how, if at all, Karlgren and Chao brought the European pursuit of universal alphabet to bear on the Romanizing impulse of the Chinese script in its self-reimagination and reconfiguration. As Karlgren noted, the most useful thing to do to enable China to join and gain appreciation from the rest of the intellectual world was to adopt the “common script” of “Roman letters,” so that the High Chinese could be printed “as quotations in western works.” What struck one as remarkable was not so much the self-legitimizing stature that “common script” mounted in Karlgren’s reasoning, but rather through relegating High Chinese to be written “as quotations in western works,” Karlgren invited the Chinese alphabet to share the stakes in the enterprise of the “common script.” In an uncanny manner, it manages to explain away the violence of the alphabetic universalism against other forms of writing practice and script imagination. Once converted to and complicit in the world of “Roman letters,” other idiosyncratic non-alphabetic-scripts are reduced to the status of an alphabet manqué. The domination of the universal alphabet over all other scripts of particularity, translates itself into the consent of the latter and hence the desirability of alphabetic universalism. For believers in the common script and Chinese Romanization, the injury done by renouncing characters was in no comparison to the joy of breaking away from the shackles of tradition and elevating the Chinese writing into the rank and file of the realm of “Roman letters,” albeit with an entry position as “quotations.” With the advancement of GR, it became increasingly clear

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Humbolt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues* (The Heterogeneity of Language and its Influence on the Intellectual Development of Mankind, 1836); C. K. Ogden, *Debabelization: with a survey of contemporary opinion on the problem of a universal language* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & co., ltd., 1931); and Roy Harris, *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

that far more than an acquiescent consent, the Chinese alliance with the common script was a much sought-after enterprise.

Having acknowledged the alliance with his Romanization comrades, Karlgren gave his specific instructions, “The writing system should be as simple as possible, with few diacritical marks (except the tones). It does not matter if it does not reproduce the pronunciation shades quite closely, if it is only logical and consistent.” On top of a sound and practical transcription system, Chao should not, as Karlgren put it, “make too many primers about the new language.” Instead, “above all,” Chao should make haste to produce “primers on all subjects (history, literature, geography etc.) written in the new language, and good new Chinese literature (fiction and thought) in it.” Provided that these instructions were closely observed, Karlgren promised Chao, “you will succeed.”

From 1925 to 1928, between the time when Karlgren sent the letter to Chao and GR’s elevation to the “Second Form of National Alphabet,” the Chinese Romanization Movement saw a series of new developments. First came the final abandonment of the old national pronunciation, then the birth of *Gwoyew Romatzyh*, adjusted to conform to the sound of Pekingese, as well as the publication of a series of GR primers – Chao’s *Last Five Minutes* being one of them. To draw a historical connection between Karlgren’s letter and the steady progress of the Chinese Romanization Movement is not to project the Orientalist model of cultural imperialism onto the encounter between Chao and Karlgren, putting the Chinese intellectuals in the supine position of acceptance while portraying the foreign academics as intellectual chauvinists. Rather, I suggest, such a connection underscores an alliance amongst Chinese and the international intellectual community, forged and fortified by their common interest in the Chinese Romanization

Movement and their shared faith in alphabetic universalism. Seen through that prism, Karlgren's later critique of GR was not limited to a critique of its orthographical layout, but an expression of discontent with GR's competing and overreaching claim to alphabetic universalism, a claim held so dear to Karlgren's heart that it was not allowed.

In Karlgren's paper "The Romanization of Chinese," presented in London shortly before the announcement of the official acceptance of GR, he introduced to his British audience Chao and Chao's system, "There is a society of very energetic young reformers in China, one of the leaders of whom is Professor Chao Yüan-jên (Y. R. Chao, the well known author of *A Phonograph Course in the Chinese National Language*, 1925), and their C system is already on the market. I confess that I am not a great admirer of it."<sup>62</sup>

What Karlgren has difficulty in appreciating in the GR system happens to be what Chao took most pride in: the representation of tones or what Chao later called "speech melody" using nothing but the "Roman letters" eliminating altogether diacritical marks for tonal representation. A comparison between Chao's old Romanization system and the updated GR system shows that Chao has already adopted this "tone-in-letter" approach in the earlier system and has updated it in the new GR system to reflect the four-tone Pekingese. By embedding tones in the common script, GR differentiates itself from all other systems—Karlgrén's included—and establishes its claim to a new orthographical universalism, a true Chinese universal alphabet. The spelling rule of GR is listed as following:

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<sup>62</sup> Karlgren, *The Romanization of Chinese: A paper read before the China Society on January 19, 1928*, 18. Karlgren named three types of Romanization: (1) A system as "a philological system, strictly phonetic, for scientific study;" (2) B system of "a sinological system, for dictionaries, text-books, treatises on Chinese history, etc.;" and (3) C system as "a popular system to be used by the Chinese themselves in creating a new colloquial literature and for use in newspapers, etc." *Ibid.*, 2.

“For the 1st tone:

(1) Use the ‘Basic Form.’ For instances, hua 花, shan 山. The Basic Form also includes neutral tones, onomatopoeia and auxiliaries, e.g. ma 嗎, aia 啊呀.

(2) For initials of m, n, l, r, add h, e.g., mhau 貓, lha 拉.

For the 2nd tone:

(3) Add r after open finals, e.g., char 茶, torng 同, parang 旁

(4) If the first letter of finals is i or u, change i to y and u to w, e.g. chyn 琴, hwang 黃, yuan 元; but when the entire final is i or u, then change i to yi, u to wu, e.g., pyi 皮, hwu 胡, wu 吳.

(5) When initials are m, n, l, r, use the ‘Basic Form,’ e.g., ren 人, min 民, lian 連.

For the 3rd tone:

(6) Double the single vowels, e.g., chii 起, faan 反, eel 耳.

(7) For multiple vowels, change i to e, u to o, e.g. jea 假, goan 管, sheu 許, hae 海, hao 好; but do not change the final vowel if the first vowel is changed already, e.g., neau 鳥, goai 拐.

(8) Double vowels of ei, ou, ie, uo follow the Rule 6th, e.g. meei 美, koou 口, jiee 解, guoo 果.

For the 4th tone:

(9) Change the finals from -i to -y, from -u to -w, from -n to -nn, from -ng to -nq, from -l to -ll or from -(none) to -h. E.g., tzay 在, yaw 要, bann 半, jenq 正, ell 二, chih 器.”<sup>63</sup>

Chao’s innovations became Karlgren’s grievances. By way of summarizing the tonal rules of GR, Karlgren critiqued the tone-in-letter system, “As you notice, the 2nd tone is marked in certain syllables by an r which has to be mute, in other syllables by -i- and -u- being changed into -y-, -w-. The 3<sup>rd</sup> tone is marked by doubling the vowel, or by changing -i-, -u- into -e-, -o-. The 4<sup>th</sup> tone is marked by a final -h, or by doubling the final -n, or by changing the -ng into -nq. This is all very ingenious, but in my opinion it has the fault of deviating too far from phonetic truth to be practical.”<sup>64</sup> Although he had

<sup>63</sup> The official announcement of the rules of G. R., quoted in Chao, *Last Five Minutes* 最後五分鐘 (Zuihou wufenzhong) (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1929), pp. 42-43.

<sup>64</sup> Karlgren, 19. Karlgren goes on to observe seven “fatal points”:  
(α) The r in the 2<sup>nd</sup> tone has, of course, no equivalence in real pronunciation.



asked Chao in the 1925 letter to make the Romanization system “as simple as possible,” Karlgren did also advise that Chao should do “with few diacritical marks (except the tones),” thus making an exception for tonal diacritics. As a matter of fact, both his own Romanization system of Pekingese in *Analytic dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese*, which he recommended to Chao in previous-quoted letter, as well as a modified C system he approved of in the 1928 paper, preserved the tonal diacritics, thus preventing overt artificiality as Karlgren perceived in Chao’s system.

Regardless of his differences with Chao and his own choice of Chinese Romanization system, Karlgren was gracious enough to conclude that it was up to the Chinese to decide “how far they will listen to a European phonetician” and that “the Chinese ought to be allowed to mould their own destiny without too much foreign meddling.” What the international community could and should do was to give the Chinese their “warm sympathy, and with keen interest observe and follow their progress.”<sup>65</sup>

Chao never openly responded to Karlgren’s criticism, except downplaying the latter’s importance in the conception of GR during later interviews. What seemed to be

(β) *-h*, which is commonly used to indicate **shortness**, is no good in the 4<sup>th</sup> tone, which is *not* particularly short. It could with much better right be used as a general mark of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tone, which is decidedly shorter than the three other tones.

(γ) There exists no *y* distinguishing *di* : *dʷi* (Wade *ti1* : *ti2*), nor any *w* distinguishing *hu* : *hwu* (Wade *hu1* : *hu2*).

(δ) It is not true that the **vowel** is longer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tone in words ending in *-n* and *-ng*: it is really not *taan* but *tann* (Wade *t’an3*), not *taang* but *tannng* (Wade *t’ang3*).

(ε) It is not true that the 4<sup>th</sup> tone has a long (double) *n* : *tann* (Wade *t’an 4*), *shiann* (Wade *hsien4*). On the contrary, *-n* is remarkably *weak* in the 4<sup>th</sup> tone, in words like *yüan4-i4*, “to be willing,” almost disappearing: *yüa(n)-i*.

(ζ) It is not true that the *-i-* and *-u-* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tone are opened into *-e-*, *-o-* : *shea* (Wade *hsia3*), *hoa* (Wade *hua3*).

(η) It is not true that words like *shiu* (Wade *hsü1*), *shyu* (Wade *hsü2*), *sheu* (Wade *hsü3*), *shiu*h (Wade *hsü4*) have two vowels: *ü* is a single sound.

<sup>65</sup> Karlgren, 23.

lost on Karlgren and dear to Chao was a seemingly fantasitcal but real pursuit – GR’s pursuit of universality. Since his earliest writings, Chao had been critiquing the Indo-European languages for their orthography being inaccurate and “unphonetic.”<sup>66</sup> GR, as Chao conceived it in spite of Karlgren’s contrary diagnosis, was a practical and precise orthography, capable of taking on the role of a universal script and spelling system. Chao was bold enough to predict that in a century’s time GR would establish its claim to alphabetic universalism firmly enough that Chinese children starting to learn English would wonder, “Why do the British use our Chinese script too?”<sup>67</sup> By seizing on to the stake of alphabetic universalism, Chao argued that GR—effective and workable as it was an orthographical system—far from restricting itself to a mere “Chinese alphabet,” should profess to spell all languages. Dwelling on the “phonetic truth” and the radical elimination of tonal diacritics, Karlgren still viewed GR as a case of reconciliation between the Chinese particularism and alphabetic universalism. What he failed to recognize was the Chinese appeal to the universalism of the common script, willingly sacrificing the Chinese particularism. Answering the call of the universal script, the Chinese alphabet joined its order, challenged its orthographical limits and eventually usurped the throne of superiority. As we shall see, by pushing the limits of alphabetic universalism, Chao advanced further his quest for the universalism through the Chinese alphabet. It was this preoccupation that led GR away from being a practical orthography, to say nothing of a common script that sought to overthrow characters.

### ***Last Five Minutes: Claiming Universalism with a Chinese Orthography***

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<sup>66</sup> Chao, “The Problem of the Chinese Language,” 507, 590.

<sup>67</sup> Chao, *Zhao Yuanren Yuyanxue lunwen ji*, 89.

On June 25, 1927 Chao wrote in answer to another of Karlgren's letter while announcing his new project:

“I translated A. A. Milne's *Camberley Triangle*, a one-act comedy, into both the *Gwoyeu Romatzyh* and characters and have arranged to have it printed with the two on opposite pages. As an overgrown appendix, I put in a study of the speech melody of Peking. I have just finished the rough draft of the whole thing when your letter came, so I was just ready to answer your question. I think the book will be ready in a month, as the publisher (*Beeishin Shujuy*) is very much interested in it too. I think this the first attempt to write a *bairhuah wen* as one actually *shuo huah*.”<sup>68</sup>

It is hard to ascertain whether Chao wrote the note having in mind Karlgren's long letter of instructions from February 1925. But phrases like “just finished” and “just ready to answer your question” express a fortuitous sense of timeliness. Chao was pleased with the birth of the book as much as with the impeccable timing to be able to report to Karlgren his newest endeavor: a primer. Indeed the publication of Chao's translation of *Camberley Triangle* marks the debut of GR primers,<sup>69</sup> not “about the new language” but “in the new language,” as Karlgren emphatically advised in 1925.

The book, which eventually came out in 1929, was titled in GR, *Gwoyeu Romatzyh Deuyhuah Shih Shihpuu: Zueyhow Wuu-Fen Jong* 國語羅馬字對話戲戲譜: 最

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<sup>68</sup> Carton 5, Karlgren Folder, Bancroft Library. The GR word “*bairhuah*” means *baihua* in the *pinyin* system while “*shuo huah*” is the GR version of “*shuo hua*,” meaning “to speak.”

<sup>69</sup> According to Chao Yuen Ren, *The Last Five Minutes* is the second GR primer. The first is credited to Li Jinxi, *Guoyu mofan duben shouce* 國語模範讀本首冊 (First Volume of the Model Reader of the National Language) (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1928). See *The Last Five Minutes*, 12. Chao later made another primer in GR, a translation of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. The titled is written in GR, *Tzoou Daw Jingtz Lii*. The manuscript to be published in Shanghai in 1938 was burned during the Second Sino-Japanese War and only republished in San Francisco in 1968, as Vol. 2 of *Sayable Chinese* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Spoken Language Services, 1974).

後五分鐘 (*A Conversational Drama Score in GR: The Last Five Minutes*).<sup>70</sup> Chao, as a master translator, rendered Milne's *Camberley Triangle* in considerable faithfulness and ingenuity. Set in the immediate wake of the Great War, Milne's original story depicts the homecoming of a British veteran named Dennis Camberley. Upon his return, he discovers the love affair between his wife Kate Camberley and a certain Mr. Cyril Norwood. Dennis suggests that he and Norwood each spend five minutes with Kate and afterwards let her leave with the man of her choosing. In a mere five minutes, Dennis Camberley dissuades his wife from eloping with Norwood, wins her back and solves the "Camberley triangle." In Chao's translation and adaptation, Dennis Camberley is renamed Chern Danlii 陳丹里 (Chen Danli) and appears not as a British soldier coming home from the dismantled Ottoman empire after four years of war,<sup>71</sup> but as a returned Chinese student from the U.S. after five years of study. Kate Camberley is renamed as Kaelin 愷林 (Kailin), Cyril Norwood as Luu Jihliou 魯季流 (Lu Jiliu) and the title is transformed from *Camberley Triangle* to a *The Last Five Minutes*.

*The Last Five Minutes* by Chao, though by now largely obscure, was a work of great expectations upon its making. Its innovation however was not simply the fact that it

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<sup>70</sup> Before its publication, the play was put on stage in Tsinghua University, Beijing on April 30, 1927 to celebrate the sixteenth anniversary of the university. Please see Chao, *The Last Five Minutes*, 32. Chao spent a considerable amount of time in drama translation and production during his teaching years in Tsinghua. For a list of works translated and adapted by Chao, please see *Zhao Yuanren Nianpu*, pp. 174-183.

<sup>71</sup> Chao's translation is remarkably faithful retaining even Milne's use of English idioms. It is curious that Chao should choose to erase the Turkish background of the play as well as the emphasis on WWI, given the connection between China and Turkey on the issue of language reform. Exponents of de-characterization in China hailed the success of the anti-Arab-Persian script movement in Turkey. As coincidence would have it, the new Turkish script was made official in 1928, the same year that G. R. was announced as the "Second Form of National Alphabet." For a recent study of the Turkish language reform, please refer to Nergis Ertürk, *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

wrote “a *bairhuah wen* as one actually *shuo huah*” as Chao told Karlgren, nor was the contribution to put GR in juxtaposition with the characters in order to reassert an order of succession, not even was it to make a case study out of the Pekingese “speech melody.” Its true ambition was embodied in Chao’s originality in shifting the paradigm of alphabetic writing towards a more phonemically accurate direction. This was to be experimented with what Chao termed as “*Shihpuu* 戲譜 (drama score).” A drama score, as its name suggested, was a score of a conversational drama not unlike a score for an opera, combining the system of phonetics with that of musical composition, for a precise representation of sound, pitch and time to be meticulously laid out by the writer/composer and to be followed veraciously by the actors/singers.<sup>72</sup>

Chao’s love for composition and phonetics found this novel expression after watching the Macdona Players’ performance of Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* in Paris.<sup>73</sup> While Chao enjoyed how the flower girl Eliza Doolittle was trained by the phonetician Henry Higgins into a fair lady, he was not amused by the poor command of Cockney (a dialect spoken by working class Londoners in the East End) on the part of the actress portraying Eliza. Chao, as a phonetician himself, took on unwittingly the role of “Professor Higgins” in rectifying Eliza’s pronunciation. It mattered little if it was the posh London accent or the crass Cockney sound that the phonetician required, as long as the desired phonemes and intonations were truthfully represented. Chao reasoned for the

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<sup>73</sup> For Chao’s experience in sitting through all twelve Macdona plays, please see *The Last Five Minutes*, 23. Chao lists several references in *The Last Five Minutes*, which might have influenced his formulation of the GR Drama Score: Liu Fu, *Etudes Expérimentales sur les Tons du Chinois*; D. Jones, *Intonation Curves*, Teubner, Leipzig, 1909; D. Jones, *English Phonetics*, Teubner, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1922, pp. 135-168; H. E. Palmer, *English Intonation*, Heffner, Cambridge, 1922; H. Klinghardt and M. de Fourmestraux, *Französische Intonationsübungen; French Intonation Exercises*, Heffner, Cambridge, 1923 and M. L. Barker, *A Handbook of German Intonation*. See Chao, *ibid*, 131.

necessity of devising a new method to control and command all fair ladies to speak with the level of accuracy mandated by their Professor Higgins:

“I think before long we shall adapt the notation of music and phonetics to the uses of the dramatic art. Time and pitch (including slides, which is more usual than fixed pitch in speech) must be indicated, if not throughout a play, at least here and there where they are of decisive significance... If we do not excuse a singer for singing the wrong tune or out of time in an opera, where pitch and time when you come to think of it don't really matter, why shouldn't we hold a player strictly to a proper and therefore varied style of using pitch and time in a play, where pitch and time matter very much?”<sup>74</sup>

To execute full control over time and pitch, Chao first thought that he could write dialogues combining the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) with the five-line musical staff, adding notations such as “andante, crescendo, mf, pp”<sup>75</sup> and the like. But this method proved to be “too inconvenient,” partly because the combination of IPA and the staff was too difficult and costly for printing when GR would have sufficed, partly because in a play unlike in an opera rarely would several characters speak simultaneously. Chao therefore came to the decision that the new time-pitch notation should adopt the basic form of GR, to be supplemented by a numbered musical notation (also known as the Ziffersystem) added alongside those key words for clarification.<sup>76</sup> Such is the so-called “GR Drama Score.” As an example, Chao illustrates how the four tones in

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<sup>74</sup> In fact, the actress portraying Eliza was not the only one who gave Chao grievances. Chao listed a series of offences from the Macdona actors, “The Macdona Players, for instance, are considered good players, and so they are, it seems. But after seeing them in twelve plays, you find that one actor always lets his falling inflection in an important sentence fall a tone or so too short, suspended as it were in mid-air, another always puts a crescendo on his ‘if’ clause, finishing with a sforzando on its last stressed syllable, another always gives an insinuating slow rising-falling reflection to the chief stress in a phrase where other people usually use a simple falling inflection, and another always uses a simple vowel instead of the usual diphthong for ‘long ā.’” Chao, *The Last Five Minutes*, 23, 25. Chao is quoting from his own “The Third Green Letter.”

<sup>75</sup> Chao, *The Last Five Minutes*, 26, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 28, 30.

Pekingese should be represented as “speech melody” under the musical notation system (Figure 2.2, example of four tones of *yi*).<sup>77</sup> The tonal representation subsumed under the numbered musical notation system is not only accurate but allows more autonomy for the playwrights to play with time and pitch. Drawing on the musical nature of the four tones of Pekingese, Chao exemplifies the representability of all tones and intonation in his new system of the “GR Drama Score,” which could have aided greatly Bernard Shaw in training his Cockney lady.

If Chao made GR into a Chinese alphabet able to spell all languages – Chinese *guoyu* being but one of many; then Chao had bigger dreams for the GR Drama Score. The combination of music notation and articulatory phonetics allowed the GR Drama Score full control of time and pitch. Applied to transcribing languages, the GR Drama Score would write all languages exactly the way they were spoken. As the GR Drama Score challenged all existing scripts, alphabetic ones in particular, in the competition of the identification of the spoken and the written languages, or in other words, the perfect mimetic representation of orality in the realm of literacy; the promise of the linguistic evolution, as it seemed, was to eventually culminate in the GR Drama Score. Chao, through the GR Drama Score, staked his claim to alphabetic universalism.

Insomuch as the GR Drama Score exemplifies formidable mimetic prowess, it is puzzling why it did not gain as much prestige and popularity as any powerful system should have. To unravel that puzzle, one needs to have first-hand experience with the GR Drama Score. In my view, it is the very mimetic prowess driven by its obsession in speech representation that deconstructs and deconstructs the system that seemingly fulfills

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 121.

that goal. The following paragraph, as an instance, is taken to illustrate the workings of the GR Drama Score. Here Norwood/Lu Jiliu grumbles rather unwisely during his last five minutes with Kate/Kailin about how he sees no point in this game of “the last five minutes.” First is Milne’s English original with his own italic emphases, as a limited means of authorial control:

“Norwood (*impatiently*). What does he *want* with five minutes? What’s the *good* of it to him? Just to take a pathetic farewell of you, and pretend that you’ve ruined his life, when all the time he’s chuckling in his sleeve at having got rid of you so easily. *I* know these young fellows. Some Major’s wife in India is what *he’s* got his eye on... Or else he’ll try fooling around with the hands-up business. You don’t want to be mixed up with any scandal of *that* sort. No, the best thing we can do—I’m speaking for *your* sake, Kate—is to slip off quietly, while we’ve got the chance. We can *write* and explain all that we want to explain.”<sup>78</sup>

Chao translates Milne’s prose with great fidelity, except changing “some Major’s wife” to “some overseas female students in America” to conform to Dennis Camberley’s new identity as the returned student Chen Danli. The following is Chao’s juxtaposition of the “Character Drama Score” vis-à-vis the “GR Drama Score,” printed back to back. All forms of emphases and notations are all Chao’s:

“魯（不耐煩的：）他要那嘅五分鐘幹麻嘅？他要·它有什麼用·處嘅？（幾字先尖後粗，先快後慢：）不過就是對你說一套很悲慘的得離別詞<sup>(2)</sup>，做得好像你把他一移輩子的得生·活弄糟了勒·似的是得，其實時阿，hng! 他骨子裡還孩「格兒」「格兒」的得笑著之嘅，沒梅想到這末容易就把你弄·掉。我才曉得「這一」·班人嘅。他的得眼睛阿，總在一個·什末美國女留學生的得身上（:232）.....（改一個腔調：）要不然那，他一移定是待「那兒」頑兒「娃兒」·什末（做放手槍的手勢：）“抬起手來！”那內種把戲。你尼總不願意（：上幾字快）再鬧·出那嘅末一意場·來罷？還孩是不要罷，阿（:5#64）！咱們頂好阿，一我這都兜是為你說「的阿」打，愷林，一咱們頂好還孩是（：上幾字快）趁有這個機會的得·時·「候兒」輕

<sup>78</sup> A. A. Milne, “The Camberley Triangle,” in *Second Plays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 157.



「輕兒」的得走·掉了勒。咱們隨後可以再寫信·來，（以下低粗吐氣的嗓子：）要解·釋什蛇末都兜可以解·釋。”<sup>79</sup>

“Luu (*bunayfarnde*:) Ta yaw neh wuu-fen jong gannma ne? Ta yaw · te yeou sherme *yonq·chuh* ne? (*Jii tzyh shian jian how tsu, shian kuay how mann*:) Buguoh jiwsh duey nii shuo i-taw—heen beitsaan de libye-tsyr<sup>2</sup>, tzuoh de haoshianq nii baa ta ibeytzde sheng·hwo nonq-tzau le·shyhde,—chishyr a, hng! ta gwutzlii hair gelxde shiawj ne, mei sheang daw jehme rongyih jiow baa nii nonq·diaw. Woo tsair sheaude jey·ban ren ne! Tade yeanjing a, taoong tzay ige ·sherme Meei·gwo neu-lioushyuësheng de shen shanq (:232) ... (*gae ige Chiangdiaw*:) Yawburan a, ta idinq sh daynall wal ·sherme (*tzuh fanq shoouchiang de shooushyh*:) “Tair·chii shoou –lai!”” neyjoong baa·shih. Nii (:ni) tzoong bu yuanyih (:shang jii tzyh kuay) tazy naw·chu nehme i-charng -lai ba? Hairsh buyaw ba, a(:5#64)! Tzarm diinghao a, —woo jeh dou sh wey nii shuo d’a, Kailin, —tzarm diinghao hairsh (:shanq jii tzyh kuay) chenn yeou jehge jihuey de ·shyr·howl chingchinglde tzoou·diaw le. Tzarm sweihwo keryii tazy shiee *shiin·lai*, (*yiishiah di, tsu, tuhchi –de saangtz*:) yaw jiee·shyh sherme dou keryii jiee·shyh.”<sup>80</sup>

Chao introduces the use of colon (“:”) to writing the playwright’s instruction, which was usually italicized and put in parentheses, as we see in Milne’s practice. On top of following the common practice, Chao adopts the use of colon (“:”) to mark the direction and range of application of the instructions. For instance, “*bunayfarnde*:” or “不耐煩的:” which means “*impatiently*” in Milne’s prose indicates that this instruction is to be applied on the content after the column; while “:*shang jii tzyh kuay*” or “: 上幾字快” meaning “quick in the delivery of the previous characters” instructs the actor to speed up the delivery of the content that comes before the column.

<sup>79</sup> A note on the musical notations in the parentheses. (:232) and (:5#64) are both numbered musical notations in the Ziffersystem, instructing actors how to execute the “speech melodies” that come immediately before the parentheses exactly as the playwright has intended with his “drama score.” Chao, *The Last Five Minutes*, 102. Please see Figure 2.3 for Chao’s original footnote (2).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 103. Please see Figure 2.4 for Chao’s original footnote 2.

To perfect the execution of pronunciation and intonation, Chao adopts the middle dot (·) to mark the neutral tone, the en dash (–) for linking two or three syllables as one word, and the em dash (—) for the interruption or change of tone. For the maximum results, the rules of the GR Drama Score, as Chao’s “Explanatory Notes”<sup>81</sup> states, apply not only to the GR system but also to characters. For the words/characters/syllables that need special emphasis, the corresponding characters are underlined while the GR counterpart is italicized. For characters ought to be pronounced in one unit, Chao uses the special quotation mark “「」” to group the words and change the GR spelling accordingly. For instance, 「格兒」 「格兒」 (the onomatopoeia of laughter of Dennis/Chen Danli, as Norwood/Lu Jiliu imagines it to be) is grouped into one unit and spelled as “gelx” which should have been “ger err” “ger err” in strict GR system for single characters.

As though these rules are not dazzling enough, Chao adds one more measure to demonstrate the full control of time and pitch. Aside from the two examples of “上/shanq (:232),” and “阿/a(:5#64),” which indicate the tonal representation to be sung in the numbered musical system, Chao gives a full sentence to be sung as a musical phrase: “不過就是對你說一套很悲慘的得離別詞/Buguoh jiowsh duey nii shuo i-taw—heen beitsaan de libye-tsyr,” which means “(Chen Danli) will do nothing more than giving you a sorrowful farewell speech.” Shown in Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4, this phrase under both systems of the Ziffersystem and the five-line musical staff, is constituted with seven bars

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<sup>81</sup> Chao, *The Last Five Minutes*, pp. 54-56.

and its tempo is set at 1/4.<sup>82</sup> Granted that Chao sets the two keys for characters and for the GR Drama Score differently gesturing to the open possibilities of the pitch and tune of any given sentence, it is established that the flow of any sentence can now be translated into and transcribed as clear representation of its tonal relationship. Since the attributes of a tonal language such as Chinese enable its representability in and as music, the GR Drama Score is turned into the “Drama Score GR.” It thus shifts the emphasis of the GR system, from an aspiring script (“Second Form of National Alphabet”) able to spell a drama score, to a transcription system striving to represent the true sound as it is spoken or sung. The transcription system, in order to perfect its mimetic results, transforms itself into an unruly monster, whose increasingly difficult rules not only work against its erstwhile promise to lower the bar of literacy, but also challenge itself as a transcribing medium.

While previous scholarship (Karlgrén’s included) faults GR for its overly complicated system and attributes its lack of popularity to its impracticality, which does little to help combat illiteracy, I suggest that there are deeper reasons for GR’s eventual failure. In servitude to phonocentrism—putting aside for a moment the Derridian critique—GR, as a transcription system, accomplished full control of phonetic mimesis. As a supplement to speech sound, it is a medium and a technology to store and restore the spoken language. The question is, however, if the use value of a writing system as GR or the GR Drama Score does not go beyond the replication of the master voice, then what is to become of writing in the age of phonographs and other more instantaneously efficient

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<sup>82</sup> Under the five-line staff system, the notation is more accurate, with the Bass Clef and Allegro specifying the tempo. Also a note on keys, if we take Chao’s key in the Ziffersystem as C Major then that in the staff is E Major.

technologies? The very idea of writing as “supplementarity” in Derrida’s critique and the unfortunate perfection of its transcription system as a result, unwittingly devastates and destroys the very ground—both literally and conceptually—where writing could take its meaningful place.

### **Visible Speech: Overcoming Phonocentrism?**

Insomuch as Chao considered linguistics and the study of phonetics in particular a science and himself a scientist, he was much more invested in descriptive linguistics than the Saussurian structural linguistics. While maintaining nothing more than a sporadic correspondence with Roman Jakobson, Chao engaged actively with Leonard Bloomfield and Edward Sapir—both major figures in the foundation of linguistics as a science in the U.S.—admitting the former’s great influence on him and complementing the latter’s good humor and talent.<sup>83</sup> The zeitgeist of linguistics as a science did not mean that the question of phonocentrism was never brought to bear on Chao. When there was an opportunity to reflect and perhaps overcome phonocentrism as a disciplinary premise, Chao seized it. The technology that captures Chao’s attention in this context is the development of the sound spectrograph (Figure 2.5, the machine). While it takes the experimental phonetics into a new phase, it affords new possibilities to the reconceptualization of visible speech.

Not unlike other technological advancements, the development of the sound spectrograph had a military origin. Bell Telephone Laboratories, the lab in charge of the development of the then-classified technology, explicated the genesis of the spectrograph project since 1941, “American participation in the war emphasized the military

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<sup>83</sup> Chao, *Zhao Yuanren Quanji*, Vol. 16, 147; Mei Zulin 梅祖麟, “Bijiao fangfa zai zhongguo, 1926-1998” 比較方法在中國, 1926-1998 (The Comparative Method in China, 1926-1998), in *Studies in Languages and Linguistics*, Vol. 23, no.1, March 2003, pp. 16-18.

applications of, and needs for, a visual translation of sound, and during the war period major interest was centered upon these military requirements.”<sup>84</sup> After winning the Second World War and in the year of 1947, Bell Laboratories made public the “visible speech” project, publishing a book of its namesake. In the section on the sound spectrograph in the book *Visible Speech*, Bell Laboratories illustrated its working mechanism—developed and bettered by Bell Labs—as following, “In effect, it is an instrument that analyzes, one band at a time, the simple oscillations of a complex wave, and records the intensity variations in each band side by side in an orderly fashion upon a sheet of paper. The result is a visible pattern of the sound in its three fundamental dimensions – frequency, intensity, and time.”<sup>85</sup> To put it in another way, a sound spectrograph records any incoming wave against time, not the sound wave itself, but its frequency components, thus producing a frequency spectrum. Since the intensity of the frequencies is indicated by the intensity of darkness burned onto the paper, the end result is a visual portrayal of any given speech one hears, hence visible speech (Figure 2.6).<sup>86</sup> In a letter to Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (Chao’s close friend, co-founder of Academic Sinica and director of the Institute of History and Philology there) in 1947, Chao told Fu that Sinica should arrange for the Institute of History and Philology to purchase a sound spectrograph set, hailing it as “the revolutionary new development in experimental

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<sup>84</sup> Ralph K. Potter, George A. Kopp and Harriet C. Green, *Visible Speech* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. 1947), pp. 4-5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Chao, *Language and Symbolic Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 161-167.

phonetics.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, as Oliver E. Buckley, then the President of Bell Labs, put it in the “Foreword” to *Visible Speech*, “For the first time it has become possible to represent sound graphically so that pictures defining it fully can be printed in books.”<sup>88</sup>

Here arises a question: why are technologies such as the sound spectrograph which transforms sound into graphs and hence doing away with sound so “revolutionary” for the field of phonetics, by definition a study of sound? Bell Labs states its mission, since the time of Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone and the founder of Bell Labs, as the “improvement of the telephone and extension of its service.”<sup>89</sup> The project of visible speech is also conceived as a prosthetic one. By printing and reading sound, the deaf will be able to communicate through the sound spectrographs, not unlike how laryngaphones enable those who are challenged in their speaking capacities to converse over telephones. Aside from its prosthetic function and other practical applications such as “speech correction” and vocal music training, visible speech has a utopian origin. Alexander Melville Bell, the father of Alexander Graham Bell, happened to also have a vision for “visible speech.” Like father, like son. In 1867, Melville Bell published a book titled *Visible Speech: The Science of Universal Alphabets*. As though to commemorate its eightieth anniversary of its publication, the new 1947 *Visible Speech* introduced its predecessor as a prehistory of its own endeavor:

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<sup>87</sup> Carton 3, Bancroft Library. The Institute of History and Philology is divided into three sub-groups: history, language and archeology. For a long time, Chao was the head of the language division, which was nicknamed “Division 2.”

<sup>88</sup> *Visible Speech*, xv. It is worth pointing out, however, that there had been earlier attempts of speech-graphics representation in England, the Soviet Union, and Germany. Please see Thomas Y. Levin, “‘Tones from out of Nowhere’: Rudolph Pfenninger and the Archaeology of Synthetic Sound,” in *Grey Room*, No. 12 (Summer 2003), pp. 32-79.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

“Melville Bell called his symbols ‘visible speech’ because they specified the pronunciation of word sounds so accurately, that speech thus symbolized could be repeated by anyone else familiar with the method... Melville Bell would ask members of the audience, preferably from distant parts of the country or world, to come up and say a few words of their own choosing for him to write down. After making such records, he would call in his son who would read aloud the written sounds. After each reading the original speaker would pronounce the words so that the audience could hear that the pronunciation had been accurately imitated.”<sup>90</sup>

Not unlike Chao’s GR system, the “visible speech” that Melville Bell created was a set of alphabetic script that aims to transcribe and represent any given speech with perfection (Figure 2.7, an example of the handwritten “visible speech” in its own system). Publishing his invention shortly after Max Müller’s *Lectures on the Science of Language*, Melville Bell adopted Müller’s hypothesis. Bell treated his own system as a form of “invention” as he professed at the beginning of his *Visible Speech*, “My sole object here is to communicate the system as the basis of a new science of UNIVERSAL ALPHABETICS.”<sup>91</sup> Upon the publication of the book, the handwritten symbols of visible speech were praised as a major contribution to phonetics and to the education of the deaf. Their immediate representability and impeccable representation warranted the system of visible speech its claim to universality. One could only speculate whether the seeds of the “universal alphabets” were sown in the mind of the young Graham Bell, as he performed the feat of perfect phonetic representation during those demonstration sessions of visible speech symbols. As history

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 3. Capitalized letters are Bell’s original.

<sup>91</sup> Alexander Melville Bell, *Visible Speech: The Science of Universal Alphabets* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1867), ix.

unfolded, Graham Bell developed a deep interest in the problems of deafness, went on to invent the telephone and founded Bell Labs. Graham Bell saw in the visible speech symbols a possibility of actually making speech visible in a form that could be read.<sup>92</sup> If human agency could restore speech sound from visible symbols, then a simple reversal should enable certain mechanism to produce visible patterns from speech sound, thus forming a complementary relationship between the human and the machine. The sound spectrograph—Bell Labs’ 1941 project—realized such communicability and materialized the reversal between graphics and speech sound. While alphabetic universalism found new embodiment, it also seemed that for a moment, alphabetic phonocentrism might overcome itself with the help of the new technology.

To understand the significance of the sound spectrograph and its bearing on the question of phonocentrism framed in relation to the development of the Chinese Romanization Movement, one might do well to explore Chao’s connection with the Bell family, Bell Labs and the sound spectrograph. Back in 1916 in “The Problem of the Chinese Language,” a piece that I examined earlier, Chao was already evoking Melville Bell’s “universal alphabets,” listing it on par with Otto Jespersen’s system and the International System of Phonetic Transcription, together as the three most important western systems of “a real alphabet.”<sup>93</sup> After his first encounter with and evocation of the universal alphabet, Chao went on to create his own version of the “real alphabet” as a form of visible

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Chao, “The Problem of the Chinese Language,” pp. 506-507.



speech, i.e. the readable and singable GR. The advent and advancement of spectrograph technology further brought Chao to a historical conjunction where he witnessed how the claim of the universal alphabet became reinforced while the imagination of visible speech became materialized. If Max Müller and Melville Bell were writing to mark the onset of linguistic evolutionary thinking supported by the hierarchization of human languages, then the historical moment when Chao encountered Bell Labs and visible speech was an era of phonocentric domination buttressed by technological advancement. In a time span of a little more than eight decades, linguistic evolutionary thinking grew from nothing more than a working hypothesis of “universal alphabets” to a triumphant technological realization of visible speech embodied in the project of sound spectrograph at Bell Labs.

The shared interest in and pursuit of alphabetical universalism and visible speech aside, Chao’s contact with the Bell Labs was a concrete one. Back in the late 1939, Chao was already in contact with Dr. Robert W. King, his schoolmate from Cornell University and the then assistant vice-president at Bell Labs, for gaining permission to observe the work done on artificial speaking at Bell Labs. With the help of Hu Shi, the Chinese ambassador to the U.S. at the time, Chao was eventually recruited as a consultant in spite of his alien immigration status.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Chao did not become an American citizen until 1954. Because of his nationality, Bell Labs did not allow him full access to the labs, even with Hu Shi’s reference letter written on Chao’s behalf on March 22, 1940. Hu Shi’s reference note is quoted below. Please see Carton 5, Bancroft Library. Hu Shi’s letter reads:

“Sirs:

It gives me pleasure to introduce to you Dr. Yuen-Ren Chao who has for the last ten years been the Chief of the Division of Linguistics at the Institute of History and Linguistics in the Academia Sinica. Dr. Chao is now Visiting Professor at the Graduate Department of Linguistics at Yale University. It is his great desire to be permitted to see the special experiments in artificial speaking in your Laboratories. Dr. Chao and I are schoolmates of Dr. Robert W. King of your Laboratory. Any courtesy that you can show Dr. Chao will be gratefully appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Chao started discussing with Robert W. King the nature of his future work at Bell Labs in April 1940. As the first of such correspondences shows, neither Chao nor Bell Labs were sure what Chao should be doing at Bell, though he would be welcome to observe and explore. In a letter from April 7, 1940, Chao asked King if he could have “an opportunity to try out some time-pitch graph recording among other things” and if the labs are “stocked with books on linguistics.”<sup>95</sup>

King wrote back on May 14, 1940, setting the tone of the collaboration:

“As to the activities which you might undertake, our general thought was simply this. You have had such a broad background in the study of phonetics and speech that if you were to take the time just to browse around in some detail amongst the items of equipment which Dudley and some of the others have and familiarize yourself with their problems, then something of value would almost inevitably turn up although no one in advance would have the ghost of an idea as to what it might be. I am sure you will find this group of men a very agreeable one to be in contact with and they in turn, are enthusiastic about comparing notes with you.”<sup>96</sup>

Chao served in the capacity as a consultant at Bell until 1947, the year when Bell Labs published *Visible Speech* making public its sound spectrograph project. Though there is no document to be found to exactly when Chao actually started working at Bell Labs and what his project was if any, it is certain that the consultant position started before June 1944 when Oliver Buckley the President of Bell Labs wrote to Chao announcing that “The Lab hereby agree [sic] to retain you as a consultant working independently or jointly with employees of the Lab, in such studies of characteristics of speech.”<sup>97</sup> As the spectrograph project started in early 1941, Chao’s time at Bell Labs

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Hu Shih”

<sup>95</sup> Carton 5, Bancroft Library.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> *Zhao Yuanren Nianpu*, 272.

overlapped with the research and development of sound spectrograph. Though Chao was not designated directly as part of the spectrograph project given its military nature, he did observe in close proximity the development of the new technology, engaged with other lab personnel such as Ralph Potter who was directly responsible for the spectrograph project and finished his assignment at Bell Labs with a report on visible speech.<sup>98</sup> With the absence of Chao's report on visible speech for Bell Labs, an examination of Chao's manuscript provides us with outlines for two talks given by Chao in 1947 and 1951, both on the sound spectrograph, and informs us of Chao's understanding of the use of visible speech.<sup>99</sup>

The first talk given to the U. C. Linguistic Group on December 10, 1947 entitled "The Visible Speech Spectrograph" focused mostly on its working mechanism. The second talk, "The Sound Spectrograph," was delivered on the Berkeley campus on June 26, 1951 and gave specific examples of its applications in speech analysis. The significance of the sound spectrograph, in Chao's appraisal, lay in the fact that it revolutionized speech representability. In the "pre-spectrograph" era, meaning of energy distribution of speech frequencies is an abstraction. The advent of the spectrograph, however, substituted the one-way correspondence from sound waves to ears with a visual portrayal of speech, which was in essence a two-way correspondence between the visual and the acoustic. The added dimension of the visual representation effectively

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<sup>98</sup> Though I was unable to locate Chao's actual report on visible speech, it is indicated in his letter to Buckley on June 8 1947 that his report on visible speech would be delayed. See Chao's letter to Buckley, June 8, 1947 Carton 3, Bancroft Library. More research has to be done in regard to the specifics of Chao's activities at Bell Labs, but I suspect that Chao's side-project called "the legible speech," which was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, grew out of Chao's relationship with Bell Labs.

<sup>99</sup> For both talks outlines, please see Carton 25, Folder "Lectures Special," Bancroft Library.

undermined the monopoly of sound over meaning. As Chao showed with a few selected spectrographic images (Figure 2.8), the spectrograph—excellent in its portrayal of vowels and sonorant consonants such as l, m, and n—could represent sound speech with minimum human mediation and with maximum mechanical accuracy. With adequate training, one could for the first time in human history read and understand the sound without actually submitting oneself to hearing the sound.

Granted, neither Chao nor Bell Labs viewed the spectrograph as a means of mass education in the campaign against illiteracy; nor did they conceive of the development of the spectrograph as a challenge to the concept of phonocentrism. But to uphold the spectrographic visible speech as an alternative to sound speech, which embodied the dream of alphabetic universalism, was wrongheaded in multiple ways. It did not seem to have occurred to Chao and Bell Labs that for the scientifically visible speech to deliver meaning, a certain level of symbol literacy in the spectrographic language would be required. Such symbol literacy would be inevitably rooted in a specific language, though such specificity seemed irrelevant on a theoretical level of abstraction. An English spectrographic reader would not be able to decipher a spectrograph recorded in Japanese and vice versa. The seemingly neutral and universal image of speech sound therefore would have to confront its linguistic particularity before reaching out to answer the call of universalism. Much more importantly, the perfect representability of the spectrograph belied a deconstructive irony. Inasmuch as the Roman alphabet prided itself in the accurate representation of sound speech, the advent of the spectrograph drove the question of alphabetic universalism home. The spectrographic image, with its neutrality and scientificity, made all other transcribing systems inferior—all alphabets included. In

comparison to the frequency color-block of the spectrograph, the so-called common script was overly particular, scientifically insufficient and hence far from universal. In an unexpected way, the quest of “universal alphabets” as Melville Bell put it, turned the belief of the alphabetic universalism on its head. In a strange manner, the supremacy of sound retained, however problematically, while the claim to alphabetic universalism fell apart.



Figure 2.1: *New Phonographs of the National Language* (1924). Photo courtesy of the Chung Chi College Elizabeth Luce Moore Library, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

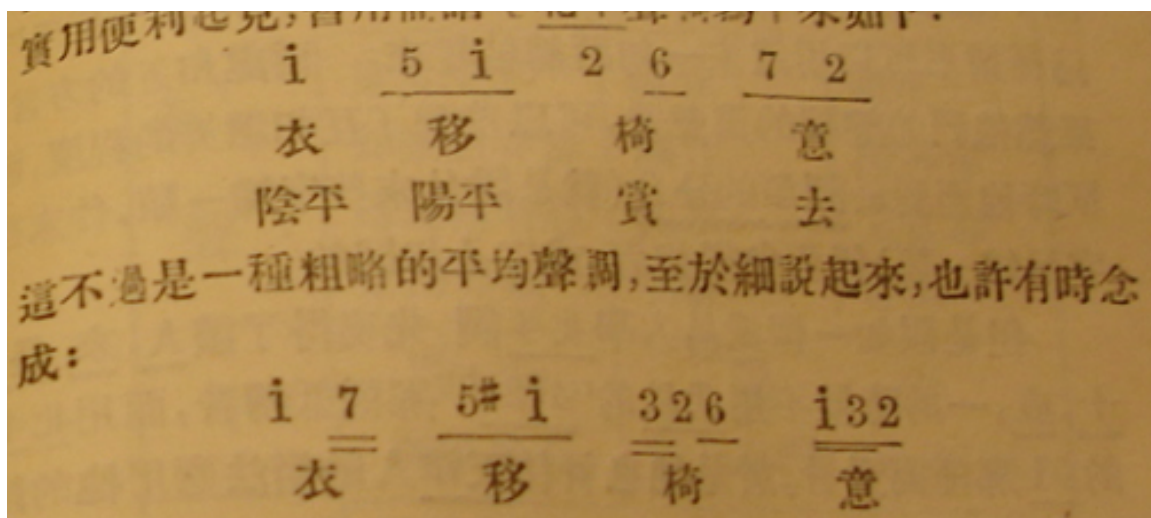


Figure 2.2: Example of “Speech Melody,” four tones of *yi*, *Last Five Minutes*, 121.

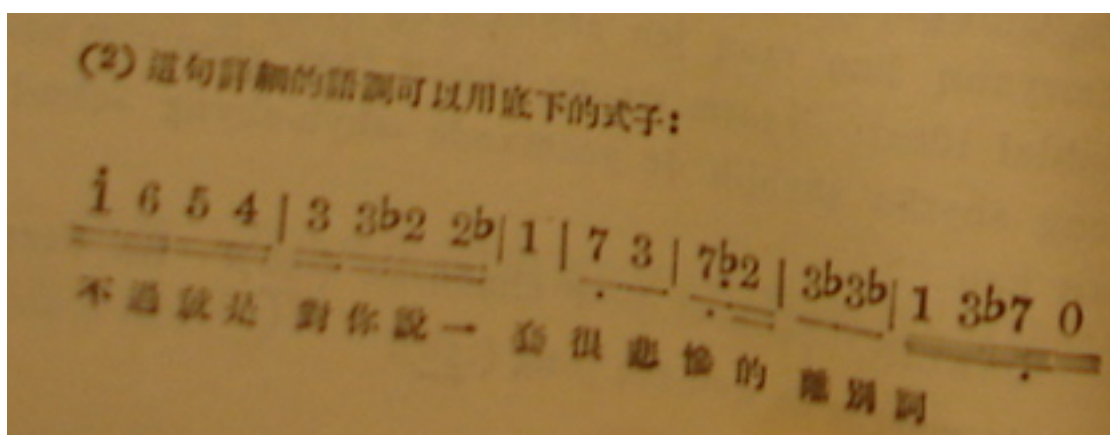


Figure 2.3: Ziffersystem notation of “不過就是對你說一套很悲慘的離別詞,” *Last Five Minutes*, 102.

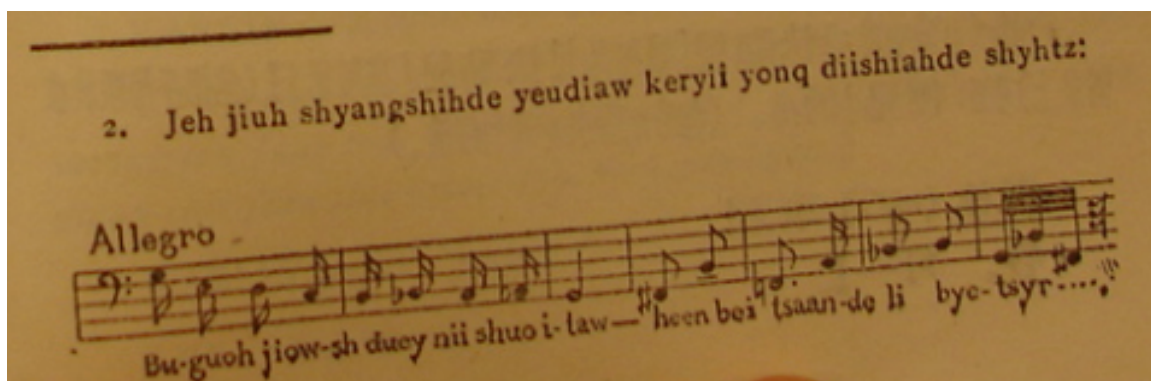


Figure 2.4: Five-line music staff notation of the same sentence in the GR Drama Score. *Last Five Minutes*, 103.

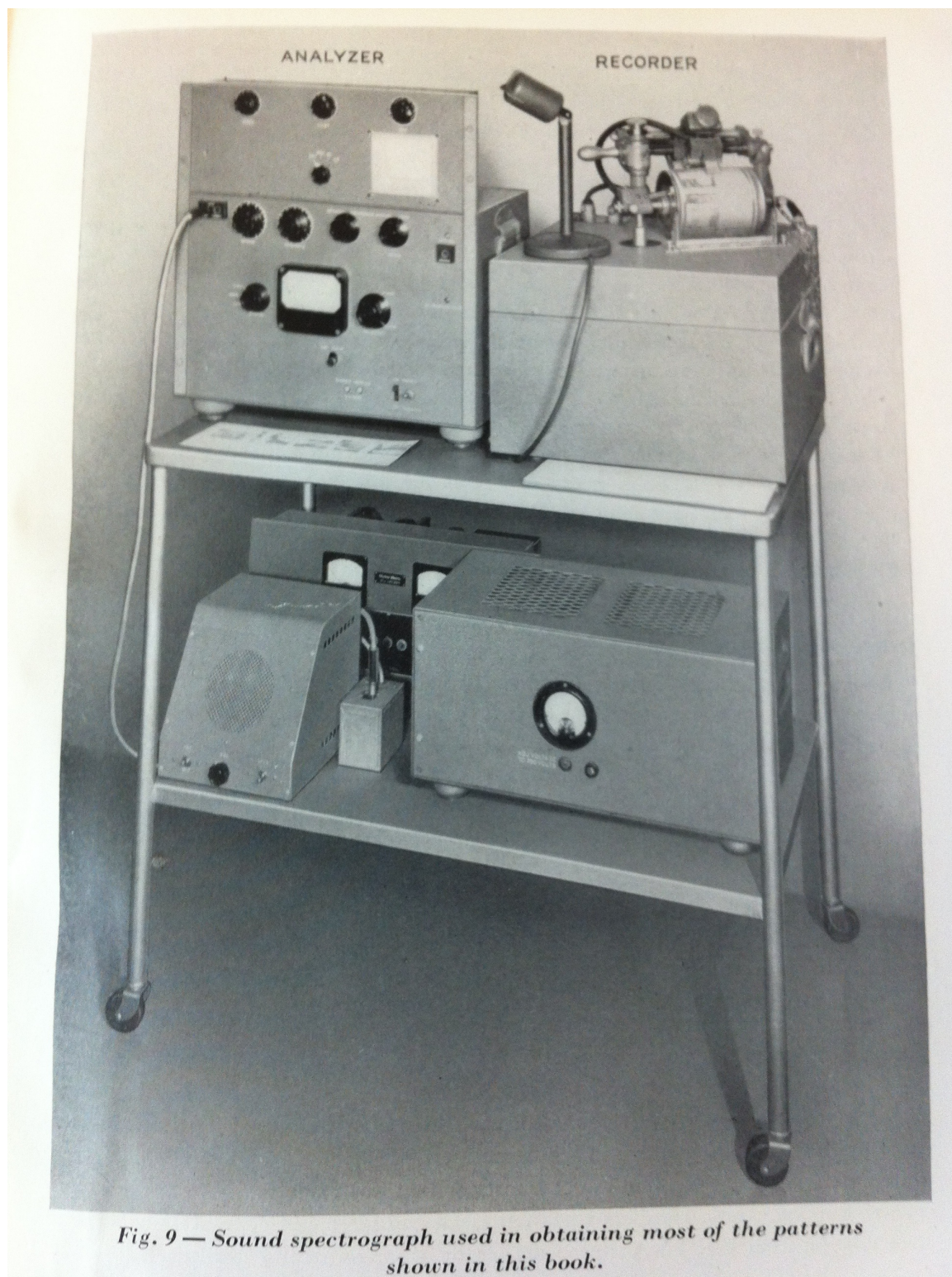
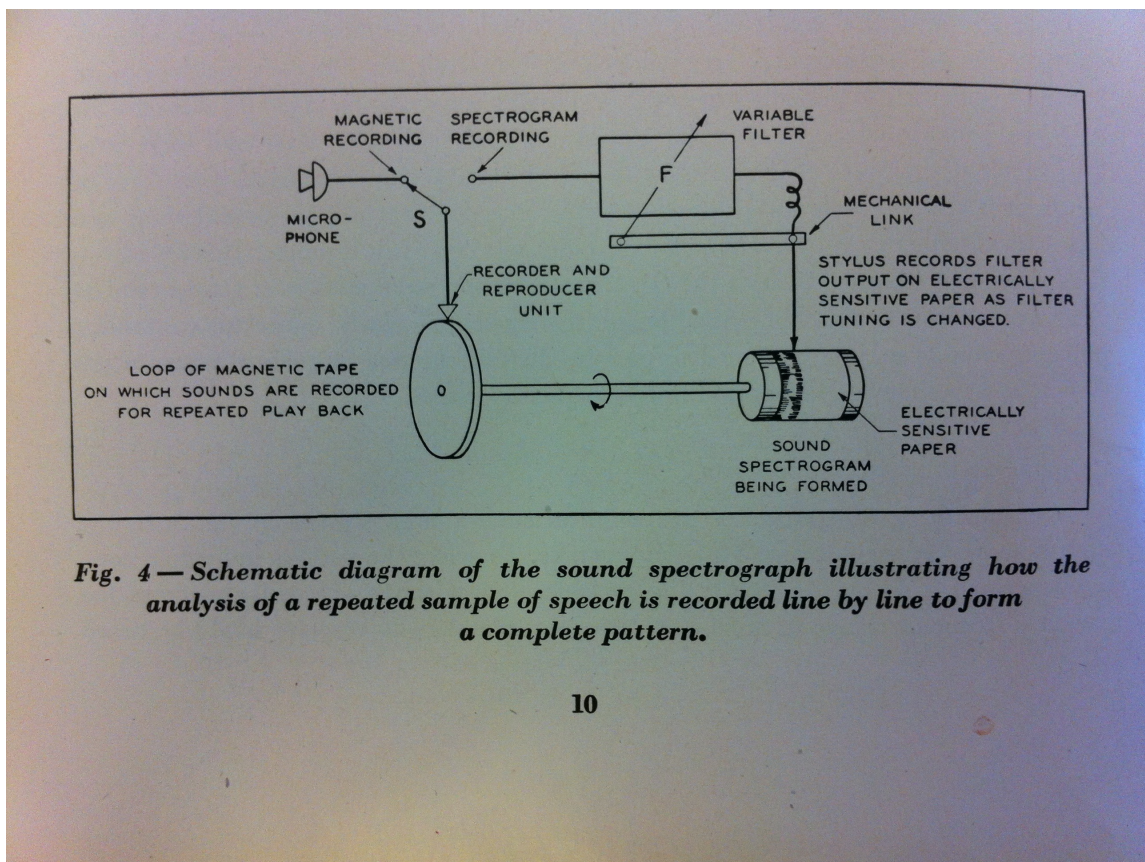


Figure 2.5: Sound Spectrograph Machine, *Visible Speech* (1947).





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Figure 2.6: Working mechanism of the sound spectrograph, *Visible Speech*, 10.

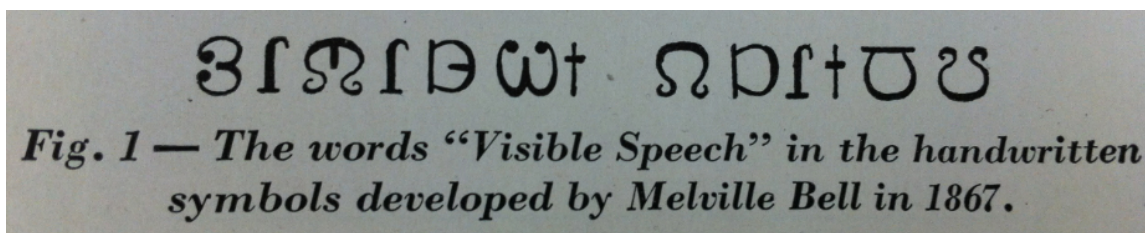


Figure 2.7: "Visible Speech" in the Universal Alphabetics by A. M. Bell, *Visible Speech*, 3.

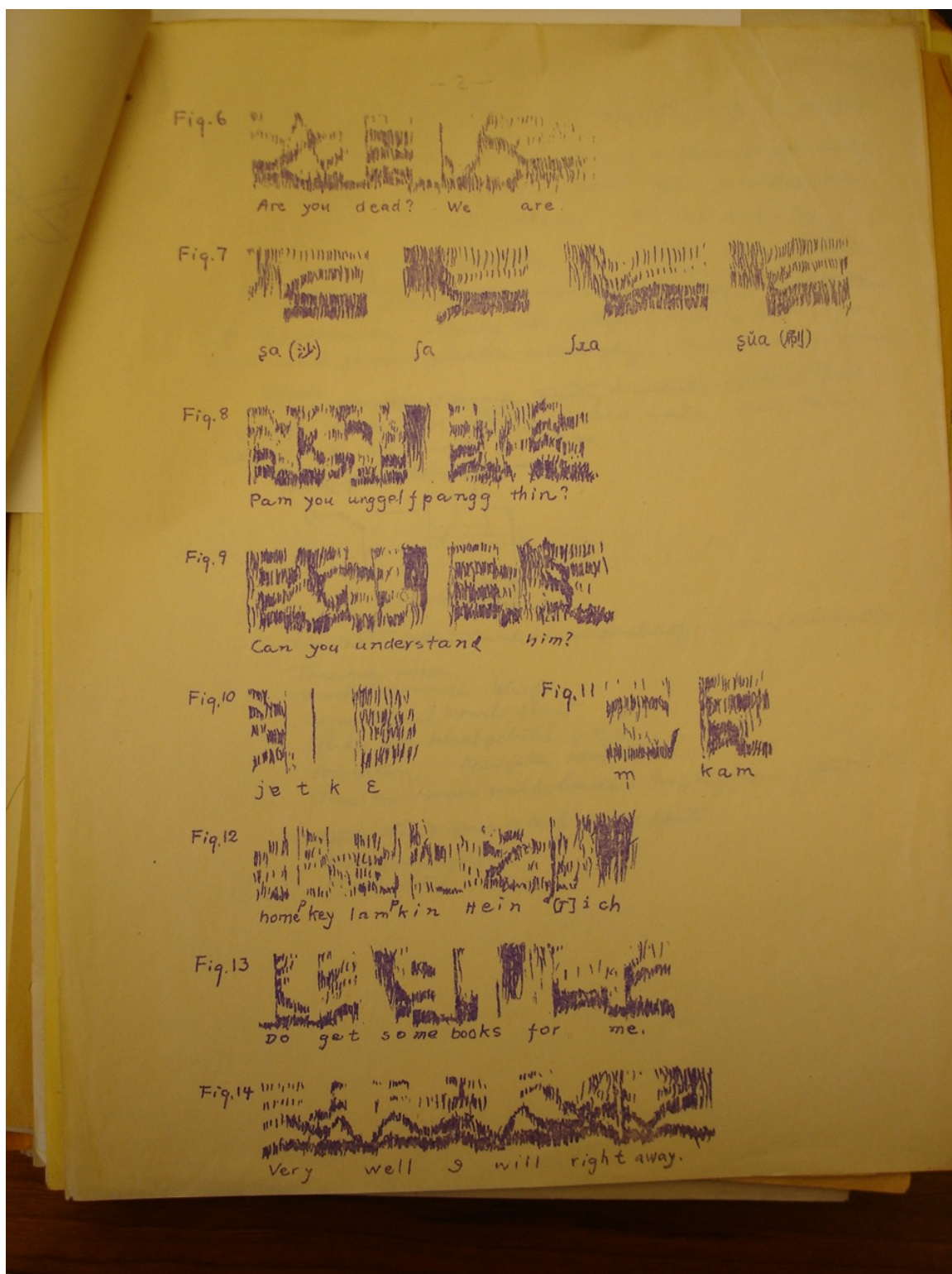


Fig. 2.8: Spectrographic images from Chao's lecture notes, "Yuen Ren Chao papers, 1901-1982," Carton 25, Bancroft Library.

## CHAPTER 3

**Mimetic Writing and The Chinese Latinization Movement**

In December 1935, the Shanghai Chinese Latinization Research Society 上海中文拉丁化研究會 issued a proclamation entitled “Our Opinion on the Promotion of the New Script (*Sin Wenz*).”<sup>1</sup> It was a public letter in support of the Chinese Latinization Movement and its proud product, the so-called “*Sin Wenz*.” Written in the Latin script, “*Sin Wenz*” 新文字 literally meant in its own system the “new script.” This new Latinization scheme strove to eradicate of the old script of Chinese characters and implement a new alphabetic Chinese writing system. It purported, on the eve of the full outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, to answer the urgent call of “educating the people” and saving China at a moment of national “life and death.”<sup>2</sup> As many as six hundred and eighty-eight leading Chinese writers, scholars, artists, and activists signed off on this public letter. Among them were educators such as Cai Yuanpei and Li Gongpu, politicians like Sun Ke and Liu Yazhi, as well as an array of writers such as Mao Dun, Guo Moruo, Ba Jin, Ye Shengtao, Tao Xingzhi, Xiao Hong, and last but not least Lu Xun,

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<sup>1</sup> “Women duiyu tuixing xinwenzi de yijian” 我們對於推行新文字的意見(Our Opinion on the Promotion of *Sin Wenz*), in *Zhungguo wenz latinxua wenxian* 中国文字拉丁化文献 (Documents of the Latinization of the Chinese Script) (Shanghai: Latinxua chubanshe, 1940), pp. 153-157. The “latinization” of the book title and its publication information is in the original form. I preserve the original spelling of the primary sources from the Latinization movement if available. Otherwise I use *pinyin*. For instance, I keep “Latinxua” if the primary source is so spelled. Otherwise, I use the *pinyin* form “Ladinghua” or the English spelling “Latinization” for uniformity and standardization.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

the foremost modern Chinese writer who produced arguably the best modern Chinese prose and fiction written in characters.<sup>3</sup>

The Latinization Movement harnessed expansive support far beyond Shanghai. Numerous Latinization Research Societies sprang up in Beijing, Shanxi, Guangdong, and Guangxi, while several overseas Chinese schools adopted *Sin Wenz* for instruction in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Lyon, and San Francisco.<sup>4</sup> Although widely popular and renewing energy for the script revolution as a national and international campaign, the Latinization Movement also stirred up controversies as tension grew between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Guomindang (GMD) Nationalist government. The Latinization Movement—originating in the Soviet Union and largely associated with the CCP—was banned as a dissident movement by the GMD between January 1936 and May 1938.<sup>5</sup> Political schism aside, the Latinization Movement did create for itself, as testified by the public letter, a polarizing rhetoric against the Romanization Movement endorsed by the GMD. This “new” Latinized Chinese script vouched for the definitive abolishment of Chinese characters and thus claimed its superiority over all schemes of Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> It bears pointing out that Cai Yuanpei also supported the Chinese Romanization Movement. Though the antagonism between the Chinese Romanization and Latinization Movements was at its height, leading figures from the two camps were contemplating the possibility of a united front against the pending outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. A selection of signatures follow the public letter, *ibid.*, 157.

<sup>4</sup> For the development of the Chinese Latinization Movement, please refer to Ni Haishu, “*Latinxua Sin Wenz Yndong*” *de Shi-mo he Biannian Jishi* 拉丁化新文字運動的始末和編年紀事 (The Beginning and End of the Chinese Latinization Movement and Its Chronology) (Shanghai: Zhishi Chubanshe, 1987), pp. 1-53; Ni Haishu eds., *Zhongguo Yunwen de Xinsheng: Latinxua Zhungguoz Yndung 20 Nian Lunwenzi* 中國語文的新生：拉丁化中國字運動二十年論文集 (The New Life of Chinese: Anthology of the Chinese Latinization Movement on its Twentieth Anniversary) (Shanghai: Shidai Chubanshe, 1949), pp. 57-77.

<sup>5</sup> The Nationalist Government lifted the ban of the Latinization Movement in May 1938 after the CCP and the GMD reached the consensus on the Second United Front against the Japanese invasion. Latinization was only permissible on the condition that it remained a “pure academic pursuit” or “an instrument of social mobilization” and should not “impede or distract the anti-Japanese forces.” See Ni Haishu, “*Latinxua Sin Wenz Yndong*” *de Shi-mo he Biannian Jishi*, 15, 18.

alphabetization that came before it – *Gwoyeu Romatzyh* (GR) included. The issue of script and writing system loomed so large that it determined the scale and the speed of mass mobilization, upon which national defense became contingent. Drawing on the common nature of mediality, the public letter analogized between different writing systems and technologies of transportation. If the characters were the backward “wheelbarrow” 獨輪車 to be revolutionized, then the National Language Romanization GR was no more than an outmoded “steamboat” 火輪船, while *Sin Wenz* was the ultimate “airplane” 飛機 to reach the other shore of “national salvation.”<sup>6</sup> The Latinization Movement, therefore, was envisioned to be the most technologically advanced medium for mass education, political mobilization, and national salvation at a time of unprecedented crisis.

Before accounting for the differences that substantiated the antagonism between the Romanization and Latinization movements, one must pause and contemplate the mediatory and technological language shared by both alphabetizing campaigns. The proclamatory letter by the Latinization Movement referenced at the beginning of the chapter makes these commonalities especially clear. Both movements, portrayed as technologies to awaken China and mobilize its people, were preoccupied with improving the efficiency of mimetic representation; to wit, the spoken should more closely match the realm of the written. Therefore, both GR and *Sin Wenz*, were embodiments of “phonetic mimesis”—one of the two forms of what I have termed “mimetic writing”—dedicated to a series of related tasks such as eradicating the written characters, channeling real speech, and delivering the voices of the people. Incidentally, the unfolding events of

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<sup>6</sup> *Zhungguo wenz latinxua wenxian*, 155.

the Latinization Movement also gave form to the second category of “mimetic writing”—what I call “literary mimesis”—in the tradition of critical realism and in relation to proletarian culture and literature in the 1930s. I argue that the heretofore much eclipsed movement of Chinese Latinization is in fact an essential linchpin that simultaneously connects the script revolution, language reform, literary productions, as well as national and international politics in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s.

This chapter, devoted to the Chinese Latinization Movement, takes the prism of “mimetic writing” and brings to light the historical interconnections and contradictions between script and literary revolutions. I begin by illustrating the differences between the two phonetic mimesis systems of Romanization and Latinization in terms of their technical details, operational methods, and ideological investment. These differences, anchored deeply in their respective conceptualization and consideration of dialects,<sup>7</sup> lead us to further examine the genealogy of the alphabetization of dialects. I trace the origin of this mimetic writing of dialects to three sources: 1) the missionary productions of what I call the “alphabetic dialect Bible” since the mid-nineteenth century; 2) the provenance of Chinese dialectology and the ensuing dialect survey in the 1920s; 3) the origin of the Latinization Movement in the Soviet Union from the late 1920s onward. Connecting the

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<sup>7</sup> I reserve the term dialect to translate 方言 (*fangyan*) as the term was used historically. However, I should also note that the term 方言 (*fangyan*) could be deployed to signify “language,” “dialect,” and “patois” (spoken dialect) all at once in the Chinese context. According to Einar Haugen, while “language” denotes linguistic standardization and “dialect” its local variation, further distinctions within “dialect” should be made. In the original Greek sense, dialects were understood as written varieties of Greek, which were “based on spoken dialects of the regions whose names they bore.” Later in the French tradition, “patois” came into use to mark the distinction between written dialects and spoken dialects, which did not have corresponding written forms. Please see, Einar Haugen, “Dialect, Language, Nation,” in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Aug., 1966), pp. 922-935. The taxonomical difficulty of the Chinese *fangyan* was a result of its conceptual ambiguity that dappled through all three concepts of language, dialect and patois. In spite of such taxonomical nebula, Robert Ramsey and Jerry Norman, among others, have ventured to classify Chinese “dialect.” Please see S. Robert Ramsey, *The Languages of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

missing links amongst the Latinization Movement in general, the Chinese Latinization Movement, the Proletkult (Пролеткульт, proletarian culture), as well as the Third Literary Revolution,<sup>8</sup> I delineate the natural kinship—both affinity and tension—between the Chinese Latinization Movement and the Chinese literary revolution in the 1930s. Such kinship was most clearly manifested when the proponents of the Latinization Movement took the principles of Latinization and Proletkult into the realm of literary writing. Taking Xu Dishan and his novella “Yu Guan 玉官” as an example, I examine the intertwinement of gender, literacy, orality, and the limits of realism through the figures of a Bible Woman and her “alphabetic dialect Bible,” bringing these issues to bear on the struggle of the script and literary revolutions. The Chinese Latinization Movement, redefined in terms of phonetic and literary mimesis embodied in a series of seemingly disparate historical events and literary texts, affords us a rare opportunity to reflect on modern Chinese writing and writing system: its form, its medium, and its ultimate goals of achieving national salvation through the induction of modernity.

### **Phonetic Mimesis: *Sin Wenz* v.s. GR**

In what was perhaps the most comprehensive interview Chao Yuen Ren gave in his lifetime, Chao shed light on why the GMD “disapproved of” the Latinization Movement. At the interviewer’s prompting, Chao – the father of GR explained that the disapproval was partly because of Latinization’s affiliation with the Soviet Union, and

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<sup>8</sup> The Third Literary Revolution referred to the Massification Movement, the development of proletarian literature, and revolutionary literature in the 1930s and the 1940s. It was coined by Qu Qiubai in relation to the first and second literary revolutions – the late imperial period and the May Fourth period respectively. For Qu’s definition, see his “Zai lun dazhong wenyi da Zhijing” 再論大眾文藝答止敬 (More on Mass Literature, A Reply to Zhijing), in *Qu Qiubai Wenji* 瞿秋白文集 (The Collected Works of Qu Qiubai) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1953), Vol. 2, pp. 907-908.

partly because the GMD “had already recognized GR as the official form.”<sup>9</sup> Aside from confirming the political antagonism the Nationalists and Communists, and asserting GR’s official status as the “Second Form of National Alphabet,” Chao refused to disclose any further knowledge of the Latinization Movement and the contention between his brainchild and *Sin Wenz*. When asked if he had discussions with the *Sin Wenz* proponents such as Qu Qiubai, the chief theoretician of the Latinization Movement, Chao informed us “not in detail, no; I never had long discussions with him.”<sup>10</sup> Though we could only speculate the nature and content of these neither detailed nor long discussions, conversations and exchange did take place between Chao and Qu, and the two antagonizing groups.

In fact, Chao was one of the first outside of the initial Latinization coterie to take an interest in the movement<sup>11</sup> and was the first amongst the Romanization camp to introduce *Sin Wenz* to the Chinese readers. In a 1934 blurb written for *The National Language Weekly* entitled “Regarding the Latinization of Chinese in the Soviet Union,”

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<sup>9</sup> The interview was conducted in English by Rosemary Levenson in 1977. The quotes from the interview are in their English original. “Yuen Ren Chao, Chinese Linguist, Phonologist, Composer and Author,” in *Zhao Yuanren Quanji* 趙元任全集 (The Complete Works of Zhao Yuanren) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2007), Vol. 16, 120.

<sup>10</sup> *Zhao Yuanren Quanji*, Vol. 16, 120. This is the only indication to my knowledge of the interaction between the two groups.

<sup>11</sup> The first Chinese article on *Sin Wenz* was “Su’e chenggong zhi zhongguoyu dalingwen” 蘇俄成功之中國語拉丁文 (The Successful Latinized Script of the Chinese Language in the Soviet Union), in *Sihai Magazine* 四海雜誌 (The Four Seas Magazine), Vol. 3, No. 6, 1932. The second was Jiao Feng 焦風 (penname of Fang Shanjing 方善境), “Zhongguoyu shufa zhi ladinghua” 中國語書法之拉丁化 (The Latinized Orthography of the Chinese Language) in *Guoji meiji wenxuan* 國際每日文選 (The International Daily Digest), No. 12, 1933. The article was a translation done of the Esperantist Jiao Feng of the Latinization proponent Xiao San’s (also known as Emi Siao) work. For the convergence of the Esperantists and Latinizationists, please see Ye Laishi 葉籟士, “Huiyi yulian: sanshi niandai de shijieyu he xinwenzi yundong” 回憶語聯：三十年代的世界語和新文字運動 (Remembering ĈPEU: The Esperanto Movement and the New Script Movement in the 1930s), in *Xin wenxue shiliao* 新文學史料 (Historical Sources of New Literature), No. 2, 1982. For the history of the introduction and initial frustration of the Latinization Movement, please see Ni Haishu, “*Latinxua Sin Wenz Yndong*” de Shi-mo he Biannian Jishi, pp. 5-6.



Chao reported on a primer brought back from Vladivostok and written in *Sin Wenz*, outlined its phonological and tonal plans, and summarily announced it as “a textbook used by the Russians to teach Chinese Romanization.”<sup>12</sup> Chao concluded the blurb with an official stamp of “The Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language,” without proffering further judgment on the matter. To him and the rest of the committee, *Sin Wenz* was but one of the many competing schemes of alphabetizing Chinese that had to take a back seat when GR was the officially endorsed form. If Chao found it unnecessary to voice his discontent with *Sin Wenz* and its less than perfect representation of time and pitch in comparison to his own GR, Qu Qiubai and the rest of the Latinization group did not shun away from open criticism of GR and the Romanization Movement in general.

On July 24, 1931, Qu Qiubai wrote an article targeting GR in specific, entitled “A GR Chinese Script or a Gross Chinese Script” 羅馬字的中國文還是肉麻字的中國文. Playing on the orthography of “Roma,” which in the GR system could be used to denote the homophones of both “Roman” and “gross” in the national pronunciation, Qu launched a critique of the Romanized National Alphabet, its creator Chao Yuen Ren, as well as the Chinese Romanization Movement at large. Qu Qiubai, one of the most talented and politically engaged literary figures in twentieth century China, was an expert and veteran translator of Russian literature, a pioneer of modern Chinese reportage writing, as well as a founding member of the Department of Sociology at Shanghai University – the first sociology department in China. Politically active, Qu was a member

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<sup>12</sup> This blurb published in the “Correspondence” section in the *Guoyu Zhoukan* was originally written by Chao in GR and was translated by the journal editor. Chao Yuen Ren, “Guanyu su’e de ladinghua zhongguoyu” 关于苏俄的拉丁化中国语 (Regarding the Latinization of Chinese in the Soviet Union), in *Guoyu Zhoukan* 國語週刊 (The National Language Weekly), no. 139, 1934.

of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party and served twice as the chairman of the CCP. While Qu's multiple roles as politician, writer, translator, and even a seal-carving artist were well documented, his participation and leadership in the Chinese Latinization Movement was largely forgotten.

In this 1931 article, Qu first affirms the importance of eradicating Chinese characters and adopting an alphabetic script, and then proceeds to “critique the pitfalls of GR.”<sup>13</sup> Qu quotes from Chao's GR primer entitled *A Conversational Drama Score in GR: The Last Five Minutes*, the main tenets of GR.<sup>14</sup> The contribution of GR together with its drama score, more than the official endorsement as the Second Form of National Alphabet, lies in the fact that it is arguably the first Chinese alphabet capable of eliminating characters, despite its own technical difficulty and intricacy. For Qu, though GR could theoretically replace characters, it fails across the board as a mimetic transcription system in its choices of vowels, consonants and tonal expression. In his objection to GR's arrangement of consonants, Qu writes:

趙元任式的國語羅馬字裡面的子音之中，單純子音(b, p, d, t 等)是沒有問題。至於複合子音(tz=ㄗ, ts=ㄘ, j=ㄐ, ch=ㄑ, sh=ㄒ),<sup>15</sup> 那就太拘泥於發音學的學理和英文的習慣了。因此，j (ㄐ)，ch (ㄑ)，sh (ㄒ)，tz (ㄗ)，ts (ㄘ) 等的配合是很不整齊，很沒有系統的。例如 ts (ㄘ)，尤其是 tz (ㄗ)，是中國很常用的音，雖然這些子音在音韻學的學理上是複合的（是 t+z 和 t+s 的混合音），可是在中國字母表裡卻可以各自採取一個羅馬字母來表明他們。字母表是預備幾萬萬人用的，不必完全合於學院式的原理……中國普通話的讀音是採取北方音，北方音之中捲舌的四個字音：ㄐ，ㄑ，ㄒ，ㄖ，是非常之

<sup>13</sup> Qu Qiubai, “Luomazi de zhongguowen haishi roumazi de zhongguowen” 羅馬字的中國文還是肉麻字的中國文 (A GR Chinese Script or a Gross Chinese Script), in *Qu Qiubai Wenjin* (1953), Vol. 2, 662.

<sup>14</sup> For Chao's original formulation, see Chao Yuen Ren, *Last Five Minutes* 最後五分鐘 (Zuihou wufenzhong) (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1929), pp. 42-43.

<sup>15</sup> ㄗ, ㄘ, ㄐ, ㄑ, ㄒ, and ㄖ are all consonants written in the form of the National Alphabet.

多——這是北方民族的影響，中國古音裡面是沒有的，中國南方長江流域，尤其是江浙，以至於福建廣東，這種捲舌音也是很發達的，甚至於完全沒有的。為着要使普通話裡面這種字音，對於南方人更加容易學起見，為着要使他們即使不能夠完全學得會，可是勉強可以聽得懂起見，最好編成下列的系統：

z 不捲舌的	zh (ㄓ) 捲舌的
c 不捲舌的	ch (ㄔ) 捲舌的
s 不捲舌的	sh (ㄕ) 捲舌的
j 不捲舌的	jh (ㄑ) 捲舌的..... <sup>16</sup>

In Chao's GR system, the simple consonants of 'b, p, d, t' stand without a question. As for the compound consonants of "(tz=ㄗ, ts=ㄘ, j=ㄐ, ch=ㄑ, sh=ㄒ)", they fall too much into the constraints of phonetic rules or to the habits of English speakers. Therefore, the layout of j (ㄐ), ch (ㄑ), sh (ㄒ), tz (ㄗ), ts (ㄘ) is unkempt and nonsystematic. Take the sounds of ts (ㄘ) and tz (ㄗ) for an example. Though phonologically speaking these sounds are compound consonants (combination of t+z and t+s), such common consonants in China should be represented in the alphabet using but one Roman letter. The alphabet is meant for the use of millions of people and does not need to comply with scholarly rules ... The Chinese common speech (*putonghua*) adopts the northern pronunciation, which is full of the sounds of ㄐ, ㄑ, ㄒ, ㄑ, bearing the influence from (the languages spoken by) the northern ethnicities. In the ancient Chinese pronunciation, there were no such retroflex sounds. Regions of the Yangtze River—especially the provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu, or even Fujian and Guangdong Provinces—have little or no retroflex sounds. In order for the southerners to be more adept in learning the retroflex sounds, or, if they cannot master them, to understand these sounds in a superficially cognitive fashion, it would be better arranged in the following categories:

z non-retroflex	zh retroflex
c non-retroflex	ch retroflex
s non-retroflex	sh retroflex
j non-retroflex	jh retroflex...

Qu's objection to Chao's formulation of consonants is two-fold. For one, Chao's rigorous portrayal of compound consonants runs the risk of turning into an overly academic endeavor over-equipped for adoption by a larger audience. It seems to Qu

<sup>16</sup> Qu, "A GR Chinese Script or a Gross Chinese Script," pp. 664-665.

almost pedantic that one should keep both “tz” and “z” or “ts” and “s” when a simple pair of “z” and “s” will suffice. For another, Qu points to the regional differences of dialects, which foregrounds his own project of *Sin Wenz*. GR, after its official endorsement, narrowed its scope of representation to only the new national pronunciation based on Pekingese, therefore turning against its own theoretical promise as a working mimetic medium to capture all dialect speech. As a result, while the GR consonants more often than not fail to register the nuances and mutations of regional differences, they also at times impose dialectal idiosyncrasies of the north onto other regions of the country. Qu argues, therefore, that though it might be important to mark the basic differences of retroflex and non-retroflex consonants extant only in northern dialects, it has to be done in a succinct manner while tolerating partial mastery of retroflex consonants on the part of southerners. Qu goes on to pick on two single vowels in GR, “e” and “u,” as well as diphthongs such as “au” and “ai,” to argue for a more systemic and simplified representation of these vowels. The distinction between diphthongs of “au” and “ao” should be eliminated, keeping only “ao;” while the “ai” and “ae” sounds should also be combined and reserve only the spelling of “ae.”<sup>17</sup> Qu establishes his grounds by cautioning against excessive and pedantic technicality on the one hand, and calling for overdue respect for the incommensurability amongst dialects on the other.

Qu then raises his first formal objection to GR, i.e., the tonal expression. In GR, Chao Yuen Ren designed an elaborate tonal system using no diacritical marks but only letters to mark the four tones of the national pronunciation based on the Beijing dialect. GR’s “tone-in-letter” system distinguished among the four tones of the national

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 670.

pronunciation by adding an r for the second tone, a diphthong for the third, and an ending consonant to mark the fourth.<sup>18</sup> Chao even went so far to adopt a five-line music staff and a Ziffersystem to execute full control in representing the combination of time and pitch of any given speech. GR, in its pure alphabetic form and its enhanced format of musical notation, was thus put on par with any other alphabetic writing system in its perfect representability of phonetic values. In fact, Chao was confident that the transcription system of GR would be more than adequate to transcribe all the other less phonetically accurate alphabetic languages such as English and French. Chao therefore stakes, through GR, a Chinese claim of alphabetic universalism.

Affirming GR's value, especially the GR drama score, as "meticulous research,"

Qu nonetheless criticizes Chao's "tone-in-letter" approach:

用字母，甚至於用五線譜來表示聲調，只是學院裡研究音韻學的功效，不能夠寫到通常的文字裡面，去給幾萬萬人應用……因此，我們主張聲調的拼法是不需要的。<sup>19</sup>

To use the alphabet or even a music staff to mark tones is no more than an academic endeavor of phonetics studies. It can neither be used to write everyday prose, nor be adopted by millions of people... Therefore, we maintain that expressions of tonal variations are not necessary.

As precluded by his discontent with Chao's choice of consonants, Qu's argument against tonal variation in spelling is also anchored in his consideration of dialect and oral speech. Given that the four tones of Pekingese are a reduction from most dialects—seven or eight tones in Wu dialects, nine tones in Cantonese, and up to ten tones in several Guangxi dialects—and that formal tonal relations do not obtain in the real-time flow of speech, it

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 663-664, quoting from Chao, *The Last Five Minutes*. I have a more detailed discussion of GR's tonal spelling plan in Chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 671.

is far from necessary to indicate tonal values dogmatically with diacritics. Further, it is more cumbersome to force a “tone-in-letter” method that is strenuous to learn in the first place. Taking more seriously the pragmatics of speaking and the vast variety of dialects, Qu argues that “the orthography of the New Chinese Script 新中國字 should be simplified to the maximum degree.”<sup>20</sup> If the Chinese script were to be liberated from the shackles of characters, then the new script, in its orthography and tonal arrangement, cannot but adopt a liberal approach. In his rules for the tonal expression of the New Script, Qu stipulates: “The range of words to which we apply rules of tonal variation should be very limited and should follow the general principle of ‘if it can be avoided, then do not apply.’”<sup>21</sup> In fact, from 1931 to 1932, different versions of the “New Script” increasingly simplified their spelling plans in terms of tonal variations. When the final *Draft of The New Chinese Script* 新中國文草案 came out in December 1932, all expressions of tonal variations and distinctions were eliminated.

Settling the difference regarding tonal expression, Qu goes on to question the hegemony of Pekingese and GR’s endorsement thereof.

既然採用拼音制度，那麼，用什麼一種讀音做標準呢？趙元任式的國語羅馬字式根據注音字母用北京音做標準的，叫做什麼「標準國音」……一切五方雜處的地方並不是大多數能夠說道地的北京話……這種情況之下，如果要拼法完全照著北京的讀音，北京的腔調，這對於極大多數的人是要感覺到十二分的困難的。所以我們認為還是用注音字母的第一時期（一九二五年以前）所審定的讀音做標準，比較的好些。<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Qu’s Chinese original is: “採用「變聲」拼法的範圍應當是很小的，以「可以不用就不用」為原則。” Ibid, 679.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 673.

Now that we are using an alphabetic script, which speech sound should be the standard for transcription? Chao Yuen Ren's GR, in accordance with the National Alphabet, adopts Pekingese, regarding it as the so-called 'standard national pronunciation...' In places where people from all over the country coexist, pure Pekingese is a rarity... Under these circumstances, if pure Pekingese spelling and pronunciation are forced upon people, the majority of them will probably feel extremely inconvenienced. Therefore we argue that it is better to adopt the pre-1925 national pronunciation for standardization.

What Qu was referring to was the 1923 adoption of the new Pekingese pronunciation by the Committee on the Unification of National Language. This took place as a result of the debate between the old and new national pronunciations. As soon as the old national pronunciation—the synthetic and dialect-eclectic “High Chinese”—was made official by the Nationalist Government in 1913, tensions started brooding between the national pronunciation (*guoyin*) and the Pekingese pronunciation (*jingyin*). Between 1920 and 1921, the debate climaxed when the journal *Xuedeng* 學燈 published a series of polemical exchanges between the group in support of Pekingese such as Zhang Shiyi 張士一 and the group loyal to the old national pronunciation like Li Jinxi.<sup>23</sup> Zhang Shiyi, an alumnus of the Teachers College at Columbia University and an educator of English in China, argued that in order to expedite and promote the unification of a national language, the old national pronunciation should abdicate in favor of the form of Pekingese spoken by a Beijing native who has received an “intermediate level of education.”<sup>24</sup> Zhang and

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<sup>23</sup> For the details of the debate, please see Zhu Lingong eds., *Guoyu wenti taolun ji* 國語問題討論集 (An Anthology of the Discussions of the National Language) (Shanghai: Zhongguo shuju, 1921); Li Jinxi 黎錦熙, *Guoyu yundong shigang* 國語運動史綱 (The Historical Grundrisse of the National Language Movement) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1935, 2011), pp. 104-159.

<sup>24</sup> Zhang says, “祇要定標準語的時候，說明是北京有教育的本地人（至少有過中等教育）的話，那就可以免去免去一種極其粗俗不堪的話，而可以完全互相懂得了。” See Zhang Shiyi, “Guoyu guoyin wenti” 國語國音問題 (The Problem of the National Language and the National Pronunciation) in *Guoyu wenti taolun ji*, Vol. II, 14.

the other Pekingese advocates also raised the question of whether the old national pronunciation with its artificial concatenation of dialectal heterogeneity ran the risk of impeding the unification of the national language. As a response, Li Jinxi and the Romanization loyalists quickly turned around and questioned the homogeneity and hegemony of Pekingese. While pointing to the internal linguistic differences and idiosyncrasies among Beijing natives who have gone through intermediate education, they maintained that a true national language should preserve as much dialectal difference as possible. Theoretically sound as it may be, the campaign of the old national pronunciation was from its inception a faltering one, and it was not long before a simpler and more popular pronunciation system stole its stage. As shown in Chapter 2, the Romanization affiliates—Li Jinxi, Chao Yuen Ren and the like—fought the losing battle on behalf of the old national pronunciation until their alliance with the state forced them to convert however reluctantly to the new national pronunciation. The new pronunciation based on Pekingese thus won the day.

It remained unclear whether or to what extent Qu and the rest of the Latinization group were aware of the difficult stance of the Romanization camp during the debate of the old national pronunciation vis-à-vis Pekingese. Granted that Qu might not have learnt from his discussions with Chao about Romanization's support of the "pre-1925 national pronunciation," Qu's narrative effectively brushed aside the Romanization Movement's erstwhile endorsement of a dialect-eclectic national language, which created the said pronunciation in the first place. Qu, by endorsing the "pre-1925 national pronunciation for standardization," successfully created an image of the Romanization supporters as linguistic chauvinists, while rendering the Latinization Movement as the true heir to the



old national pronunciation. Carrying on the legacy of idealistic and egalitarian language-making, the Latinization group offered their own blueprint in salvaging the Chinese language and script revolutions supposedly hijacked by linguistic nationalism embodied in the amputated history of the Romanization Movement.

In one move, Qu manages to combine the concrete agendas of the Latinization Movement and the ideals of an artificial linguistic utopia epitomized by the old national pronunciation. By assuming the three-way equivalences amongst the synthetic old pronunciation, the so-called “hybrid mandarin 藍青官話,” and “common speech 普通話,” Qu masterfully substitutes the artificial “pre-1925 national pronunciation” with the “hybrid mandarin” that is not only dialect-friendly but already in circulation, and proclaims that “the hybrid mandarin has already become the de facto common speech.”<sup>25</sup> Despite the elitist objection to the diluted make-up of the “hybrid mandarin,” Qu prophesies that it is destined to become the future “common speech” à la mode. Written in the *Sin Wenz* system, the new national language—or, as Qu prefers to call it, the “common speech”—will no longer be the linguistic fairyland reigned by the old pronunciation, only to be usurped by Pekingese; rather, it would be an egalitarian realm of linguistic heterogeneity.

On top of his support for the coexistence of dialects in the new “common speech,” Qu also for the first time in the Chinese Latinization Movement, argues for the legitimacy of using the same Latin alphabet to create different writing systems for various dialects:

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<sup>25</sup> Qu’s definition of “hybrid mandarin” is not to be equated with James Yen’s use of “mandarin” (Chapter 1). Qu’s use of mandarin stresses the colloquial nature of the speech, while Yen’s usage gestures toward a literary language. *Qu Qiubai Wenji* (1953), Vol. 2, 673.

應該根據普通讀者來制訂現代中國普通話的拼音文字。同時，北京話，廣州話，上海話……都可以用這種字母表或者加以相當的符號去拼音，如果有這種必要，簡直可以特別制訂廣州文等等。<sup>26</sup>

We should accommodate the new alphabetic Chinese to the ordinary readers. At the same time, any dialect, be it Beijing dialect, Guangzhou or Shanghai dialect, should be able to adopt the New Script or add adequate symbols in its transcription. If it is necessary, we can even design a special Guangzhou script and so forth.

Though Qu's own 1932 *Draft for the New Chinese Script* chose to transcribe the so-called "common speech," which was based on the Beijing dialect but inclusive of southern dialects, numerous individuals and Latinization Research Societies localized *Sin Wenz*. During the fledgling period of Latinization between 1934 and 1937 alone,<sup>27</sup> more than ten dialects developed their own writing systems in accordance to *Sin Wenz* principles, covering big dialect groups such as the so-called Northern dialect 北方話, the Wu dialect, the Minnan dialect, Chaozhou dialect, and Cantonese. Meanwhile, 23 different kinds of primers were published, along with 19 theoretical introduction books, 11 textbooks, 8 bibliographies, as well as 36 periodicals in varying dialect versions of *Sin Wenz*.<sup>28</sup> In 1941, the CCP-controlled border region of Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia Provinces granted legal status to the *Sin Wenz* based on the Northern dialect.<sup>29</sup> To

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 674.

<sup>27</sup> Ni Haishu divides the development of the Chinese Latinization Movement into four stages: 1934-1937, 1937-1945, 1945-1949, and 1949-1955. Please refer to Ni, "*Latinxua Sin Wenz Yndong*" *de Shi-mo he Biannian Jishi*, pp. 9-37.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 14. Though *Sin Wenz* is used to denote all Latinization schemes regardless if they transcribe the northern dialect or the Minnan dialect, some dialect versions of the new script spell *Sin Wenz* in correspondence to their own dialect pronunciation, for instance, "*Sin Vensh*" in Wu dialect and "*Sen Menzi*" in Cantonese among others.

<sup>29</sup> Ni Haishu compiled a list of *Sin Wenz* publications in *Zhungguo Pinjin Wenz Yndung de Giandand Lish* (中國拼音文字運動史簡編 (A Concise Chronology of the Chinese Alphabetization Movement)(Shanghai: Shidai shubao chubanshe, 1948), appendix 1. The following local speech produced corresponding *Sin Wenz*

promote *Sin Wenz*, Mao Zedong wrote the following as a dedication to the *Sin Wenz Bao* 新文字報 (The *New Script Newspaper*): “Effectively implement (*Sin Wenz*), as widely as possible (Figure 3.1).”<sup>30</sup>

Even before Mao’s endorsement, *Sin Wenz* and its varying dialect versions were already in wide circulation – so much so that they became suspect in the eyes of the Nationalist government. It became clear that *Sin Wenz* was easy to learn and readily accepted by the people, as the 1936 GMD secret decree which banned the Latinization Movement so admitted.<sup>31</sup> By rejecting the hegemony of the “national pronunciation,” while legitimizing the heterogeneity of the local dialects, *Sin Wenz* aligned itself with all non-standardized speeches and created a narrative of emancipation and empowerment for the non-Pekingese speaking and illiterate people all over China. Songs were composed in praise of the dialect-friendly new script as people of all ages and ranks were invited to celebrate a new definition of literacy. Highly localized, this new literacy did not take its roots in the world of characters, but in the realm of the Latin alphabet strictly representing people’s varying local speech. Two examples of the “Song of the New Script”—in Shanghai dialect and Cantonese—illustrate the bond between the new script and its people. The Shanghai Dialect “Song of the New Script” reads:

“Sin Vensh Gu”	『新文字歌』	“The Song of the New Script”
Sin vensh,	新文字,	The New Script,

schemes including but not limited to: the northern dialect, Jiangnan speech, Shanghainese, dialects of Suzhou, Wuxi, Nibo, Xiamen, Shantou, Cantonese, and Minnan dialect.

<sup>30</sup> Mao’s dedication to *Sin Wenz* was ironically written in characters: “切實推行，越廣越好。” See *Sin Wenz Bao* 新文字報 (The New Script Newspaper), No. 1, 1941.

<sup>31</sup> Ni, *Zhongguo Pinjin Wenz Yndung de Giandand Lish*, 15.

Zen bhiedong,	真便當,	How convenient.
Hoqhuez shmu daq pin'in,	學會仔字母搭拼音,	Once you learn the alphabet and the spelling rules,
Koe s feq iao ngin siangbong,	看書勿要人相幫,	You can read books without asking others to assist.
Haeho tungtung siadeqceq,	閒話統統寫得出,	All conversations can be spelt and written,
Gung-nung huedeq zu venzong!	工農會得做文章!	Even workers and peasants learn to compose. <sup>32</sup>

The Cantonese “Song of the New Script” is as following:

“Sen Menzi Go”	『新文字歌』	“The Song of the New Script”
Sen menzi,	新文字,	The New Script,
Zen xae xou!	真係好!	How marvelous!
Mloen nei gei dai,	唔論你幾大,	No matter how grown-up you are,
Mloen nei gei lou,	唔論你幾老,	No matter how old you become,
Loenq-go yd,	兩個月,	In two months,
Bao nei xogdegdrou!.....	包你學得到! .....	It is guaranteed that you will master it! .....
Daiga jau zisig,	大家有知識,	Everybody has knowledge,
Daiga senqwad dou binxou!	大家生活都變好!	Everybody enjoys a better life! <sup>33</sup>

Not unlike alphabetic transcription systems that came before it, the new script of the Latinization Movement (*Sin Wenz/Sin Vensh/Sen Menzi*) functioned as a mechanism of phonetic mimesis claiming allegiance to phono-alphabetic universalism. What set the Latinization Movement apart from its predecessors, especially the Romanization Movement after its 1928 official endorsement by the GMD, was its renunciation of the

<sup>32</sup> Ni Haishu, *Zhungguo Pinjin Wenz Gailun* 中國拼音文字概論 (An Introduction to the Chinese Alphabetic Script) (Shanghai: Shidai Press, 1948), 83. The *Sin Wenz* and character proses are the original. The English translation is mine.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 95-96.

top-down imposition of a privileged national pronunciation, its reassurance of the egalitarian status amongst all local speech, and its realization of optimal mass mobilization for the purpose of national salvation. As a result, the Latinization Movement created a dynamic discourse in which the script revolution lent voices to the people and made possible their dissemination in writing. These voices, now mimetically representable and represented, symbolized national solidarity in a moment of crisis, while calling for the birth of a new national language as well as a new literary language. But before we account for the link and contradictions between the script and the literary revolutions, we might do well to dwell for a moment on the theoretical, technical, and political moorings of the localization of phonetic mimesis.

### **The Alphabetic Dialect Bible**

There were, to my knowledge, three antecedents to the 1930s Chinese Latinization Movement that took an interest in phonetic mimesis and dialect alphabetization. The first was the nineteenth-century missionaries' translation of the Bible into Chinese dialects using the alphabet, or what I call the "alphabetic dialect Bible." The second antecedent came in the 1920s with the inception of modern Chinese dialectology and its incorporation of descriptive linguistics. What was noteworthy about this movement was the fact that though modern Chinese dialectology—the study of Chinese dialects—was a discrete field of study in its own right, it also developed as a supplement to the standardization of the national pronunciation and was conducted in relation to the Chinese Folklore Movement. Last but not least was the Latinization Movement that originated in the Soviet Union. It first started in Azerbaijan, targeting the Arabic script and quickly spreading to the rest of the Soviet Union, eventually

implicating the Cyrillic Russian script as well. The Soviet Union Latinization Movement gave direct rise to the Chinese Latinization Movement and the subsequent Chinese Third Literary Revolution. These disparate but interrelated historical moments, once pieced together, delineate the genealogy of the Chinese Latinization Movement, crystallize the nature of movement as a vital nexus that connects the makings of modern Chinese script, language, literature, and culture revolutions.

The provenance of the first source of dialectal alphabetization – the “alphabetic dialect Bible” can be traced to the early seventeenth century when Christian missionaries started working on projects of romanizing Chinese. In 1605, Matteo Ricci, aided by fellow Jesuits Michele Ruggieri and Lazzaro Cattaneo, produced one of the first books that attempted to alphabetize Chinese characters *The Miracle of Western Letters* 西字奇蹟.<sup>34</sup> In 1626, another Jesuit missionary named Nicolas Trigault published his *Aid to the Eyes and Ears of Western Literati* 西儒耳目資, the first study of Chinese phonetics and philology using a scheme of Chinese alphabetization.<sup>35</sup> Although these Jesuits schemes of alphabetizing Chinese were conceived as Chinese-language learning aids for foreign students and scholars and were mostly concerned with the mandarin Chinese of the time, they also inspired the Protestant missionaries to begin transcribing the various Chinese dialects via an alphabet. The project of translating the Bible into Chinese was thus expanded to include general transcription of Chinese speech.

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<sup>34</sup> Ricci later was said to produce another book that alphabetized Chinese in collaboration with Lazzaro Cattaneo. Ni Haishu has a section on the Jesuits in *Zhungguo Pinjin Wenz Gailun*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> De Francis maintains that the book was published in 1616, see De Francis, 16. For a detailed account of Jesuits’ work in developing Chinese phonology, see Luo Changpei, “Yesuhuishi zai yinyunxue shang de gongxian” 耶穌會士在音韻學上的貢獻 (The Jesuits’ Contribution in Philology), in *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology Academia Sinica*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1930): 267-338.

From the wake of the First Opium War to the early twentieth century, Protestant missionaries such as Joshua Marshman, Robert Morrison, Walter Henry Medhurst, Karl Gützlaff, and Thomas Barclay among others produced a myriad of Chinese Bibles translated in part or in full into either characters or an alphabet. The character versions of the Chinese Bible were translated into classical (*wenli*) Chinese, the literary or colloquial Mandarin (*guanhua*) or dialects.<sup>36</sup> Though the dialect translation of the Bible at that time was still in characters, it started to treat characters in the fashion of phonetic transcription symbols. According to Marshall Broomhall, a Protestant missionary and historian of Bible translation in China, while the character translations served the needs of scholars all over China, the majority of the population—the uneducated or undereducated masses—who knew few characters and spoke no Mandarin were still deprived of “the Word of God in their mother-tongue.” To fulfill that need, “there must be translations into these dialects,” and “the use of Romanized is necessary.”<sup>37</sup> Inasmuch as translations of dialect Bibles were conceptualized as instruments of an evangelization and a mass anti-illiteracy program, the Romanized dialect Bible proved to function more effectively than the dialect Bible in characters. The latter, by assuming a basic literacy of Chinese characters,

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<sup>36</sup> Major versions of Chinese Bible in characters include: Joshua Marshman and Joannes Lassar transl., *Yesu jiushi shitu ruohan suoshu fuyin* 耶穌救世使徒若翰所書福音 (The Gospel of the Apostle John, Translated into Chinese) (Serampore: Mission Press, 1813); Joshua Marshman and Joannes Lassar transl., *Shengjing* 聖經 (*The Holy Bible*) (Serampore: Mission Press, 1822); *Delegates Version Xinyue quanshu* 新約全書 (*The New Testament*) and *Jiuyue Quanshu* 舊約全書 (*The Old Testament*) (1854); E.C. Bridgman and M.S. Culbertson transl., (Shanghai: American Bible Society, 1863); W. Medhurst, K.F.A Gützlaff, and E.C. Bridgman trans., *Jiushizhu Yesu xin yizhaoshu* 救世主耶穌新遺詔書 (*The New Testament*) (Singapore: Jianxia shuyuan, 1839); *Union Version of the Easy Wenli Testament, Easy Wenli Translation, Tentative Edition* (Shanghai: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1902); *Union Version of the New Testament, Matthew-Romans, High Wen-li Translation, Tentative Edition* (Shanghai: American Bible Society, British and Foreign Bible Society, National Bible Society of Scotland, 1905). For a more comprehensive bibliography of Bible translation in Chinese, please see Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (Nettetal: Steyler Verl., 1999), pp. 400-403.

<sup>37</sup> Marshall Broomhall, *The Bible in China* (London, Philadelphia, China Inland Mission, 1934), 99.

excluded the illiterate people for whom the dialect Bible was created in the first place. As a result, versions of what I call “alphabetic dialect Bible” were developed in tandem with and as a crucial supplement to the character-based Bible. From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, at least nineteen dialects were equipped with a corresponding “alphabetic dialect Bible,” including: the northern dialect, several Wu dialects such as Shanghai, Ningbo, and Hangzhou dialects, Cantonese, Hakka, and variations of the Fujian dialect such as Fuzhou dialect, Jianning dialect, Jianyang dialect and the Amoy - commonly known as the Minnan dialect.<sup>38</sup> The Minnan dialect merited special attention, for according to the records at the American Bible Society, it was not only the first to produce an alphabetic dialect Bible as early as 1852, but it was also the dialect whose alphabetic Bible claimed the widest circulation. As we shall see later in a later section, this Minnan dialect Bible also featured as a key figure in Xu Dishan’s novella “Yu Guan.” I shall seek to show how the Minnan dialect Bible helps us uncover the historical contradictions between the two forms of mimetic writing embodied in the script and literary revolutions of modern China. However, before proceeding to an analysis of the role of the Minnan dialect Bible in “Yu Guan,” we still need to account for the second source of dialectal alphabetization – Chinese dialectology in the age of descriptive linguistics, which bridged the historical moment of the Alphabetic Dialect

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<sup>38</sup> Broomhall lists the dialects that produced Romanized Bible as following: “The more important dialects into which the Scriptures have been translated are: Ningpo, Wenchow, Kianning, Kienyang, Foochow, Amoy, Tingchow, Swatow, Canton, Hakka, Wukingfu, and Hainan.” *Ibid*, 99.

Dr. Liana Lupas at the American Bible Society has compiled an inventory of the dialects for which corresponding versions of Romanized dialect Bible were produced. These dialects included: Hakka (1910, 1924), Hangzhou (1879 by George Evans Moule), Xinghua (1892, 1896, 1934), Jianning 建寧 (1896, 1896, 1912), Jianyang 建陽 (1898, 1900), Jinhua (1866), Nanjing (1869), Ningbo (1852, 1871, 1865, 1870, 1880, 1885, 1895, 1887, 1898, 1923), Shanghai (1853, 1860, 1861, 1864, 1870, 1886, 1895), Shandong (1892), Shaowu (1892), Suzhou (1891, 1921), Shantou (1877, 1888), Taizhou (1880, 1897, 1914), Dingzhou (1919), Wenzhou (1892, 1894, 1902), Fuzhou (1881, 1886, 1889, 1892), Hainan (1891, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1914), Hakka (1860, 1865, 1866, 1887, 1958, 1993), Wujingfu (1910, 1924), Zhili (1925).



Bible and its reemergence in modern Chinese literature during the Latinization Movement.

### **Dialect, Time and the Other**

The application of descriptive linguistics to the study of Chinese dialects in the 1920s constituted the second source of dialect alphabetization. Previous scholarship has dated the inauguration of descriptive linguistics in China to the year 1924, when the first dialect survey society, called the “Peking University Dialect Survey Society,” was founded.<sup>39</sup> In the following two decades, the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica conducted six major dialect surveys: (1) The survey of the Guangdong and Guangxi dialects between 1929 and 1930; (2) The survey of the southern Shaan’xi dialect in 1933; (3) The Anhui dialect survey in 1934; (4) The Jiangxi dialect survey in 1935; (5) The Hunan dialect survey in 1935; and (6) The Hubei dialect survey in 1936.<sup>40</sup> These surveys, prompting a series of reports and monographs, marked the advent of modern Chinese dialectology—the study of dialects—produced by Chinese scholars. Among these works were Chao Yuen Ren’s *Studies of the Modern Wu Dialects* (1928),

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<sup>39</sup> Zhou Zhenhe and You Rujie 周振鶴、游汝杰, *Fangyan yu zhongguo wenhua* 方言与中国文化 (Dialects and Chinese Culture) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1986, 2006), 14.

<sup>40</sup> Chao Yuen Ren, *Xiandai wuyu de yanjiu* 現代吳語的研究 (Studies of the Modern Wu Dialects) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1928, 2011); *Zhongxiang fangyan ji* 鐘祥方言記 (Records of the Zhongxiang Dialect of Zhongxiang) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1939); *Zhongshan fangyan* 中山方言 (The Dialect of Zhongshan) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1948, 1956); Luo Changpei 羅常培, *Xiamen yinxi* 廈門音系 (The Xiamen Sound System) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1930, 1956); Linchuan yinxi 臨川音系 (The Sound System of Linchuan) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1941, 1958); Li Fang-Kuei 李方桂, “Languages and dialects,” in *The Chinese Year Book*, pp. 121–128 (1936–1937), reprinted in *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 1.1:1–13, 1973; Chao Yuen Ren, Ding Shengshu, Yang Shifeng and etc., *Hubei fangyan diaocha baogao* 湖北方言調查報告 (The Report of the Hubei Dialect Survey) (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1948). See Zhai Shiyu 翟時雨, *Hanyu fangyan yu fangyan diaocha* 漢語方言與方言調查 (Chinese Dialects and Dialect Surveys) (Chongqing: Xinan Normal University Press, 1986), pp. 14–15.

*The Dialect of Zhongxiang* (1939), *The Dialect of Zhongshan* (1948); Luo Changpei's *The Xiamen Sound System* (1931) and *The Sound System of Linchuan* (1941); Li Fang-kuei's "Languages and Dialects (1937);" as well as a co-authored report entitled *The Report of the Hubei Dialect Survey* (1948). These new studies developed a dialect geography, collected dialect data in terms of lexicon and grammar, and, most importantly, in contrast to the classical study of rhyme books, described and recorded the phonetic values of dialects in terms of vowels, consonants, and tones making use of an alphabet.<sup>41</sup>

These Chinese linguists, albeit the first generation of Chinese scholars in modern dialect studies, were by no means pioneers in dialectology or the larger field of descriptive linguistics. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, European scholars had been collecting dialect data and creating dialect atlases using what was perceived as the scientific method – phonetic description. The German linguist Georg Wenker's *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs* (1876) paved the way for dialect studies, followed by a generation of scholars working on dialects all over Europe such as Jules Gilliéron, Karl Jaberg, Jakob Jud, and Johan August Lundell among others.<sup>42</sup> Collected and compiled phonetically and hence scientifically, the dialect data recorded synchronic variation amongst dialects, provided evidence for the process of dialectal change, construed inferences about historical conditions, and were used to test theories of dialectal kinship. Though by now a subfield of sociolinguistics, dialectology was in its early years more

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<sup>41</sup> For dialect maps and dialect geography, see Robert Ramsey, *The Languages of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 15-16, pp. 87-142. Yuan Jiaye, *Hanyu fangyan gaiyao* 漢語方言概要 (An Introduction to the Chinese Dialects) (Beijing: Wenzi gaige chubanshe, 1960).

<sup>42</sup> Jules Gilliéron, *Atlas Linguistique de la France* (Paris: H. Champion, 1904); Karl Jaberg and Jakob Jud, *Sprach und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz* (Zofingen: Ringier, 1928-1940). For discussions of dialect geography, see Winfred P. Lehmann, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 117-119.

closely associated with historical and comparative linguistics. The study of dialects consisted and made use of what I call “the synchronic and diachronic dyad of dialects.” The synchronic dimension was captured by the scientific procedure of phonetic description, capable of representing the phonetic value of any given local speech at a static point, thus providing synchronic snapshots of sound. The diachronic attributes, on the other hand, lay deeply in the very nature of dialects, a hypothesis shared with historical and comparative linguistics. The epitome of the hypothesis was, in Leonard Bloomfield’s formulation, “the recognition that a number of languages of Europe and Asia are related,” which in turn developed into “a scientific investigation” showing “definitively that these languages are divergent forms of an earlier uniform parent language.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, the hypothesis of linguistic evolution determined that the scientific nature of historical linguistics was an account of the causes for and the course of language change. As Saussure has argued, among possible causes for language change such as climate, topography, and ways of life, “time” was “the essential cause.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, to mark the progression of time was to portray the course of linguistic evolution. Under this rubric, modern dialectology conceptualized and configured the phonetic value of dialects—their synchronic attributes—as traces of diachronic changes, as the instantiation of historical linguistics, and as the very evidence of linguistic evolution. Accordingly, the European dialectologists adopted what could be called a two-step methodology of “description-comparison”: first was a phonetic description of the

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<sup>43</sup> Leonard Bloomfield, *An Introduction to the Study of Language* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1914), 310.

<sup>44</sup> Saussure also says in a more definitive manner, “But *the change itself*, apart from its specific direction and particular manifestations, - in short, the instability of the language - depends on time alone.” Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1983), pp. 196-197.

synchronic value of the chosen dialects; second was a series of comparison that sequenced and deduced the dialectal kinship.

This two-step “description-comparison” approach was also taken up in the field of modern Chinese dialectology, phonetics, and historical linguistics. The first scholar to have methodologically engaged with “the synchronic and diachronic dyad of dialects” in the study of Chinese linguistics was none other than Bernhard Karlgren (1889-1978). Karlgren, a polymath, folklorist, and dialectologist of his native Sweden before his interests turned eastward, went on to become the director of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (Östasiatiska Museet), a leading Sinologist of his time, and the first scholar to introduce methods of descriptive linguistics into the study of Chinese languages.<sup>45</sup> His *Études sur la phonologie chinoise*—written and published between 1915 and 1926—was the first attempt to systemically reconstruct the sounds of the “Ancient Chinese”<sup>46</sup> through a comparative study of Chinese dialects. Seizing on the relation between the “Ancient Chinese” and dialects, Karlgren enumerates at the beginning of *Études* the top three priorities for the construction of “a new science of Chinese linguistics”:

1° de reconstruire de l’ancien chinois ce qui est nécessaire pour donner un point de départ sûr à l’étude méthodique de la langue moderne dans ses différents dialectes;

2° de présenter un exposé entièrement descriptif de la phonétique des dialectes chinois, puisque c’est là la condition indispensable pour

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<sup>45</sup> It so happened that Karlgren was a student of Johan August Lundell while studying Russian at Uppsala University, where he was to return in 1915 to teach after his sojourning abroad: first in Russia (1909-1910), then to China (1910-1912), and finally in France (1912-1915) where he met Paul Pelliot and Henri Maspero, while completing his PhD studies. For Karlgren’s biographical information, see N. G. D. Malmqvist, *Bernhard Karlgren: Portrait of A Scholar* (Plymouth, U.K.: Lehigh University Press, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Karlgren coins a pair of concepts – the “Ancient Chinese” and the “Archaic Chinese.” The former is now understood as “Middle Chinese,” while the latter is usually substituted by “Old Chinese.” Karlgren defines the “Ancient Chinese” as the Chinese dialect spoken in the capital city of Chang’an in Sui and Tang Dynasties, which the “Archaic Chinese” denotes Chinese language spoken around the compilation of *Shijing* between Shang Dynasty and early Zhou Dynasty.

3° montrer par une étude phonologique, comment les dialects modernes se sont développés de l'ancien chinois.<sup>47</sup>

1. 把中國古音擬測出來，要想作系統的現代方言研究的起點，這一層是很必要的；
2. 把中國方言的語音作一個完全描寫的說明，作過這層之後然後可以；
3. 用音韻學的研究指明現代方言是怎樣從古音演變出來的。<sup>48</sup>

1. To reconstruct from “Ancient Chinese” what is a necessary starting point for the systematic study of the modern language within its various dialects.
2. To present a thoroughly descriptive account of the phonetics of Chinese dialects, since it is the prerequisite in order to:
3. Show through the phonological study, how modern dialects were developed from “Ancient Chinese.”

Karlgren lays down the three tasks in a fashion that assumes interrelations: if the reconstruction of “Ancient Chinese” mandates a phonetic description of contemporary dialects, the fledgling field of Chinese dialectology also benefits from an understanding of “Ancient Chinese”; both benefits are warranted by the naturalized kinship between the two. However what Karlgren assumes, more than the affinities between Middle Chinese and dialects, is the applicability of the “description-comparison” method endorsed by historical linguistics. In a 1926 seminar, Karlgren summarized his methodology as following:

My own studies have been devoted hitherto chiefly to the history of Chinese, especially its phonology and the evolution of its sounds... it would afford linguists a copious gleaning which would reveal exactly the same phenomena as those we have in the Indo-European languages—palatalizing and velarising under certain conditions, assimilation and dissimilation, phenomena connected with the expiratory and musical accents—in short, parallels that will be of the greatest value when we

<sup>47</sup> Bernhard Karlgren, *Études sur la phonologie chinoise* (Upsala, K. W. Appelberg; Leyde; Stockholm: Brill, 1915-1926.), pp. 19-20.

<sup>48</sup> Bernhard Karlgren, *Zhongguo yinyunxue yanjiu* 中國音韻學研究 (A Study on Chinese Philology), trans. Zhao Yuanren and Li Fanggui (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1962), 13.

approach the task of trying to formulate comprehensive evolutive phonectis [sic].<sup>49</sup>

The zeitgeist of historical linguistics universalized the “description-comparison” approach originating in the study of Indo-European languages and legitimized the operations of “evolutive phonetis.” As a result, Karlgren conceptualizes in *Études* “Ancient Chinese” as the ancestral language from which all dialect variations take place thereafter. These dialect variations, on the other hand, are believed to flag the trails of evolutionary sound change and therefore can effectively help trace the source of mutation. In accordance to the two steps of description and comparison, Karlgren first gives concrete phonetic value to more than 3,100 characters as well as their respective rhyme categories compiled in classic rhyme books such as Lu Fayan’s *Qieyun* (601 A.D.) in an alphabet, thus departing from the traditional and relational *fanqie* system.<sup>50</sup> Karlgren then conducts a systematic comparison of up to nineteen dialects, whose data was amassed during his own “dialect survey” while in China between 1910 and 1912. Thus *Études* constitutes the first comprehensive investigation of Chinese dialects and philology, while producing, however controversially, a “necessary starting point” for the study of “Ancient Chinese” and its dialect descendants.

Karlgren’s 1926 reconstruction of “Ancient Chinese” incurred many criticisms and went through many revisions, not a few by Karlgren himself and sometimes through collaboration with others.<sup>51</sup> However, these critiques of the Middle Chinese, far from

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<sup>49</sup> Bernhard Karlgren, *Philology and Ancient China* (Oslo, H. Aschehoug & co.; Cambridge, Mass., Harvard university press, 1926), pp. 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> For an explanation of the *fanqie* system, please see Chapter 2, footnote 25.

<sup>51</sup> Li Fang-Kuei, Jerry Norman, and Edwin Pulleyblank among others criticized and revised upon the reconstruction in *Études*. Ramsey, pp. 131-132.

weakening Karlgren's methodology, consolidated the comparative use of the dialectal dyad. While subsequent works on Chinese dialects questioned the historical veracity of "Ancient Chinese," they also drew direct inspiration from *Études*, and forwarded and buttressed the "description-comparison" method introduced by Karlgren into Chinese philology. Take Chao Yuen Ren's *Studies of the Modern Wu Dialects* (1928) for example. Chao wrote his 1928 monograph—the first study of modern Chinese dialectology produced by Chinese scholars—after he became one of the three translators of *Études* from its French original to Chinese at Karlgren's personal invitation. Though Chao did not openly criticize *Études*, his 1928 monograph could be construed as a response to Karlgren's work. In a discussion of the comparative method in China, Mei Tsu-lin, an acquaintance of Chao and a fellow linguist, articulated Chao's discontent and the relation between Chao's *Studies of the Modern Wu Dialects* and Karlgren's *Études*:

趙元任先生在《中國音韻學研究》只有法文本的時候已經看出來這本書的若干缺點。比方說，上海、溫州、福州、汕頭、廣州都是靠傳教士編的字典，是第二手資料。還有，按照比較擬構的一般程序，應該是先擬構共同吳語、共同粵語、共同閩語等等以後，再擬構它們的共同祖先，而不是像高本漢那樣大雜拌地把二三十個方言在一個層次中同時運用。趙元任先生的《現代吳語的研究》，從書的架構看來，目的是得到吳語方言第一手資料，而且是準備用比較的方法來擬構共同吳語的。<sup>52</sup>

When there was only the French edition of *Études sur la phonologie chinoise*, Chao Yuen Ren already noticed several shortcomings of this book. For instance, (the description of the dialects of) Shanghai, Wenzhou, Fuzhou, Shantou, and Guangzhou were all based on the dictionaries compiled by the missionaries and were secondhand. Moreover, one should, according to the regular procedures of dialect reconstruction, first reconstruct the common Wu dialect, the common Cantonese, and the common Minnan dialect etc, after which one can move on to reconstruct their common ancestor. One should not, as Karlgren did, conflate all

<sup>52</sup> Mei Tsu-lin, "Bijiao fangfa zai zhongguo, 1926-1998" 比較方法在中國, 1926-1998 (The Comparative Method in China, 1926-1998), in *Studies in Language and Linguistics*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Mar., 2003), 18.

twenty or thirty dialects into the same plane. Chao's *Studies of the Modern Wu Dialects*, judging from the structure of the book, was aiming at obtaining the firsthand material of the Wu dialects in order to reconstruct a common Wu dialect with a comparative method.

It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to determine whether or to what extent a common ancestral language generated from the reconstruction of the common languages of the first-tier dialect zones is more accurate than that which comes out of a hodgepodge comparison of dialects of different temporalities. While Mei Tsu-lin confirmed that the field of Chinese dialectology endorsed the guiding principle of historical linguistics together with the approach of “description-comparison,” Mei did not hesitate to point out that it was precisely Karlgren who failed to execute this method thoroughly. The crux of the contention was the specificity of dialect temporality. To wit, Karlgren's lack of discretion in distinguishing and maintaining the specific temporality that belonged to different dialects compromised the accurate portrayal of sound lineage. What Chao did in the *Studies of the Modern Wu Dialects* could be understood as an attempt to close the gap of temporality between the individual dialects of disparate dialect zones and Middle Chinese via a study of modern Wu dialects. The reconstruction of the common Wu local speech served as a middle ground upon which the linkage between Middle Chinese and individual dialects became more plausible. Similarly, the six dialect surveys as mentioned earlier—in Guangdong and Guangxi, Shaan'xi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hunan, and Hubei—furthered the effort of reconstructing models of common local speech at the level of dialect zones before recovering the ancestral and common language of Chinese.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> It is generally established that the Wu dialects are the oldest dialects, followed by the Hunan dialects, Cantonese, Minnan dialect, and last but not least Hakka and Jiangxi dialects chronologically. For a survey of Chinese dialect genealogy in relation to population migration, see Zhou Zhenhe and You Rujie, *Fangyan yu zhongguo wenhua*, pp. 15-49; Lin Tao 林焘 and Geng Zhensheng 耿振生, *Yinyunxue gaiyao* 音韵学概要 (*The Outline of Phonology*) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2004).



The notion of dialect temporality became crucial. Individual dialects were assigned per their phonetic value a temporality of their own, and were in turn sequenced in a genealogy of phonetic evolution. The mapping of dialects' temporalities amounted to what Johannes Fabian formulated in *Time and the Other* as the “spatialization” of time.<sup>54</sup> According to Fabian, the process of spatializing time undergirded the epistemological ground sanctioning the establishment of the “other” at the primitive end of history vis-à-vis the “self” in the superior modern present; hence, thus developed an anthropological discourse of self and other. The study of dialects was thus turned into a machine of anthropological knowledge that galvanized the ethnographic imagination of the linguistic other. The series of dialect surveys carried out between 1929 and 1936 became, at least partially, projects of surveying, understanding, and mapping the other. It is my contention that these dialect surveys—conducted after the official recognition of Pekingese as the new national pronunciation in 1924—constituted a crucial supplement to the creation of a true *guoyu* (national language). With the old dialect-eclectic *guoyu* disintegrated, the dream of representing in a single national language all dialect temporalities seemed an ill-fated pursuit of the *Reine Sprach* (pure language). If Pekingese were to reign as the new national pronunciation, then a narrative of linguistic evolution relegating and subjugating the rest of the dialects as the tamable linguistic other was in order. This narrative was then precisely what the Chinese dialectologists set out to construct. Adopting the new methodology of descriptive linguistics in the Indo-European tradition, the Chinese dialectologists thus embarked upon their field trips with the express purpose of getting to know the linguistic other.

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<sup>54</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 2002), 120.

Such a process resembled and overlapped with the fieldwork done by Chinese folklorists in the same period.<sup>55</sup> On the one hand, both the dialect surveys and the folklore studies served a cause for the nation: the former for the establishment of a national pronunciation and the latter for the enrichment of a national literature. On the other hand, both projects were complicit in consolidating the discourse of “time and the other,” by producing knowledge about the linguistic or ethnic other and relegating it to a specific temporality other than the present. The present belonged to the unmarked ethnographer, either a dialectologist or a folklorist. Unsurprisingly, a complementary relationship eventually formed between folklore studies and the study of dialects. As the dialectologist gathered dialect data in the form of folksongs and folk stories, the folklorist needed an accurate linguistic description to record the collected materials usually enunciated in dialects. Their convergence was most clearly marked when the “Peking University Dialect Survey Society” published its “Manifesto” in the journal of the *Folklore Weekly* shortly after its founding in January 1924. After a brief literature review of the traditional scholarship on Chinese phonology and dialect studies done by Yang Xiong 扬雄, Hang Shijun 杭世駿, and Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 among others, the manifesto quickly moved on to charting out new territory for the field of modern Chinese dialectology:

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<sup>55</sup> Hung Chang-tai gave a comprehensive account of the modern Chinese folklore literature movement, with a brief mention of its pre-modern history in Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature 1918-1937* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1985). For a critical examination of the transnational origin and the politics of colonial mimicry in the making of Chinese folklorics, please refer to Lydia Liu, “Translingual Folklore and Folklorics in China” in Regina F. Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem, eds., *A Companion to Folklore* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), pp. 190-210. For another case study of Chinese folklorics, see Lydia Liu, “A Folksong Immortal and Official Popular Culture in Twentieth-Century China,” in Zeitlin and Liu, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), pp. 553-609.

按方言調查，除去研究詞彙同異之外，還有種姓遷移的歷史，苗蠻異種的語性，古今音變的系統，方言語法的進化等等連帶問題，都是方言研究分內的事。凡研究一方言，必並考察其背景歷史，以究其源流；得一音變，必並考查其與鄰近方音原原委委之關係。即使異族方言。語不出於經史載籍，也無妨比串同異以推求周秦以往的語言系統，如西藏暹羅等語。是今日方言與音韻學，殖民史，印度支那語言學等不可分離的一種研究。<sup>56</sup>

Aside from the study of word similarities or differences, the study of dialects should also include the migration of ethnicity and family, the linguistic nature of Miao and other minorities, the system of sound change from the ancient time to present. Whenever we study a dialect, we must examine its background and history in order to get to understand its genealogy. Once we find a sound change, we must investigate its relationship with the sound of its neighboring dialects. In case of languages of other ethnicities, for instance Tibetan and Thai and etc., in spite of the absence of records regarding these languages in classics, it does not hurt if we adopt the same comparative approach to understand their language systems before Zhou and Qin Dynasties. Therefore dialect study in this day and age is inseparable from rhyme studies, colonial history, and the study of Indo-China languages.

It is remarkable to note the degree to which the study of modern Chinese has expanded its scope from its initial stage in the New Culture Movement, now covering ground as wide-ranging as rhyme studies, historical linguistics, colonial history, and anthropology. Granted that the manifesto includes seven specific tasks of the field, most of which fall into the realm of descriptive linguistics, the fourth point stands out, stating: “Examine languages of the Miao people and other minority groups – this is especially encouraged by our Society.”<sup>57</sup> One has to wonder why the study of Miao, the other

<sup>56</sup> “Beida yanjiusuo guoxue men fangyan diaocha hui xuanyanshu” 北大研究所國學門方言調查會宣言書 (Manifesto of the Dialect Survey Society in the School of National Learning of Peking University) in *Geyao Zhoukan* 歌謠週刊 (The Folklore Weekly), No. 47, March. 16, 1924.

<sup>57</sup> All seven tasks of the Society are as following:

- “一、製成方音地圖——此為語言調查(linguistic survey)的根本事業。
- 二、考定方言音聲，及規定標音字母……
- 三、調查殖民歷史——近日語言學界的一個重要調查結果，即方言與本地歷史的密切關係。
- 四、考定苗夷異種的語言——此為本會所特別鼓勵注意的事件。

minority groups, as well as the Tibetan and Thai people and their languages is given special emphasis. While they assume the role of the linguistic other in the narrative of language change, they also pose important questions: What happens after the identification of the linguistic other? To what extent does a multi-lingual polity, which has codified its national pronunciation, encourage the voice of the linguistic other? The Latinization Movement in the Soviet Union serves as a case in point.

### **Latinization: From the Soviet Union to China**

The Soviet Union Latinization Movement constituted the third and last source of latinizing Chinese. Almost all accounts of the Soviet Union Latinization Movement quote Lenin's declaration that "Latinization is the great revolution in the east."<sup>58</sup> Though it was debatable whether Lenin, who was reportedly already on his deathbed when singing the praises of Latinization, actually said the movement was a "great" one, what was indisputable was that the movement was a revolution. In 1922, a political elite from Azerbaijan named Samed Agamali-Ogly initiated a campaign to latinize the Turkic

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五、依據方言的材料反證古音 .....

六、楊雄式的詞彙調查——凡各方言的不同，或在讀音，或在語法，或在詞彙。

七、方言語法的研究 .....

“1. Make dialect maps – this is the foundation of linguistic survey.

2. Determine word pronunciation in dialects and establish the use of letters for phonetic description...

3. Investigate colonial history – one important development of the field of linguistics is its understanding of the intimate relationship between dialects and local history.

4. Examine languages of the Miao people and other minority groups – this is especially encouraged by our Society.

5. Use dialectal materials to produce in retrospect the ancient pronunciation ...

6. The sort of vocabulary investigation carried out by Yang Xiong – dialectal difference in terms of pronunciation, grammar, and diction.

7. The study of dialectal grammar...”

Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> According to Agamali-Ogly, Lenin said 'Da, eto velikaia revoliutsiia na Vostoke!' *Stenograficheskii otchet 2 plenuma VTsK NTA* (Baku, 1929): 2-3. See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 187.

scripts. In October 1923, the Latin script was given equal status with Arabic and in 1924 was made the sole official script throughout Azerbaijan, followed by a 1926 Turkological Congress in Baku, promoting the Latin alphabet outside of Azerbaijan. By May 1930, thirty-six languages had adopted the new Latin alphabet. According to historian Terry Martin, on top of the Turkic and North Caucasian peoples, three Mongolian nationalities took up the new Latin alphabet between 1929 and 1930: the Kalmyk, the Buriat-Mongols, and the Mongols of the Soviet client state of Mongolia. These three peoples held their own miniature “pan-Mongol” summit in Moscow to unify their alphabets. Moreover, seven Iranian languages adopted the new alphabet, including the Mountain Jews of Dagestan and the Central Asian Bukharan Jews, both abandoning the Hebrew script. The next script in line to be revolutionized was Yiddish. Though no concrete plan materialized, numerous Soviet Jewish organizations passed resolutions on the latinization of Yiddish. The Assyrian and Armenian peoples also rejected Cyrillic and the Armenian script respectively in favor of Latin.<sup>59</sup> With the exception of Georgian,<sup>60</sup> almost all scripts

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<sup>59</sup> For historical accounts of the Soviet Latinization Movement in its early stages, please refer to Terry Martin, pp. 198-199; Lenore A. Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Dordrecht; Boston; London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), pp. 35-57; Michael G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 121-142.

<sup>60</sup> The Georgian exception remained a mystery, which could be partially explained by the official endorsement of Nikolai Marr’s “Japhetic Theory.” The Marrist “new theory of language” dominated the Soviet Union between the 1920s and the 1950s, until Stalin himself wrote in *Pravda* to renounce Marr. The “Japhetic Theory” stipulated a common ancestor for the Caucasian and Semitic languages. The reconstruction of this common language based on Georgian, Marr and Stalin’s mother tongue, was understood in Marr’s system, as the first step toward a unified global language, to be generated through the science of historical paleontology and the Marxist theory of materialism and class struggle. This Marrist belief in and drive at a universal language eased the anxiety of Latinization supporters for fear that multiple writing systems might encroach upon the unity of the Soviet. It was in fact the same promise of the advent of a universal language that the Chinese Latinization supporters cashed in. For the Georgian exception and an account of the Marrist theory, see Grenoble, pp. 55-57; Smith, pp. 81-102; Lawrence L. Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N. Ja. Marr (University of California Publications in Linguistics, Volume XIV)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 85-116.

in the Soviet Union experienced some form of shock therapy of latinization, Russian Cyrillic included.

As a matter of fact, the Russian Cyrillic alphabet became the biggest obstacle blocking a complete victory of Latinization throughout the Soviet Union. The Cyrillic alphabet was seen increasingly as the symbol of the “colonial, missionary russification policies of the Tsarist regime” and “a weapon of propaganda of Russian imperialism abroad.”<sup>61</sup> A short-lived Latinization movement against the Russian Cyrillic script took place between November 1929 and January 1930, under the tutelage of Anatoly Lunacharsky – a Marxist revolutionary, the first Soviet People’s Commissar for Education, and a harbinger of Proletkult (Пролеткульт, proletarian culture) and proletarian literature.<sup>62</sup> Endorsed by Lunacharsky, three committees were formed within the Scientific Department of Education Commissariat to reform the Russian writing system: one on orthography, another on spelling, and the third on latinization of the Russian alphabet. Lunacharsky himself wrote several articles in support of latinizing Cyrillic. Another special committee overseeing the publication of reform materials and results was established under the Council of Defense and Labor.<sup>63</sup> Beyond a limited amount of secondary scholarship, which is curiously disproportionate to the significance

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<sup>61</sup> Martin, 200.

<sup>62</sup> Narkompros, also Народный комиссариат просвещения, Наркомпрос is translated as the People’s Commissariat for Education. For biographical accounts of Lunacharsky and introduction to Lunacharsky’s writing, please see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Ken Kalfus, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment* (New York: Ecco, 2003); Timothy Edward O’Conner, *The Politics of Soviet Culture Anatolii Lunacharskii* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983).

<sup>63</sup> Lunacharsky wrote the following articles: “Latinizatsiia russkoi pis’mennosti,” *Krasnaia gazeta*, nos. 5-6 (06-07. 01.29); “Latinizatsiia russkoi pis’mennosti,” *Kul’tura i pis’mennost’ vostoka*, no. 6 (1930): 20-26. See Martin, 196.

of the event, we could not determine the scale and intensity of the movement. Its forced abrogation, however, speaks to the level of attention it had received at the time. On January 25 1930, the Politburo—the highest political organ in the Soviet—issued a terse resolution: “On Latinization: Order *glavnauka* to cease its work on the question of latinizing the Russian alphabet.”<sup>64</sup> Though the reason behind this ultimate objection remains obscure, the anti-Russian-Cyrillic campaign was effectively suspended.

Russian Cyrillic was, as a matter of fact, not the only writing system that became off-limits for the Latinization advocates. Latinization activities targeting Ukrainian and Belorussian were also obstructed.<sup>65</sup> As a general pattern, Latinization forged ahead in the east Soviet but was vigilantly curbed in the west Soviet for fear of Pan-Turkism. If Russophobia was permissible and a process of westernization encouraged in the backward east, “they were treason” in the west.<sup>66</sup> To further elaborate on the implications of these unsuccessful cases of Latinization would be the task of another systematic study of the Latinization Movement in the Soviet Union, which has yet to be written. Two points, however, have emerged from this history as crucial focal points connecting it to the Chinese Latinization Movement. First was the movement’s revolutionary ethos. Though somewhat constrained to the eastern part of the Soviet, the Latinization movement fashioned itself as a liberation campaign of the small peoples from the Tsarist

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<sup>64</sup> I should note that the Politburo’s order was not unlike the GMD’s ban of the *Sin Wenz*. *Glavnauka* refers to the Central Administration for Scientific, Scholarly-Artistic, and Museum Institutions, an administrative body that existed from 1922 to September 1933 as part of the Narkompros. Ibid, 198.

<sup>65</sup> For instance, linguists who participated in the 1926-1927 conferences on writing reforms in Belorussia and Ukraine underwent trials and purges in the cultural revolution. George Y. Shevelov, *The Ukrainian Language in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1900-1941): Its State and Status* (Cambridge, Mass.,: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1989), pp. 131-140; Martin, pp. 204-206.

<sup>66</sup> Martin, 204, 206.

regime. Under the new Soviet Union, all peoples were recognized as equals. All languages were entitled to their own writing systems, transcribing respective local speech while written in the Latin alphabet. This alphabet, bequeathed to all peoples within and beyond the Soviet as a token of liberation, hallmarked the Latinization Movement as an international and socialist mission. Its aim was the export of the socialist revolution—script and cultural revolution included—to the rest of the world. By embracing the Latin alphabet, China joined the same quest of linguistic egalitarianism and revolutionary ethos. Secondly, the Politburo's ban of the Latinization of Russian Cyrillic, as well as the setbacks that the Ukrainian and Belorussian Latinization advocates encountered, delineated the limits of the revolution, while raising the difficult question of whether and how it was possible to circumvent such limits. As we shall see, Proletkult and proletarian literature became the literary and political field upon which the fraught experiment of Latinization as a cultural revolution continued.

Although the Latinization Movement in the west Soviet was constrained to a certain extent, the latinization of other scripts from the east Soviet and further eastward prevailed and flourished. For instance: the Cyrillic used to inscribe the Mari language by the eastern Finns and the Chuvash language were latinized, as well as Korean and Chinese.<sup>67</sup> According to John De Francis, as early as 1926, unsuccessful attempts were

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<sup>67</sup> According to Marin, between 1930 and 1932, the “All-Union Central Committee of the New (Turkic) Alphabet (VTsK NTA)” decided to form “five separate Latin alphabets for five major dialects,” including in the Russian Latinization “severnoi/shandunskii, guandunskoi, futszianskoi, tziianu/chzhetsziana, khunaii/tziianu.” In present-day *pinyin* system, they are Shandong, Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, and Hunan dialects, out of which only Shandong dialect alphabet was actually designed. The VTsK NTA's Shandong Latin script is yet to be tracked down and it is remains unclear to me what the relationship was between the VTsK NTA's version of the Shandong Latin script and Qu Qiubai's Chinese alphabet. See “Pervaia vsesoiuznaia konferentsiia po latinizatsii kitaiskoi pis'mennosti,” *Revoliutsiia I pis'mennost'*, nos. 1-2 (1932): 130, in Martin, 119. As for the Korean Latin alphabet, the VTsK NTA was said to have approved the plan for it but never materialized it. See Martin, 200.



made to Latinize the writing system of the Dungan people – the Chinese Muslim emigrants. It was not until late 1928 that the Scientific Research Institute of China in Moscow took up the issue of Latinizing Chinese.<sup>68</sup> Collaboration between Soviet Sinologists and Chinese scholars took place. Amongst the involved Chinese was Qu Qiubai. His main collaborator was a certain Mr. Vsevolod Sergeevich Kolokolov (V. S. Kolokolov), whose Chinese name was Guo Zhizheng 郭質生, a Soviet linguist and Sinologist who became friends with Qu after his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1921.<sup>69</sup> In October 1929, Qu, with the assistance of Kolokolov, published the first Chinese Latinization pamphlet entitled *The Chinese Latinized Alphabet* 中國拉丁化的字母 in Moscow. After several revisions, Qu made it into *The Draft of the New Chinese Script* 新中國文草案 in December 1932.<sup>70</sup> In the preface of the first edition of *The Chinese Latinized Alphabet*, Qu acknowledged Kolokolov's contribution to the project of Latinizing Chinese:

Wo bien zhé-ben siaocéz, dedao Kolokolof tonze di hydo banzhu, wo dueju ta feichań gansie.

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<sup>68</sup> Estimates of the population of the Dungan people in the Soviet Union in the 1920s vary from 14,600 to 25,000. According to John de Francis, illiteracy among Dungan people amounted to almost 100 per cent. John De Francis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (New York: Octagon Book, 1972), 88.

<sup>69</sup> In his *Chidu xinshi* 赤都心史 (A Personal History in the Red Capital), Qu mentioned Kolokolov several times as Guo Zhisheng, who functioned as Qu's guide and interlocutor. See Qu, *Chidu xinshi*, in *Qu Qiubai Wenji*, Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1989), pp. 113-251. Aside from Kolokolov, other Soviet scholars also participated in researching, devising, and critiquing the Chinese Latinized alphabet. Among them were A. A. Dragunov, B. M. Alexeiev, B. A. Vasil'ev, Y. K. Tschutskii, and A. G. Shirintsin. See John de Francis, pp. 97-98. After Stalin abandoned Marr's "Japhetic theory," Kolokolov like many other linguists who participated in the Latinization Movement, was implicated. For a critique of Kolokolov's involvement in the Chinese Latinization campaign, see A. O. Tamazishvili, "Incident na vostochnom otdeleni'i instituta krasnoi professuri istori'I," in *Vostok*, no. 1 (1994), pp. 160-166.

<sup>70</sup> Qu Qiubai, *Zhongguo ladinghua zimu* 中國拉丁化字母 (The Chinese Latinized Alphabet), Moscow: KYTK Press, 1929 in *Qu Qiubai Wenji*, Vol. 3 (1989), pp. 351-418. Qu, *Xin Zhongguowen Cao'an* 新中國文草案 (The Draft of the New Chinese Script), in *Qu Qiubai Wenji*, Vol. 3 (1989), pp. 423-491.

我編這本小冊子，得到郭質生同志的許多幫助，我對於他非常感謝。

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In compiling this pamphlet, I have gained much help from Mr. Kolokolov.  
I thank him very much.

Such collaboration between Qu and Kolokolov resembled to an extent that of Bernhard Karlgren and Chao Yuen Ren, for in both cases the Chinese scholar and the foreign expert shared a faith in the Latin alphabet as a superior mimetic technology to transcribe speech. What distinguished Latinization from Romanization, however, was its vision of a socialist cultural revolution and its commitment to revolutionary internationalism, both of which now came to be associated the Latin script. After the First Conference on the Latinization of Chinese held in Vladivostok in 1931, the proposed Latinization based on Qu Qiubai's scheme was adopted,<sup>72</sup> and it became compulsory to introduce the Chinese Latinized alphabet from 1932 onward in all Chinese schools in the USSR.<sup>73</sup> A year after that, the Chinese Latinization Movement in the Soviet Union was introduced to and finally landed in China. The promise to export a socialist Latinized script was at last delivered. What was put in circulation, more than a Latinized script, was a new way of conceptualizing the linguistic and scriptal make-up of a new China and a new wave of the Chinese literary revolution. As the Latinization Movement in the Soviet Union established the guiding principle of lending a voice to the people and giving all minority groups a script for their languages, it thereby opened the possibility of

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<sup>71</sup> Qu, *Zhonguo Latinhuadi Zemu in Qu Qiubai Wenji* (1989), Vol.3, 355, 362.

<sup>72</sup> The version presented to the conference was a slight revision of Qu's *The Chinese Latinized Alphabet* 中國拉丁化字母, entitled *The Latinized Chinese* 拉丁化中國字. Ni, *Zhongguo Pinjin Wenz Yndung de Giandand Lish*, 119.

<sup>73</sup> De Francis, 93, 99.

proletarian culture and literature. As for Qu Qiubai, who was immersed in the Soviet context and personally acquainted with the key advocate of proletarian literature Lunacharsky,<sup>74</sup> his next move was by no means surprising. Qu began to contemplate the possibility of appropriating the script and literary revolution from the Soviet Union and reinventing it in China.

Between composing the two versions of *The Chinese Latinized Alphabet* and *The Draft of the New Chinese Script*, Qu on numerous occasions pondered the future of the Chinese writing system and Chinese literature. In a February 7, 1931 letter from Qu Qiubai to Kolokolov, Qu wrote:

現在我寄上一本讀本：「國語羅馬字模範讀本」——這是依照政府公佈的拼音方式編的，比我們的方式繁難複雜得多。這是完全的北京方言——因為政府的新方式，把以前注音字母的拼法有些改變：就是ㄩ和ㄣ混合只用ㄣ（ㄣㄩ亦是這樣），把ㄟ廢去，只用ㄣㄝ等等。我以為普通話仍舊要保存，發展，方言同時要製造拼音方法——讓他們‘並存’，將來廢除漢字之後，中國一定要有一個時期是‘多種言語文字的’國家。至於四聲的分別拼法，實在是非常之困難，這本書可以做一個例子。……我請求你的事，是要你寄我一切好的關於拉丁化問題的小冊，著作，雜誌，以及言語學（языкознание）的一般書籍，再則，新出的以及舊的文學，小說，以及雜論。這件事情，我千萬的拜託，費神費神。如果你能夠常常寄來，那真是不勝感激之至了！<sup>75</sup>

Now I am sending you a copy of *The Model Primer of Gwoyew Romatzyh*. This primer is edited entirely in accordance to the National Romanization scheme adopted by the Nationalist government. It is much more complicated than our orthography and is utter Pekingese. Being the new official orthography, it entails modifications to the original National

<sup>74</sup> Paul Pickowicz and Theodore Hutters disagree over whether Qu Qiubai was well informed enough to understand and introduce the different schools of Marxist literary thoughts in the Soviet Union. While Pickowicz argues no, Hutters argues and I agree that Pickowicz reads Qu into his argument without adequately examines Qu's knowledge of the issues related to Proletkult. See Paul Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China: The Influence of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1981); Theodore Hutters, "The Difficult Guest: May Fourth Revisits," in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2, Jul., 1984, pp. 125-149.

<sup>75</sup> *Qu Qiubai Wenji* (1989), Vol. 3, pp. 325-326.

Alphabet: it combines “si” and “xi” as “xi,” “su” and “xu” as “xu”; it eliminates the use of “i” and “o” and preserve only “ü” and “e.” I think that we should still preserve and develop the common speech (*putonghua*), while creating new *pinyin* methods for dialects, thus making all of them ‘co-exist.’ In the future when characters are completely eradicated, China will have to undergo a period of multi-linguallism, with multiple systems of writing. As for the four-tone system, it is indeed a difficult issue, as exemplified by this primer... What I ask of you is this: could you please mail me any pamphlet, monograph, or magazine on Latinization, as well as general books on linguistics, new or old literature, novels, and essays. I beg of you to take the trouble and help me with this matter. If you could mail them to me regularly, I shall be most grateful!

Qu sets up the dichotomy between the *Gwoyeu Romatzyh* and *The Chinese Latinized Alphabet* as two competing alphabetization schemes. While the overly complicated *Gwoyeu Romatzyh* is endorsed by the Nationalist government, the simplified *Chinese Latinized Alphabet* is “our orthography” that awaits to be polished by Kolokolov and Qu himself. Qu’s petition to Kolokolov to mail him literature on Latinization among other things corroborates their cooperation in bringing about *The Chinese Latinized Alphabet*.

Qu’s prognostication boils down to the advent of multiple Chinese writing systems which transcribe different local speech but are inscribed using the same alphabet. It is uncertain if Qu had in mind the multi-lingual and multi-script system of the Soviet Union at that time, but following the path laid out by the Soviet Latinization blueprint, the unity of a Chinese alphabet and the plurality of the Chinese speeches, languages, and writing systems was inevitable. In a few months, Qu made the connection between the new Chinese writing system and a new Chinese literary revolution in his famous article “War Outside the Gate of the Demons” 鬼門關以外的戰爭 written in May 1931. Designating the late imperial and May Fourth movement as the First and Second failed literary revolutions, Qu criticized most vehemently the so-called new *baihua*—the proud production of the May Fourth and the New Culture Movement—as an overly

Europeanized language and hence a new *wenyan* of the bourgeois elites. It therefore deserved liquidation, clearing the ground for a new wave of literary revolution. Qu wrote:

所以，現代普通話的新中國文，應當是習慣上中國各地方共同使用的，現代“人話”的，多音節的，有語尾的，用羅馬字母寫的一種文字。創造這種文字是第三次文學革命的一個責任。<sup>76</sup>

The new Chinese script of the common speech (*putonghua*) should be customarily used by people all over China, reflecting the ‘human speech’ and should be multi-syllabic, with word endings, and written in a Romanized alphabet. It is the task of the Third Literary Revolution that such a new Chinese script should be accomplished.

It should be clear by now that the commonly understood Third Literary Revolution—also known as the New May Fourth Movement in the 1930s—was powered directly by the Latinization movement. The will to create a new Chinese script thus connected the script revolution and a new literary revolution and became a priority shared by both movements. The question that then presents itself is this: how does a new Chinese script impact the production of a new Chinese literature? A third quote from Qu Qiubai in a July 1932 article illustrates the great expectations for the new Chinese script:

新的文學革命的對象是新式文言的假白話和舊小說的死白話。而新的文學革命的目的，是創造出勞動民眾自己的文學的言語。<sup>77</sup>

The object (of our attack) in the new literary revolution is the false *baihua* of the new *wenyan* and the dead *baihua* of the old novels... the goal of the new literary revolution is to create for the laboring masses’ their own literary language.

Given the belief that the new Chinese script was able to most effectively channel the local speech of all people into writing, the same script was also expected to advance a

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<sup>76</sup> Qu, “Guimenguan zhi wai de zhanzheng” 鬼門關之外的戰爭 (War Outside the Gate of the Demons) (May. 30, 1931), in *Qu Qiubai Wenji* (1953), Vol. 2, 650.

<sup>77</sup> Qu, “Zai lun dazhong wenyi da zhijing” 再論大眾文藝答止敬 (More on Mass Literature, a Reply to Zhijing [Mao Dun]), in *Qu Qiubai Wenji* (1953), Vol. 2, pp. 907-908.

real literary language for the people and preferably by the people. Through the medium of the Latin script (the new Chinese script) and its multiple, localized, and co-existing writing systems, the material ground was prepared for the mimetic transcription of all local speech to enter the literary realm. It was a momentous transition: for the first time in Chinese literary history, it became theoretically feasible and favorable to represent people of all social strata in their own speeches or to let them speak for themselves. Literary realism—the mimetic representation of the real in writing—gained new legitimacy through the discourse of proletarian literature and the massification movement. However, new questions emerge: How does phonetic mimesis grounded in the alphabet translate into a literary mimesis? Does one form of phonetic mimetic writing facilitate or impede another form of literary mimetic writing? Can the real voice of the masses—both literal and figural—be represented?

### **The Limits of Mimetic Writing**

Qu Qiubai and Xu Dishan were decade-long friends. Their first contact dated back at the latest to the year of 1920, when both started writing for the journal *New Society* 新社會, published by a certain “Students Social Club” 實進會 under the Beijing YMCA.<sup>78</sup> The two men shared deep interests in social issues and strong attachment to writing.<sup>79</sup> Their friendship lasted beyond their *New Society* phase until Qu was captured

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<sup>78</sup> The Students Social Club was founded by the American missionary John Steward Burgess in 1911. The journal *New Society* started publication in November 1919 and was banned in May 1920 for its overtly socialist inclination. Qu Qiubai, Xu Dishan, and Zheng Zhenduo among others were all involved in the journal. See *Xin Shehui* 新社會 (New Society), no. 1-19 (November. 1, 1919 – May.1, 1920).

<sup>79</sup> Both Qu and Xu wrote extensively about gender (Xu more than Qu), labor, and other social issues. For instance, Qu Qiubai wrote “Xiaoxiao yige wenti – funv jiefang de wenti” 小小一個問題——婦女解放的問題 (A Small Problem – the Problem of Women’s Liberation), “Laodong di fuyin” 勞動底福音 (The Gospel of Labor), “Shehui yu zui’e” 社會與罪惡 (Society and Evil); Xu Dishan penned the following

by the GMD. Xu together with others attempted an active campaign to save Qu from the GMD's hands, which ended in failure with Qu's execution in June 1935. In a way, both men dedicated their lives to the social issues that fascinated the *New Society* group from the onset of the 1920s. If Qu Qiubai chose a political path, then Xu Dishan adhered closely to a scholarly and literary course.

In his own right, Xu Dishan was an essential figure in the May Fourth and New Culture movements and was among the twelve founding members of the first modern Chinese literary society—"The Literary Research Society 文學研究會"—in early 1921.<sup>80</sup> It is worth noting that "The Literary Research Society" was one of the more realist-oriented literary societies in contrast to the more Romanticist-inclined groups such as the Creation Society or the Crescent Moon. As a native of Taiwan who grew up in Fujian and Guangdong provinces and had extensive overseas experiences in Myanmar and India, Xu's literary writing took a unique and lasting interest in southern China and South Asia, which proved to be Xu's most distinctive trademark as a writer. On top of his literary career, Xu was a teacher of Sanskrit, a folklorist, a translator and an educator who created from scratch the Chinese department at Hong Kong University. A Christian himself, he was an accomplished scholar of several religions including Manichaeism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity. He also maintained a consistent research interest in material

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"Shijiu shiji liangda shehui xuejia di nvziguang" 十九世紀兩大社會學家底女子觀 (Two Nineteenth Century Sociologists' View on Women), "Laodong di yanjiu" 勞動底研究 (A Study on Labor), "Shehui kexue de yanjiu fangfa" 社會科學的研究方法 (Research Methods of Social Science). Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> The twelve founding members of the Literary Research Society included: Zhou Zuoren, Mao Dun, Xu Dishan, Zheng Zhenduo, Ye Shengtao, Geng Jizhi, Wang Tongzhao, Guo Shaoyu, Sun Fuyuan, Qu Shiyong, and Jiang Baili. For a recent study on the impact of the Literary Research Society on the institutional establishment and canonization of modern Chinese literature, please refer to Li Xiuping, *Wenxue yanjiu hui yu zhongguo xiandai wenxue zhidu* 文學研究會與中國現代文學制度 (The Literary Research Society and the Institutionalization of Modern Chinese Literature) (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2010).

culture such as Chinese costumes and ancient coins. Last but not least, as a co-founder of the Hong Kong New Script Learning Society 香港新文字學會 in 1938, Xu remained until his death in 1941 a steadfast advocate for the Chinese Latinization Movement.

Between March and May of 1939, Xu Dishan published his last novella “Yu Guan 玉官,” which was serialized in a Hong Kong based journal entitled *Da Feng* 大風.<sup>81</sup> It was arguably the most ambitious literary work Xu ever produced. It was a story of the life journey of its namesake—a Bible Woman called Yu Guan. Since the 1860s, Protestant missionaries had been training female converts to be lay church workers in India, China, and other parts of the world. In a pamphlet published by the Presbyterian Church around the same time, Bible Woman was defined as the following:

Bible Woman! What does the name mean? Probably nothing at all to the average reader. Perhaps it suggests a woman going from house-to-house and reading the Bible to those who will listen, and those who are unable to read it themselves. But that is only a part of the work done by these important constituents of the force of every mission station. ‘Woman Evangelist’—the name applied to them by the Chinese Church—perhaps better designates the various activities of these workers. They lead meetings of Christian women, teach classes of inquirers, visit women in their homes, and sometimes in the country districts even take part in the preaching at markets and on village streets... In Women’s Hospitals the evangelist does a most important work. She preaches to the crowds awaiting their turn at the daily clinic.<sup>82</sup>

Yu Guan was one of such Bible Women who served her community in a small county in southern Fujian province, approximately where Xu Dishan himself was brought up. The novella bearing her name covers a time span of more than forty years, from the 1890s to the late 1930s, encompassing major historical events within that period such as the First

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<sup>81</sup> *Da Feng* 大風 (*Great Wind*), No. 29-36 (1939).

<sup>82</sup> Mrs. W. B. Hamilton, *The Chinese Bible Woman* (New York: Women’s Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, publication date unclear), 5.



Sino-Japanese War, the Boxer Rebellion, the abolishment of the Civil Service Exam, the 1911 Revolution, the First World War, and the rise of Communism. “Yu Guan” thus amounts to Xu’s most ambitious attempt to capture modern Chinese history, mediated through and encapsulated in the life story of a particular Bible woman from Fujian. Compared to Xu’s earlier writings, “Yu Guan” marks a decided change of style. In an appraisal of Xu Dishan and his early works, C. T. Hsia asserts that Xu is “by temperament” “a writer of Romance,” while his earlier fiction is closer to “popular Buddhist tales and medieval Christian legends.”<sup>83</sup> According to Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, Xu’s life-long friend and a co-founder of the Literary Research Society, the shift in style took place around 1935 when Xu relocated from Yenching University in Beijing to Hong Kong. Zheng writes, “Works that he (Xu) produced in this period became sharper and more realist in terms of style and the choice of materials.”<sup>84</sup>

To be clear, “this period” that Zheng refers to is the period of the “Third Literary Revolution,” the one fuelled by and fomenting both the Chinese Latinization Movement and the Massification Movement. Xu himself, in an article entitled “On ‘Anti-New Romanticism’” 論“反新式風花雪月” written around this period, states his critiques:

青年作家底作品所以會落在“風花雪月”底型範裡底原故，我想是由於他們所用底表現工具——文字與章法——還是給有閒階級所用底那一套……所以要改變作風，須先把話說明白了，把話底內容與涵義使

<sup>83</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 85.

<sup>84</sup> Zheng’s full quote is following, “He made great effort in promoting the script reform and championed the phonetic alphabet as the eventual goal of the script reform... Works that he (Xu) produced in this period became sharper and more realist in terms of style and the choice of materials.” “他努力宣傳文字改革運動，主張以拼音字母為文字改革的最終目的……他這時期所寫的作品，風格和題材都變得尖銳得多，現實得多。” See Zheng Zhenduo’s preface in *Xu Dishan Xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 1958), 3.

人了解才能夠達到目的。會說明白話底人自然擅於認識現實，而具有開條新路讓人走底可能力量。<sup>85</sup>

The reason that the works of some young writers fall back into the paradigm of Romanticism should be attributed to the fact that their tools of expression—their language and their approach—still belong to the leisure class... Therefore to change one's style, one has to first make the language clear so that the meaning can be comprehended. Those who can make their language clear naturally understand the reality better and have the potential of opening a new path for the people.

Xu's objection to the language of the leisure class echoes Qu Qiubai's critique of the May Fourth *baihua* as a new bourgeois *wenyan*, while the connection he makes between a clearer language and a better understanding of reality reflects the "task" (in Qu Qiubai's term) of the Third Literary Revolution. Although Xu himself did not explicitly mention the Third Literary Revolution, he did compose a series of articles and speeches on its two tenets – the new Chinese script and new Chinese literature. Making references to the issues of script and literary revolution, these articles were all written around the same time he produced "Yu Guan."<sup>86</sup> It is therefore safe to conclude that "Yu Guan," Xu's most ambitious work, was produced in the historical context of the Third Literary Revolution. In actuality, both Xu Dishan's choice of subject—a subaltern woman, for lack of a better term—and his decision to include the issue of the script, reflect the impact of the script and literary revolution.

The novella's eponymous heroine Yu Guan is a mostly illiterate woman from southern Fujian who lost her husband in the First Sino-Japanese War. She struggles as a

<sup>85</sup> Xu Dishan, "Lun 'fan xinshi fenghuaxueyue'" 論“反新式風花雪月” (On "Anti-New Romanticism"), originally published in *Ta Kung Pao* (November. 14, 1940).

<sup>86</sup> These articles include: "Zhongguo wenzi di mingyun" 中國文字底命運 (The Fate of the Chinese Script)(1940), "Qingnianjie dui qingnian jianghua" 青年节对青年讲话 (A Speech to the Youth on the May Fourth) (1941), "Guocui yu guoxue" 國粹與國學 (National Essence and National Learning) (1941), "Zhongguo wenzi di jianglai" 中國文字底將來 (The Future of the Chinese Script) (1941).

widow against poverty and molestation by her brother-in-law who covets the family compound. Her sole hope is to follow the path of (neo-)Confucius widowhood, to bring up her son and have him become an official, who would in turn establish a chastity arch memorial for her. Under the influence of a friend Xing Guan 杏官, a local Bible woman, Yu Guan discovers and learns to read the alphabetic Minnan Bible and converts to become a Bible woman herself. Yu Guan's encounter with the Bible at Xing Guan's house is the moment when the narrative gains real momentum. In a third person narrative, Yu Guan meets the Bible:

杏官家裡的陳設雖然不多，確實十分乾淨。房子是一廳兩房的結構，中廳懸著一幅「天路里程圖」，桌上放著一本很厚的金邊黑羊皮「新舊約全書」，金邊多已變成紅褐色，書皮的光澤也沒有了，書角的殘摺紋和書裡夾的紙片，都指示著主人沒有一天不把它翻閱幾次……她偷偷地掀開那本經書看看，可惜是洋字，一點也看不懂。她心裡想，杏官平時沒聽她說過洋話，怎麼能念洋書？這不由得她不問。杏官告訴她那是「白話字」，三天包會讀，七天準能寫，十天什麼意思都能表達出來。她很鼓勵玉官學習。玉官便「愛，卑，西，——」唸咒般學了好幾天。果然靈得很！七天以後，她居然能把那厚本書念得像流水一般快。<sup>87</sup>

There was not much furniture in Xing Guan's two-bedroom house, but everything in it was spic and span. In the living room there was a picture from *Pilgrim's Progress* hanging in the middle of the wall, and on the desk there was a very thick Bible of the Old and New Testaments with gilt edges and a black lambskin cover. Much of the gilt had already turned dark red, and the leather had also lost its sheen. Its dog-eared corners, as well as the slips of paper sticking out as markers, showed only too well that the owner of the book must consult it several times a day...She secretly opened the Bible and sneaked a glance or two. It was a pity that it was all in a foreign alphabet, which made no sense to her. She thought to herself: Xing Guan speaks no foreign languages, so how could she read foreign books? She had to ask and Xing Guan told her that this was 'baihua script,' which one could learn to read in three days, learn to write in seven, and to be able to express freely one's mind in ten. Xing Guan

<sup>87</sup> Xu Dishan, "Yu Guan," in *Wu you hua* 无忧花 (Flowers of No Sorrow) (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008), 238.

encouraged Yu Guan to give the new script a try. For days on end, Yu Guan chanted ‘A, B, C’ as though they were a kind of incantation. It really worked! In seven days, she could read the thick book as fluently as running water.<sup>88</sup>

Though a combined alphabetic Minnan Bible of both The Old and New Testaments was not found, two separate alphabetic Bibles in Minnan dialect surfaced from archival research. Both *The Old Testament* (1902) and *The New Testament* (1882)—translated and transcribed as “Kū-Iok” and “Sin Iok” respectively in Minnan dialect—were commissioned by the British and Foreign Bible Society (Figure 3.2, 3.3). Not unlike Xing Guan’s Bible, the two Minnan Bibles were bound originally with “gilt edges and a black lambskin cover,” while “much of the gilt had already turned dark red, and the leather had also lost its sheen.” These and similar versions of the Minnan Bible granted women like Yu Guan their true access to literacy, one indelibly mediated through the power of religion.

By training illiterate female converts to aid their evangelical and social gospel missions, Protestant missionaries brought to the fore connections between gender and literacy. Such a connection was made possible and prosaic by the gendered inequality with regards to literacy in nineteenth-century China. If a large part of the population at that time remained illiterate, a far bigger majority of women was denied access to literacy in all forms. More often than not, reports, pamphlets, and fictions written by missionaries on female converts, as well as Bible Women, began with the issue of gendered

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<sup>88</sup> My translation here is modulated on Cecile Chu-chin Sun’s translation of “Yu Guan” in C. T. Hsia, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and Joseph S. M. Lau eds., *Modern Chinese stories and novellas, 1919-1949* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 53.

illiteracy.<sup>89</sup> The introduction to literacy was, in most cases, the prerequisite for the indoctrination of Protestant gospels. Potential women evangelists were schooled either to gain a moderate grasp of Chinese characters or to master the Latin alphabet and read different versions of the alphabetic Bibles. Early missionary fictions about Bible Women featured the teaching of the Latin alphabet.<sup>90</sup> For example, in *Leng Tso*—one of the first novels of a Chinese Bible Woman—the namesake woman evangelist Leng Tso explains to her audience how “the small characters” of the Latin alphabet work:

The foreign pastors have shown twenty-three small characters,\* each one having a name and sound of its own, and these are put together in a very great many different ways. Each way has its own sound and meaning; but when you know the sound of each of those twenty-three small characters, and are able to put their different sounds together and make the one sound that the characters joined together make, you can read every book written with them.<sup>91</sup>

The Latin alphabet, which transcribes either the common speech or a local speech, challenges the patriarchal hegemony over literacy. As Leng Tso asks her crowd of presumably illiterate female audiences, “... because we were not taught to read, shall the girls of the present time be compelled to grow up in ignorance? Because mothers were not taught, shall girls never be allowed to learn to read the Bible?”<sup>92</sup> The attempt to remedy the gendered illiteracy therefore symbolizes women’s liberation and

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<sup>89</sup> For accounts of Bible Women’s literacy classes, please see pamphlets such as *Chinese Bible Women: How They are Trained What They Do* (Publication information unclear); Grace O. Smith, *Tien Da Niang: The Story of our Chinese Bible Woman* (Publication information unclear).

<sup>90</sup> John A. Davis, *The Chinese Slave-Girl: A Story of Woman’s Life in China* (Chicago: Student Missionary Campaign Library, 1880); *Leng Tso, The Chinese Bible-Woman: A Sequel to ‘The Chinese Slave-Girl’* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1886).

<sup>91</sup> The original footnote on \* states, “\* letters.” By characters, Leng Tso is referring to letters. The number of twenty three most likely indicates the number of letters in the period of classical Latin, without the present day “J,” “U,” and “W.” *Leng Tso*, 32.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

enlightenment brought about by Protestant gospels against Neo-Confucian teaching. The new writing technology of the Latin alphabet gives more substance to the collective will to have “Girls read,”<sup>93</sup> while enhancing the bond between Bible women and their alphabetic Bibles.

In “Yu Guan,” the Minnan Bible functions neither as a mere evocation of the symbolic bond between gender and literacy, nor does it function only as a metonym for Yu Guan’s newfound religion, one with which she has a fraught relationship at best. More concretely, the alphabetic Minnan Bible serves as a narrative device that plays its own part in the plot line. It is only after Yu Guan learns to read the Bible that she can afford to put her son through a western education and leave the family compound for a residence in the church. She thus successfully dodges her brother-in-law, who in turn steals Xing Guan’s eldest daughter, flees the county, and only returns to the county as a communist party member working for the Soviet regional government. Yu Guan, now a Bible woman, takes the alphabetic Bible with her whenever she goes on field trips. She develops romantic attachments to a peddler she meets on the trips named Chen Lian 陳廉. Yu Guan does not find out until much later that Chen is in fact Xing Guan’s husband, who has had to run away from home for offenses committed against missionaries. Chen teaches Yu Guan that carrying only the Alphabetic Minnan Bible is not enough and that she needs a copy of *The Book of Change* 易經 as well to ward off the country ghosts.

The Bible also proves useful when Yu Guan stops a group of communist soldiers, who have taken over the county, from harassing local women. Significantly, she does so by preaching the gospel to them, translating her Minnan scripture into a form of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 16.

“common speech.” Yu Guan then goes to Nanjing to live with her son—now a returned student from the U.S. and an official in the Nationalist government in Nanjing. He is now married, after his first wife—Xing Guan’s younger daughter—dies. His second wife happens to be Xing Guan’s elder daughter whom he meets while in the U.S. Before long, Yu Guan finds Nanjing disagreeable and returns to Fujian upon a religious epiphany to begin serving her community with newfound piety. The narrative comes to a sudden end when Yu Guan decides that she will venture out to one of the islands in Southeast Asia (南洋 *nanyang*) to find Chen Lian. Taking her Bible and *The Book of Change*, she fades out of the story.<sup>94</sup>

The novella ends on this ambiguous note: Does Yu Guan find Chen Lian? For Xing Guan or herself? Does Yu Guan’s exit not undermine the sincerity of her previous religious epiphany? Although the issue of religion—Yu Guan’s syncretic treatment of the Chinese tradition, specifically qua ancestral worship, and Christianity—has garnered much attention from literary critics, no critic has yet accounted for Yu Guan’s sudden exchange of her former pragmatism for a “truer” form of Christianity. Similarly, explanations are pending on Xu Dishan’s sudden and hurried conclusion to an otherwise paced narrative. Instead of pursuing the question along the lines of religion, I propose taking up the angle of the narrative voice.

The narrator, taking a third person perspective, maintains throughout the novella a highly controlled narrative voice to the extent that it eliminates all conversations. This is to my knowledge the only case in Xu’s oeuvre. As a result, readers do not “hear” Yu

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<sup>94</sup> Xu Dishan, “Yu Guan,” pp. 236-278.

Guan in her own voice. Such treatment runs the risk of contradicting Xu's deliberate choice of representing a subaltern woman. If Xu is sincere about either form of mimetic writing—phonetic or realist—then should he not have let the subaltern Bible woman from Fujian speak for herself?

Granted, Yu Guan would have spoken in the Minnan dialect if given the opportunity, but that should not have posed a problem for Xu's narrative. As early as 1921, Xu made it clear in an article on writing and appreciation that:

對於一種作品，不管他是用什麼方言，篇內有什麼方言參雜在內，只要令人了解或感受作者所要標明底義諦，便可以過得去。鑑賞者不必指摘這句是土話，那句不雅馴，當知真理有時會從土話裡表現出來。

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It matters little for a piece of literary work when it comes to the questions such as in what dialect 方言 it is written or to what extent it involves what kind of dialect. As long as it conveys the author's meaning, it should be fine. Critics ought not to find it necessary to pick on slang and inelegant expressions, but should note that sometimes truth comes from slang.

If we take Xu Dishan's theory of dialect-in-literature seriously, we will be hard pressed to explain why there is no direct speech in Minnan dialect or any other speech for that matter in "Yu Guan." Lest the characters wrest control of the narrative voice and impinge on the plotline, the narrator maintains full control by using indirect speech, direct psychological depiction and free indirect speech. One example is when Yu Guan expresses her frustration with her life and religion.

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<sup>95</sup> Xu Dishan, "Chuangzuo di sanbao he jianshang di siyi" 創作底三寶和鑑賞底四依 (The Three Treasures of Creation and the Four Fundamentals of Appreciation), originally published in *Fiction Monthly*, Vol. 12, No. 7 (July 10, 1921). Quoted in *Xu Dishan Sanwen* (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1996), 214. The three treasures are: the treasures of wisdom, life, and beauty (智慧寶, 人生寶, 美麗寶), while the four fundamentals being: the fundamental of meaning, rule, intelligence, and feeling (依義, 依法, 依智, 依了義). This quote is taken from Xu's discussion of "the fundamental of meaning."



她還沒有看出那“理想”的意義，她仍然要求“現實”：生前有親朋奉承，死後能萬古流芳，那才不枉做人。她雖走著天路，卻常在找達到這目的人路。因為她不敢確斷她是在正當的路程上走著，她想兒子和媳婦那樣不理會她，將來的一切必使她陷在一個很孤寂的地步。她不信只是冷清的一個人能夠活在這世界裡。富，貴，福，壽，康，寧，最少總得攀著一樣。<sup>96</sup>

She could not see the meaning of the ‘ideal.’ What she wanted was still the ‘realistic.’ To have the respect and compliments of one’s friends and relatives while living, and to enjoy posthumous fame after one passed, that should be what life was all about. Although she was treading the heavenly path, she was, in fact, looking for a worldly way that would take her to that end. She was not sure she was on the right track. She was afraid that her old age might be terribly lonely and miserable, since both her son and daughter-in-law were so cold to her, and she did not believe that one could live in this world all by oneself. Of the six blessings in this world—wealth, position, fortune, longevity, prosperity, and peace—one should try to procure at least one.<sup>97</sup>

The reason that the narrator does not let Yu Guan think in her own speech and maintains full narrative control, I argue, is not that Xu Dishan wants to contradict his own position on dialects or negate his attempt to lend voice to the subaltern woman; after all, he has depicted other lower-class women as speaking subjects in other works (e.g. *Chun Tao* and *The Merchant’s Wife*). Rather, the crux preventing Xu’s narrator in “Yu Guan” from giving the heroine a true voice is precisely Xu’s commitment to realist writing and his sensitivity to phonetic mimesis highlighted in this scenario by the alphabetic Minnan Bible.

The answer is embedded in the narrative itself. Right before Yu Guan experiences her religious epiphany in Nanjing, the narrator informs us of her misery in her son’s house:

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<sup>96</sup> Xu, “Yu Guan,” 253.

<sup>97</sup> *Modern Chinese stories and novellas*, 66.

婆媳的感情一向不曾有過，有時兩人一天面對面坐著，彼此不說話。安妮對建德老是說洋話，玉官一句也聽不懂。玉官對建德說的是家鄉話，安妮也是一竅不通，兩人的互相猜疑從這事由可以想像得出來……老太太在一個人地生疏的地方，縱然把委屈訴給人聽，也沒有可訴的。她到教堂去，教友不懂她的話；找牧師，牧師也不能為她出什麼主意，只勸她順應時代，將就一點。她氣得連教堂都不去了。<sup>98</sup>

Since there was no genuine affection between the mother and daughter-in-law, An Ni (the daughter-in-law) and Yu Guan would sometimes sit face to face for a whole day without exchanging a word. An Ni always spoke in English to Jiande (Yu Guan's son), which was completely incomprehensible to Yu Guan. On the other hand, Yu Guan spoke to Jiande in their native speech, which was alien to An Ni. This (situation of non-communication) naturally increased their mutual suspicion... For the old lady living in an alienating city, even if she wanted to tell someone her grievances, there was nobody around to listen. When she went to church, her fellow church members could not understand her words; the minister couldn't give her any advice except to try to adapt to things and be more accepting. Yu Guan was so fed-up that she stopped going to church.<sup>99</sup>

To Yu Guan, Nanjing was an alienating place, and that was not, as C. T. Hsia diagnosed, because Yu Guan was “a total stranger” to her son and daughter-in-law’s “Westernized bourgeois ways.”<sup>100</sup> Nor was it mainly because she did not get along with her second daughter-in-law, as she had trouble with the first one as well without experiencing a religious epiphany and relocating to somewhere else. It is because, as the narrator tells us, “her words” could not be understood, either by her church members, or by anyone outside of the Minnan language zone. As Yu Guan’s literacy only functions in a specific Minnan environment – one of the most difficult dialects, she loses literacy and functionality once uprooted. She could not translate and assume equivalence in the circumstance of another local speech. If Yu Guan’s church members in Nanjing could not

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<sup>98</sup> Xu, “Yu Guan,” 274.

<sup>99</sup> *Modern Chinese stories and novellas*, 83.

<sup>100</sup> Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 90.

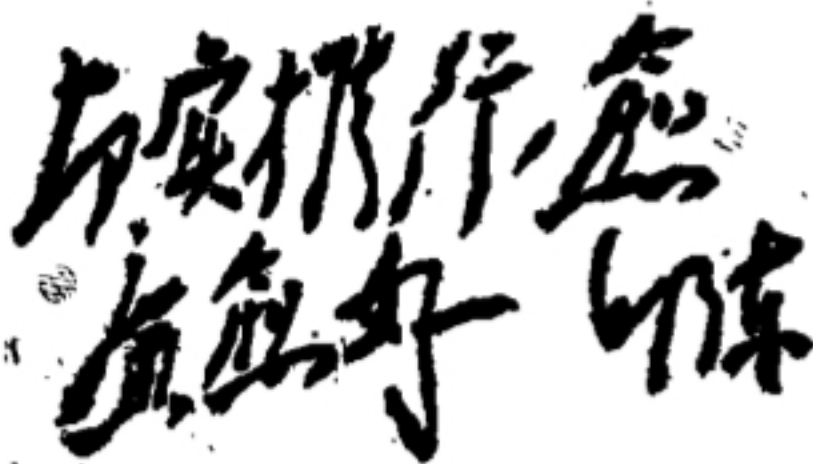
understand “her words,” neither could the readers who do not have a working knowledge of the Minnan spoken language. If Xu Dishan were to mimetically represent Yu Guan’s true speech, regardless in alphabet or characters, the majority of his readers could not have comprehended it. The crux is thus the incompatibility between the spoken language of Minnan and a written language of *baihua*. As long as the narrative voice is written in *baihua*, a mimetic representation of the Minnan speech is decidedly ill fitted however fundamental a reality to Yu Guan and her alphabetic Bible. In order not to jeopardize the cohesive narrative of “Yu Guan,” which is meant to empower the Bible woman, Yu Guan herself has to be silenced, her speech translated into and mediated through *baihua*, turning into a form of *erlebte Rede*. The Bible woman, instead of gaining her own voice, ends up conceding the right to speak directly. This incompatibility reveals the nature of *baihua*, the foundation of modern Chinese literature, as a written language or a writing system rooted in the Chinese script. Though *baihua* is inspired by the phonocentric dreams of modern Chinese intellectuals in absorbing elements from the spoken language susceptible to alphabetization, the essence of *baihua* as a written language grounded in characters resists the full materialization of such fantasy.

To take a step further, such a contradiction is reflective of the inherent mutual exclusivity of phonetic mimesis and mimetic realism. The phonocentric faith in an alphabetic script legitimizes the superiority of phonetically mimetic writing. Localized and proliferated, alphabetic-phonetic universalism creates competing mimetic writing systems based on varying local speech though written in one unifying alphabet. The thorough application of these localized schemes of universalism in literary writing challenges any given literary narrative to capture the phonetic real. Xu Dishan’s “Yu

Guan” stands in stark contrast to Marston Anderson’s appraisal that Chinese writers embrace realism while giving “little attention” to the issue of “fictional representation.”<sup>101</sup> Xu Dishan as well as others have first to re-negotiate what is real and representable before creating a mimetic literary narrative voice, both literal and metaphorical. For participants in the Third Literary Revolution, the commitment to representing all people and their voices has to be translated into tropes of women, children, the lower classes, and issues such as religion, revolution and so forth. Unexpectedly, the phonocentric dreams of modern Chinese literature, having traversed phonetic mimesis and mimetic realism, call into question the limits of mimetic writing, while opening up new possibilities for rethinking the making of modern Chinese literature.

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<sup>101</sup> Anderson offers many insights in his *Limits of Realism*, which is still one of the best studies of modern Chinese literature. While he is correct in defining realism more as “an aesthetic withdrawal than an activist engagement in social issues,” I argue that it is problematic—as showcased by Xu Dishan’s “Yu Guan”—to hasten to the conclusion that Chinese writers have given “little attention... to the technical problems of fictional representation, a preoccupation of such Western realists as Flaubert and James.” Please see Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 24-25, 37.



切實推行，越廣越好

Figure 3.1 Mao's dedication to *Sin Wenz*, “切實推行，越廣越好,” in *Sin Wenz Bao*, No. 1, 1941.



Figure 3.2 *The Old Testament* (1902) at bottom and *The New Testament* (1882) on top. Photo courtesy of American Bible Society.

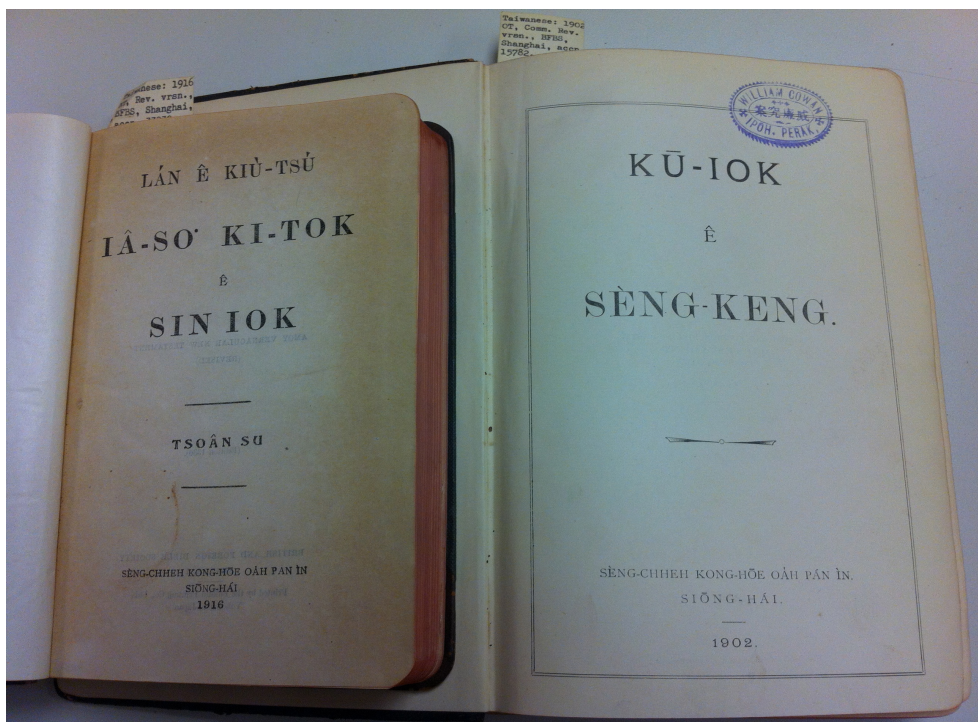


Figure 3.3 “Sin Iok” (*The New Testament*) and “Kū-Iok” (*The Old Testament*) in Minnan Dialect. Photo Courtesy of American Bible Society.

## CHAPTER 4

**War, “Yutiwen,” and the New Chinese Mass Education Movement**

The new mass education movement, which was initiated in Shanghai, should not be confused with that type of education advocated by Mr. James Yen at Ting Hsien.<sup>1</sup>

—Tao Xingzhi

Thus Tao Xingzhi 陶行知 called attention to the distinction between the old and new mass education movement. It was March 1936, the eve of the total outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Tao Xingzhi argued that in the moment of national crisis, the old mass education outmoded itself by turning into an “escapist education” for “high-class Chinese.”<sup>2</sup> It was high time, Tao pleaded, that the new mass education took the historical stage.

Arguably, James Yen and Tao Xingzhi were the two leading figures in the modern Chinese mass education movement. Backtracking thirteen years in time, the two men became colleagues and friends at the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement 中華平民教育促進會 (MEM).<sup>3</sup> As Board Secretary Tao Xingzhi even wrote to the Board President Zhu Qihui (the wife of then Premier of the Republic

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<sup>1</sup> Tao Xingzhi’s English article “The New Mass Education Movement,” cited from *Tao Xingzhi quanji* 陶行知全集 (The Collected Works of Tao Xingzhi) (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), Vol. 6, pp. 151-152.

<sup>2</sup> Tao Xingzhi, “Jiaoyu taozou” 教育逃走 (Education Fled Away), in *Tao Xingzhi quanji* 陶行知全集 (The Collected Works of Tao Xingzhi) (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1985), Vol. 3, 36.

<sup>3</sup> Grown out of the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education 中華教育改進社, MEM was founded in Tsinghua College in Beijing in August 1923. Both James Yen and Tao Xingzhi wrote about the founding of MEM. Please see James Yen, *The Mass Education Movement*, Bulletin No.1 of the National Association of the Mass Education Movement (Peking: The National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1924); Tao Xingzhi, *Education in China 1924* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1925).

Xiong Xiling), defending James Yen against objections to Yen's appointment as the General Director, saying, "There is no other more suited talent."<sup>4</sup>

So what happened in the years in between? Tao's contrasting evaluation of Yen as a unique "talent" to an outmoded mass education leader was remarkable not in the sense that old friends parted ways—they do and many of them did at crucial historical junctures—but rather because it signified a paradigm change in the Chinese Mass Education Movement from a project of "Chinese enlightenment" to a campaign of national salvation and revolutionary internationalism. Such transformation, galvanized by the unprecedented crisis of the Second World War – more specifically the Second Sino-Japanese War, manifested itself in a series of processes that rediscovered the figure of children, revamped the theory of mass education, and fundamentally redefined different forms of literacy and their ideological implications. The leitmotif of "war and literacy" in Chapter 1 resurfaces and takes on new connotations in the present chapter, as we explore how the new Chinese Mass Education Movement as well as the Chinese literary revolution found new expressions through the negotiation between alphabetic writing and character composition in the Second World War.

In this chapter, I introduce and restore the concept of *yutiwen* 語體文 (colloquialized written language) to the center of the literacy and literary movements in the late 1920s and 1930s. The research on and articulation of *yutiwen* provides us an accurate description of the main staple of modern Chinese literary writing. The silencing

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<sup>4</sup> Tao Xingzhi, *Xingzhi shuxinji* 行知書信集 (The Correspondence Collection of Tao Xingzhi) (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1981), 11. It remained unclear why the Association was lukewarm at best to Yen's candidacy, especially when it adopted largely Yen's approach to anti-illiteracy campaign. However it does explain to a certain degree why Yen was not involved in the initial conversion of his Foundation Characters to *People's Thousand Character Lessons*.



of *yutiwen*, on the other hand, enables a more informed understanding of the convoluted *baihua* as the key concept that sustains the historical contradiction between character-literacy and script revolution. Further, I examine writings, both literary and non-literary, produced by *yutiwen* writers, *Sin Wenz* sympathizers, and mass education advocates—all three in one—such as Chen Heqin, Tao Xingzhi, and Ye Shengtao. I raise a new set of questions: How does the script revolution square with the character-based *yutiwen* writing and the new mass education movement? What role does the Second Sino-Japanese War play in the refashioning of literacy and education in an unprecedented moment of national crisis? How does the old connection between war and literacy reemerge and reshape the modern Chinese literary consciousness?

### **One Thousand Characters and “*Yutiwen*”**

As discussed at length in Chapter 1, the Chinese Mass Education Movement took embryonic shape in the Chinese labor camps in France during the Great War. The literacy classes conceived for the Chinese laborers and conducted by YMCA members saw the fruition of the so-called “Foundation Characters System,” which morphed into *People’s Thousand Character Lessons* 平民千字課.<sup>5</sup> While James Yen was the initial creator of “Foundation Characters System,” it was Tao Xingzhi and Zhu Jingnong who executed the idea of grafting the one thousand foundation characters onto a four-reader curriculum for the use of the Mass Education Movement. Tao summed up the applicability and efficacy of *People’s Thousand Character Lessons* to the Mass Education Movement in his 1924 English report entitled “Education in China”:

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<sup>5</sup> James Yen, *The Mass Education Movement*, Bulletin No.1 of the National Association of the Mass Education Movement (Peking: The National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1924), 3.

An average illiterate can complete the four readers in four months by spending one hour a day. At the end of four months, he will be able to read newspapers, books, and correspondence based on the vocabulary and to express himself by using the same. As these four readers cost altogether only twelve cents Mex., even the poorest can afford to buy.<sup>6</sup>

These affordable primers, low in price and high in learning efficiency, became instant best sellers. They populated People's School 平民學校 and People's Question Station 平民問字處. Introduced to “homes, stores, factories, schools, churches, monasteries, *yamens*, steamships, prisons, and army camps,”<sup>7</sup> these primers turned all these different locales into People's Reading Circles 平民讀書處.<sup>8</sup> According to Tao, the circulation of these primers reached two million between 1923 and 1924. Advocates of Mass Education were optimistic that “it will not be long before we see a compulsory popular education in operation in China with its tax on ignorance. Friends of popular education have the ambition to achieve the miracle of eliminating two hundred million of the illiterates in a generation.”<sup>9</sup>

Aside from their ambition of eliminating illiteracy all over China, the “friends of popular education” also envisioned “the making of a new literature.”<sup>10</sup> Their expectation

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<sup>6</sup> “Mex.” referred to Mexican silver dollars, currency of the time. Tao Xingzhi, *Tao Xingzhi quanji* (1991), Vol. 6, 56. This was originally published under the co-authorship of W. Tchishin Tao (different romanization of Tao's name) and C. P. Chen, with the joint auspices of the National Federation of Provincial Educational Associations and the National Association for the Advancement of Education in 1925.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Tao wrote personally to Cai Yuanpei, Jiang Menglin, and Mrs. Hu Shi urging them to convert their homes to People's Reading Circles and to ensure that all their family members and staff should gain basic literacy with the help of *People's Thousand Character Lessons*. See *Xingzhi shuxinji*, pp. 13-14. People's reading Circles and the figure of “Little Teachers” were also seen in literary writings and theater productions, for example, Xia Yan 夏衍, *Shanghai wuyan xia: sanmu huaju* 上海屋簷下: 三幕話劇 (Under the Roof of Shanghai: A Three-Act Play) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1957).

<sup>9</sup> Tao Xingzhi, *Tao Xingzhi quanji* (1991), Vol. 6, 57.

<sup>10</sup> James Yen, *The Mass Education Movement*, 15.

was that the popularity of the primers would lend itself to the production of new literature that adopted the spirit of “People’s Thousand Characters,”<sup>11</sup> if not the exact one thousand characters per se. The May Fourth aspiration to produce accessible and living literature gained statistical precision in determining which thousand characters could provide the scriptal basis of a new literature. A quote from Lao She, speaking of his experience in writing his 1929 novel *Xiaopo’s Birthday* shows how the “People’s Thousand Characters” entered the literary consciousness of modern Chinese writers. On a sojourn in Singapore by way from the U.K. to China, Lao She worked as a Chinese teacher in a local middle school. Dismayed by the lack of time and means to write what would have been an epic of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia or the South Sea (*nanyang*),<sup>12</sup> Lao She ended up writing about Chinese children in Southeast Asia. Speaking fondly of this piece, Lao She singled out one particular aspect of the novel:

最使我得意的地方是文字的淺明簡確。有了《小坡的生日》，我才真明白了白話的力量；我敢用最簡單的話，幾乎是兒童的話，描寫一切了。我沒有算過，《小坡的生日》中一共到底用了多少字；可是它給我一點信心，就是用平民千字課的一千個字也能寫出很好的文章。<sup>13</sup>

One thing that I took most pride in was the simplicity and precision of the prose. Only after *Xiaopo’s Birthday* did I truly understand the strength of *baihua*. I dared to use the simplest language, almost childlike, to portray everything. I did not calculate how many characters there were in *Xiaopo’s Birthday*, but it gave me confidence that with the one thousand

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<sup>11</sup> Advocates of Mass Education Movement often times used People’s Thousand Characters to refer to both the publication of *People’s Thousand Character Lessons* and the teaching method of one thousand characters. I maintain the difference by italicizing the former and adding quotation marks to the latter.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Bernards discusses the “South Sea color” in Lao She’s writing. Brian Bernards, Phd Dissertation, “Writing the South Seas: Postcolonialism and the Nanyang Literary Imagination,” (University of California, Los Angeles, 2011), pp. 165-172.

<sup>13</sup> Lao She, *Laoniu poche xinbian: laoshe chuangzuo zishu* 《老牛破車》新編——老舍創作自述 (The New Edition of the Old Bull and the Broken Cart: Autobiographical Account of Lao She’s Writing) (Hong Kong: Sanlian Bookstore, 1986), 25.

characters from the *People's Thousand Character Lessons*, I could produce very decent prose.

Granted that Lao She did not check his writing meticulously against the vocabulary list of the *People's Thousand Character Lessons*, he did make the discovery that with more or less the same amount of characters, he could maintain the quality of his literary production. This discovery, though no more than a single case, confirmed the possibility of producing new modern Chinese literature using the People's Thousand Characters. While Lao She's quote substantiated, from a writer's point of view, the plausible connection between basic literacy and new literature, at the same time it showcased the conceptual confusion in naming the kind of writing system with which writers like Lao She engaged themselves. Lao She was by no means alone in adopting the nomenclature of *baihua* to describe writings that were produced with "People's Thousand Characters." In his 1924 report, Tao Xingzhi applauded "Pai-hua, or the spoken language," since it "has made it possible for the mass education movement to go on with its program of eliminating illiteracy in the country."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, James Yen defined his "Foundation Character System" as a system that contained "1000 of the most frequently used characters in Pai Hua."<sup>15</sup>

It was one thing for the New Culture Movement enthusiasts to confuse, either unwittingly or strategically, *baihua* as the spoken language and the *baihua*-styled written language; it was quite another for one-thousand-character advocates to conflate the spoken language and the script of characters, especially when their anti-illiteracy

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<sup>14</sup> Tao, "Education in China 1924," 4.

<sup>15</sup> Yen's following remarks revealed that it was not the plain speech but the discrete characters that provided the basis of his Foundation Character System, "Each character is a jewel which has attained its position among the coveted thousand by fierce competition and by its ability to prove that it can be used in a sufficient number of combinations." Yen, *The Mass Education Movement*, 3.

campaign grounded itself in the realm of the script. The lack of discrimination between orality and literacy is particularly puzzling considering that these advocates were aware of the great effort that went into determining the most popular one thousand characters—without the slightest consideration of their phonetic value—in a vast body of character data. As James Yen informed us, the initial one thousand characters in “Foundation Character System” had to be researched and revised (not phoneticized) by a group of professional educators with statistical expertise before making their way into *People’s Thousand Character Lessons*:

我們選出這最通用字的辦法，強半是根據以前在法比華工教育中的經驗……但這種選法，還怕欠妥，所以我們又博諮旁問，在各方面教育專家前請教。恰有吾友陳鶴琴先生自歸國以來，即與同事數人，在東南大學對於此事曾有精深研究。他們幾位先生，不辭勞瘁，不嫌麻煩，用了二年餘的光陰，將我國的白話文學，如《水滸》《紅樓夢》等書，及各界通用書報，每種分工檢查，將各書所有的字，以各字所用次數的多少分類，一共檢查了五十餘萬字，從中選出通用的字數千……以陳君用科學的方法所選的通用數千字中，最通用的，即分數最高的一千字，與我們由經驗及研究所選的一千字比較，竟有百分之八十相同。由此足見經驗的方法(Empirical)與科學(Scientific)的方法，實能互相糾正發明的。<sup>16</sup>

We identified the most frequently used characters more or less relying on our experience in teaching the Chinese laborers in France and Belgium (in World War I)... We were concerned that this method would not suffice, so

<sup>16</sup> James Yen, “Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong” 平民教育新運動 (The New Mass Education Movement) in *Xin Jiaoyu* 新教育 (New Education), Vol. 5, No. 5, December 1922. A slightly different version of this article was translated into English, presumably by James Yen himself, and published as the abovementioned pamphlet *The Mass Education Movement* in 1924. In the 1924 version, Yen described Chen’s engagement as follows in his English original, “This vocabulary was later checked up by the splendid work on ‘Determination of the Vocabulary of the Common People’ conducted under the direction of Prof. H. C. Chen of the National South-eastern University, covering a study of Pai Hua literature involving over one million characters. Based upon this final vocabulary four readers called ‘People’s Thousand Character Lessons’ (平民千字課) were prepared.” See Yen, *The Mass Education Movement*, 3. The discrepancy between the sizes of character data was notable: half a million in the 1922 Chinese version and one million in the 1924 English version. The same estimate of one million characters was also given in Tao Xingzhi’s preface to Chen Heqin’s book *Yutiwen yingyong zihui* 語體文應用字彙. While Chen himself gave the number of half a million, it remains unclear why Yen and Tao doubled the size of the data in various accounts.

we consulted with a wide range of expertise. It so happened that my friend Mr. Chen Heqin, upon his return from overseas, has done intensive and rigorous research together with several of his colleagues at the Southeastern University on this very subject. They took tremendous trouble and spent more than two years to go over Chinese *baihua* literature such as *Water Margin* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as books and newspapers of all fields. They categorized and checked all characters and noted the number of times each character was used. This amounted to a total of half a million characters worth of literature, out of which they culled several thousand most frequently used characters... The top one thousand characters, which were selected via Mr. Chen's scientific method and scored the highest in the frequency test among the several thousand, coincided almost eighty percent with the one thousand characters we chose based on experience. It was hence sufficient to say that the empirical and scientific methods could indeed complement each other.

The scientific *modus operandi* proved in hindsight Yen's prescience in the anti-illiteracy program during the Great War. These one thousand characters, now armed with statistical precision, went on to lay the foundation of all primers of the People's Education 平民教育 series.<sup>17</sup> It is important to point out however that the database from which these one thousand characters were culled had no bearing on the characters' phonetic value. Although they were mostly taken from the so-called *baihua* literature and hence less archaic in style, they were chosen not because they represented people's everyday speech, but because of their high frequency in a particular form of writing that was already prevalent around the May Fourth era. Their high value in statistical frequency consolidated the future trend of a new literature that employed visibly fewer characters. This form of writing, making use of a decreased number of characters, came closer to the New Culture ideal of non-classical and living literature. It survived efforts to eradicate Chinese characters and proved to be the staple of modern Chinese literature.

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<sup>17</sup> These primers include but are not limited to: *Peasants' Thousand Character Lessons*, *Urbanites' Thousand Character Lessons*, *Masses' Thousand Character Lessons*, *People's Religion Primer*, and *Elementary Peasants' Religion Primer*. For copies of these primers, see IIRR Archive, Box 131, Butler Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

While most Chinese writers and intellectuals—Lao She, James Yen, Tao Xingzhi, and Ye Shengtao (all of whom appear in this chapter)—named this mode of literary writing as *baihua* or *baihua* literature, there was a moment when a more accurate term, both conceptually and technically, made its appearance.

That term was “*yutiwen* 語體文,” literally translated as “the colloquialized written language.” This colloquialized written language aspired to close the gap between the spoken and the written with its firm footing in the written realm. *Yutiwen* was thus a more fitting term to describe the nature of modern Chinese writing. On the one hand, it captured the essence of the kind of *baihua* endorsed by Chinese writers as a written language. On the other, it registered *baihua*’s touch of colloquialism while maintaining the distinction between the written and the spoken. The term was adopted by Chen Heqin—Yen’s aforementioned friend—in a 1928 publication entitled *The Applied Vocabulary of Yutiwen* 語體文應用字彙.<sup>18</sup> Drawing on previous lexical scholarship, this book demonstrated the results of the first statistical research on character frequency in *yutiwen* conducted by Chinese scholars.<sup>19</sup> Though the book did not come out until 1928 due to a fire that destroyed part of the data, the *yutiwen* project started as early as 1920.<sup>20</sup> In the preface to the book, Tao Xingzhi acknowledged that the undertaking of *yutiwen* research, even before its publication, provided statistical backing for the first edition of

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<sup>18</sup> Chen Heqin, *Yutiwen yingyong zihui* 語體文應用字彙 (The Vocabulary of Applied Yutiwen) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1928, 1933).

<sup>19</sup> Chen referenced in the introduction of the book the following scholars (only last names) and their work: Ayres, Jones, Anderson, Thorndike, as well as Southhill and a certain Pastor P. Kronz. Ibid, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 1.

*People's Thousand Character Lessons* in 1923.<sup>21</sup> More importantly for the purpose of our discussion, *yutiwen* affords us an accurate vocabulary and a rare opportunity to reflect upon the nature of modern Chinese writing, its historical misunderstanding, and theoretical dilemmas.

The term *yutiwen* was crucial on multiple levels. First of all, it provided an accurate grasp of the composition of the source literature from which the vocabulary list was determined. By extension, it was also a fair description of the dominant form of literature in circulation after the May Fourth and the New Culture Movements. Chen summarized, in *The Applied Vocabulary of Yutiwen*, six categories of primary sources from which he and his colleagues harvested a total of 554,478 characters (including repetition of the same characters) and generated a list of 4,261 discrete characters. These six categories were, including a few examples in each category:

- (1) 兒童用書類：全世界的小孩子、兒童文學故事、兒童文學小說……
- (2) 報刊類：廈門通俗教育報、時事新報、注音字母報……
- (3) 雜誌類：婦女雜誌；
- (4) 小學生課外著作類：南京附小學生新聞；
- (5) 古今小說類：紅樓夢、水滸演義、西遊記、北京燕三小姐、禮拜六；
- (6) 雜類：學生婚姻問題、勸種小麥淺說、官話國恥演說、聖經。<sup>22</sup>

- (1) Children's books: *Little Children All Over the World*, *Children's Literary Stories*, and *Children's Novels*...
- (2) Newspapers: *Xiamen Popular Education Newspaper*, *Current Affairs Newspaper*, and *The National Alphabet Newspaper*...
- (3) Journals: *Women's Magazine*;
- (4) Extracurricular Writings of primary school students: *Nanjing Fuxiao Student Newspaper*;
- (5) Old and New Novels: *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, *Miss Yansan of Beijing*, and *Saturday*;

<sup>21</sup> Tao Xingzhi, "Preface," *ibid*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Instead of reproducing Chen's tables here, I am only quoting the content. Chen Heqin, *The Vocabulary of Applied Yutiwen*, pp. 7-10.



(6) Miscellanies: *The Problem of Student Marriage*, *Preliminary Talks on Persuading People to Grow Wheat*, *Speeches in Mandarin on National Shame*, and *The Holy Bible*.

This motley list of literature encompassed a wide spectrum of colloquialized written language. The varying degrees of colloquialization marked such different genres as the old *baihua* prose (*Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Water Margin*), the more Europeanized and bourgeois *Saturday*, various children's literature, the gender-conscious *Women's Magazine*, written speeches, and last but not least Bible translation. The furthest this body of *yutiwen* went in colloquialization were speeches in *guanhua* (mandarin). It is worth noting, however, that *guanhua* was itself a heterogeneous concept historically mediated through the literary tradition and therefore hardly a pure embodiment of the spoken language.<sup>23</sup> More significantly, this body of data did not include folklore, folksongs, or dialect literature for the full representation of the colloquial. The degree of colloquialization was thus circumscribed and took a second seat to the essence of *yutiwen* as a written language.

*Yutiwen* became more crucial as it made it clear that the future production of modern Chinese literature would operate in a certain form of written language that would give little or no consideration to the phonetic value of individual characters. Colloquialization would happen only insofar as a process of de-formalization in diction, syntax, and the tone of voice. The crux of the matter remained the Chinese written language, which adopted the character script. Chen demonstrated, through a series of

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<sup>23</sup> The concept of *guanhua* was an unstable one that changed over time and differed from place to place. For a historical and phonetic overview of *guanhua*, please refer to Geng Zhensheng 耿振生 ed., *Jindai guanhua yuyin yanjiu* 近代官話語音研究 (Studies of the Phonology of Mandarin in Early Modern China) (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 2007). For an analysis of the difference between *guanhua* and *baihua* in early modern China, see Shang Wei's forthcoming article, "Writing and Speech: Rethinking the Issue of Vernaculars in Early Modern China."

questions, the enduring connection between *yutiwen* and characters, while ruling out the relevance of *baihua*. Chen asked:

我們中國普通用的字彙究竟有多少？其中有多少文言文的字彙？其中有多少語體文的字彙？那多少字是兩種文體都有的？還有那多少字是最通用的，那多少字是次通用的？那多少字是不常用的？那幾多字是小學生應該學的？那幾多字可作平民教育用的？這些問題雖關教育之普及甚重且大，然若沒有精細的試驗，縝密的研究斷不能解決的。<sup>24</sup>

How many characters are in common use in China? How many of them are used in classical Chinese prose? How many of them in *yutiwen*? And how many of them are being employed in both? Also how many characters are most frequently used, how many less frequently used, and how many least frequently used? How many characters should primary school students learn? Which ones could be employed for the purpose of People's Education? These questions, so crucial for the popularization of education, could not be answered lightly without careful experiment and meticulous research.

In short, it was all about characters. The data source was a vast amount of *yutiwen* broken down to discrete units of characters. The “experiment” method took these characters—half a million of them—and ran them through a statistical ranking in terms of the frequency of use. Moreover, the research output was a list of characters—4,261 of them to be precise—compiled in an increasing order from the least frequently used (Figure 4.1, e.g. 僕, 罌, 羌) to the most frequently used (Figure 4.2, e.g. 一, 不, 的). The “experiment’s” objective, data sample, statistical method, and final output all demonstrated the irrelevance of the “plain speech” called *baihua*. The phonocentric take on the unification of the spoken and the written, i.e. the subjugation of the written to the spoken, had no bearing on the linguistic reality of *yutiwen* – the norm of modern Chinese writing.

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<sup>24</sup> Chen, *The Vocabulary of Applied Yutiwen*, 1.

It should be clear by now that the proper name to describe modern Chinese writing ought not to be *baihua*, but *yutiwen*. Then the question is: if *baihua* was truly a misnomer, then why did it catch on effortlessly while the more rigorous terminology *yutiwen* remained buried in a 1928 vocabulary list and was not even systematically adopted in writings by its own author?<sup>25</sup> By way of reintroducing *yutiwen* back into the messy ground of *baihua*, I pinpoint a necessary distinction between the two kinds of “the unification of the spoken and the written 言文一致,” represented by *yutiwen* and *baihua* respectively. Such a distinction, I suggest, is fundamental to reexamining the historical (mis)understanding of *baihua* and the theoretical dilemma of the phonocentric impulse of modern Chinese writing.

As we have seen, *baihua* was, rather than one single concept, a cluster of concepts, ranging from the non-classical prose, *guanhua*, to the spoken language, and the plain speech (Chapter 1). In contrast, *yutiwen* could be easily pinned down as a colloquialized written language. By extension, this unequivocal definition of *yutiwen* warranted one of the two kinds of unification between the spoken and the written – a compromise between the two in the form of a written language. The *yutiwen* branch of unification closed the gap between the spoken and the written by synthesizing a colloquialized written language, endorsing the character script. This was in fact the historical path that modern Chinese writing took, and the path that continues to influence our linguistic and literary present. The other strand of unification on the other hand, embodied in one of the definitions of *baihua*, the plain speech, unified the oral and the written by annihilating the written in

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<sup>25</sup> To my knowledge, Chen never repeated *yutiwen* in his later writings, but conformed to the term à la mode – *baihua*. See Chen Heqin, *Chen Heqin quanji* 陳鶴琴全集 (The Complete Works of Chen Heqin) (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 6.

favor of the spoken. Following more closely the footsteps of the Meiji *genbun itchi* 言文一致 movement, the *baihua* approach of unification championed orality at the expense of character literacy.

Now that the *baihua-yutiwen* distinction is established, there is yet another set of questions. If *yutiwen* was indeed more apt to describe the historical reality and linguistic materiality of modern Chinese writing, then why did it not survive discussions of modern Chinese language and literature revolutions? More importantly, why did a convoluted term such as *baihua* overrule the conceptual rigor of *yutiwen* and dominate our understanding of modern Chinese literary history? Here we reach a pivotal point where the *baihua-yutiwen* distinction revealed the phonocentric dreams that have haunted modern Chinese writing. As we have seen, *yutiwen* can be unequivocally defined as a colloquialized written language, a definition that captured and reflected the true historical circumstances of modern Chinese writing. As it turned out, *baihua* could also claim the same definition through one of its many connotations as “non-classical writing.” The multivalence of *baihua* thus took under its wings the more technically accurate *yutiwen*, while keeping the backdoor open for the phonetic usurpation of the written language. A clear definition of *yutiwen* would have sufficed for the purpose of defining the historical materiality of modern Chinese writing, were it not for its phonocentric impulse. *Baihua* became particularly useful because, on the one hand it acknowledged the historical reality of the modern Chinese writing as largely a written language with its own tradition, while on the other, it kept alive phonocentric hopes. The unification of the spoken and the written, under the rubric of *baihua*, would evolve from a tentative unification in the realm of the written to an ultimate unification in the sphere of sound.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, linguistic evolutionary thinking was the historical motor that drove forward the fraught campaigns of alphabetizing Chinese. *Baihua* was thus embraced, wittingly or unwittingly, as the concept *de rigueur* to describe modern Chinese writing. It was nebulous enough to acknowledge the “backward” nature of modern Chinese writing – its non-phonetic linguistic reality. At the same time, it kept intact the desire to bring about a sea change for modern Chinese language and literature, one that would privilege the phonetic aspects of Chinese language.

Such a sea change did take place. Movements of Chinese alphabetization called out the ambiguity of the *baihua-yutiwen* dyad. The phonocentric impulse reached its crescendo through the gradation from *yutiwen*, *baihua*, to eventually GR and *Sin Wenz*. While GR’s popularity continued to wane in the 1930s, the Latinization Movement climaxed as the Second Sino-Japanese War exacerbated the sense of urgency to salvage the nation and its writing system. Former *yutiwen* supporters, such as Tao Xingzhi and Chen Heqin, changed gears and embraced the Chinese Latinization Movement. In the following sections, we follow the change of course undertaken by both Chen Heqin and Tao Xingzhi as they integrated the Chinese Latinization Movement in their linguistic and education theories, as well as in practices of mass education and national salvation.

### ***Yutiwen* and Latinization**

Chen Heqin, after finishing his study on *yutiwen*, rarely reprised the term himself. Instead, Chen devoted his work to child psychology, early childhood education, the training of professional teachers, and the Chinese Latinization Movement. More than a mass education enthusiast with statistical expertise, Chen had extensive interests in

biology, geology, and psychology during his undergraduate years at Tsinghua College and Johns Hopkins University. It was not until graduate studies that Chen turned his focus to education. He received his Master's degree from Teachers College at Columbia University in 1919.<sup>26</sup> Mentored by Paul Monroe, William Heard Kilpatrick, Edward Thorndike, and Robert Woodworth, and influenced indirectly by John Dewey, Chen became a professional educator who specialized in kindergarten education and was reputed to be the “father of Chinese early childhood education.” A fellow YMCA member, Chen was acquainted with James Yen. Chen also became colleagues with Tao Xingzhi as he assumed teaching positions in the Nanjing Normal University and the Southeastern University.<sup>27</sup>

Chen's career as an academic and an educator took on a different hue as he engaged his education work with the Chinese Latinization Movement at its height. In the year of 1938 alone, Chen wrote four articles in support of the Latinization campaign, including a historical overview of alphabetizing Chinese, and three essays discussing Latinization's relationship to wartime refugees, children, and women, respectively:

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<sup>26</sup> Chen's learning philosophy was “Try to know something of everything and everything of something.” He took a wide range of courses at Johns Hopkins, including geology, biology, economics, education, and psychology. He also took a public administration class with Frank Goodnow, then President of Johns Hopkins, and formal advisor to the Beiyang Yuan Shikai government. Chen also spent two summers at Cornell University and Amherst College, studying ornithology, gardening, beekeeping, and automobile studies, etc. For Chen's vivid account of his years studying in the U.S., see *Wo de bansheng* 我的半生 (Half of My Life) (Shanghai: Hua hua shu ju, 1947).

<sup>27</sup> I should note that it was hardly a coincidence that James Yen, Tao Xingzhi, and Chen Heqin were all Christians, which testified to the strong connections between the Protestant missionary tradition, its Social Gospel Movement, progressive education in the U.S., and its spread in China. However, as this chapter demonstrates, their common faith did not prevent these Chinese Christian educators from taking different approaches to education and politics. For a discussion of the Social Gospel Movement and its impact on education in both the U.S. and China, please see Ronald White and Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975); Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western relations, 1916-1952* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); and James C. Thomson Jr., *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

“Latinizing the Chinese Character 漢字拉丁化,” “*Sin Wenz* and Refugee Education 新文字與難民教育,” “Little Friends! Let’s Rise and Eradicate Illiteracy 小朋友! 大家起來, 掃除文盲,” and “*Sin Wenz* and Women 新文字與婦女.”<sup>28</sup> Chen also produced between 1937 and 1938 a two-volume *Sin Wenz* primer entitled *People’s Textbooks* 民眾課本, alongside sixteen supplementary readers in *Sin Wenz*, including a translation/transliteration of Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah Q*, a translation of Ouida’s *Dog of Flanders*, and a story of Wu Xun 武訓.<sup>29</sup> Serving on the board of the Committee of Chinese Script Reform, Chen continued to write about the new script of the Chinese people. His interest in and commitment to Latinization lasted beyond the PRC’s official abandonment of the Chinese Latinization Movement in 1958.<sup>30</sup>

How did Chen reconcile his support for Latinization with the work he completed on *yutiwen*? Was he not aware of the incompatibility of the two scripts in which *yutiwen* and *Sin Wenz* were registered respectively? Given Chen’s statistical work on the Chinese script and his steady support for the Latin script, it seemed as though one could expect Chen to be levelheaded on the issue of script and its distinction from language. However, far from correcting the misnomer of *baihua* and replacing it with *yutiwen* when

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<sup>28</sup> Chen Heqin, *Chen Heqin quanji*, Vol. 6, pp. 160-186.

<sup>29</sup> The 1872 novel *Dog of Flanders* was written by Quida, the pseudonym of the English novelist Marie Louise de la Ramée. It was translated by Lou Shiyi from a Japanese edition into Chinese, which served as the basis for Chen’s *Sin Wenz* translation. For a list of Chen’s *Sin Wenz* primers, please refer to *ibid*, pp. 187-230.

<sup>30</sup> Chen gave a speech at a committee meeting of the Committee of Chinese Script Reform in 1955 entitled “Zai quanguo wenzi gaige huiyishang de fayan” 在全國文字改革會議上的發言 (A Speech at the National Meeting of Script Reform), *ibid*, pp. 234-238. After 1958, Chen continued his interest in alphabetizing Chinese. His last piece of writing on *Sin Wenz* was a 1979 report entitled “Wenzi gaige shi kexue shijian he renmin qunzhong ziji jiefang ziji de shiye” 文字改革是科學實踐和人民群眾自己解放自己的事業 (Script Reform is a Scientific Practice and the People’s Cause of Self-Liberation), *ibid*, pp. 243-246.

applicable, Chen demonstrated in his 1938 article on the history of alphabetizing Chinese nothing short of a conceptual lapse. By dissecting Chen's confusion, I reveal the working mechanism behind the historical contradiction between the will to eradicate the Chinese character system and the practice of keeping it.

Chen initially wrote the article in English in 1938 under the title "Latinization of the Chinese Language." It was translated into Chinese in 1947 as "Latinizing the Chinese Character 漢字拉丁化," which was in a way an amendment to the original.<sup>31</sup> Chen's English version and the otherwise largely faithful Chinese translation aimed to establish a narrative of the genealogy of alphabetizing Chinese. Chen first critiqued, in a way reminiscent of Qu Qiubai's writing (Chapter 3), the difficulty of Chinese characters and then listed in chronological order the following movements: Missionaries' Romanization Campaign, the May Fourth *baihua* Movement, the National Alphabet, GR, and the Chinese Latinization Movement. Chen worded his subsections as follows in the English original: "The Difficulty of Learning the Chinese Language," "Romanization of the Chinese Language," "Vernacular Language Movement," "Phonetic Signs Movement," "National Romanization or 'Kuo-yu' Romanization," "Latinization of the Chinese Language",<sup>32</sup> while the subsection titles in the Chinese translation read "The Difficulty of Learning the Chinese Characters 學習中國文字的困難," "Romanizing the Chinese script 中國字的羅馬化," "The *Baihua* Prose Movement 白話文運動," "The National Alphabet Movement 注音符號運動," "GR 國語羅馬字," and "Latinizing the Chinese Script 漢字

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<sup>31</sup> The English version was published in *The China Quarterly* in 1938. The Chinese version, translated by a certain Wang Xialiang, appeared in *Huo Jiaoyu* 活教育 (Living Education), Vol. 6, No. 1 in 1950.

<sup>32</sup> Chen, "Latinization of the Chinese Language," in *The China Quarterly*, Vol. III (1938), pp. 155-166.



拉丁化。”<sup>33</sup> Unlike Chen’s original formulation, which made no distinction amongst such concepts as spoken language, written language, and script, the Chinese translation and my retranslation of it into English served as a correction. Insofar as Chen’s entire essay dealt with the issue of the Chinese script, Chen’s indiscriminate use of “the Chinese language” risked missing the point of his own inquiry.

Chen might have erred to equate “Chinese characters” with “the Chinese language.”<sup>34</sup> He did however make an important point—deliberately or not—in using “language” to conflate script and writing system. The persistent presence of *baihua*, or rather the curious absence of *yutiwen* was our clue to understanding the confusion. Why would the author who completed a study on *yutiwen* give up the term in favor of the less accurate *baihua*, or in Chen’s romanization *Pei-hua*? Was Chen overlooking the nature of *baihua* prose as a character-based written language as he so convincingly established in the *yutiwen* project? How did such a character-based movement reconcile with the string of efforts that took the eradication of the Chinese script to be their tasks? In the section of “The *Baihua* Prose Movement,” Chen attempted to bridge the break between the two competing scripts in which *baihua* prose and Latinized Chinese were written respectively:

因為人們的心裡不能容受如中國字羅馬化那樣的根本改革，教育家們、語言學家們與改革家們便開始激起改造中國文字的浪潮，在 20 於年以前，胡適、蔡元培、錢玄同等便開始運用白話文了。<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Chen Heqin Quanji*, Vol. 6, pp. 160-173. Aside from “國語羅馬字,” whose character title was kept by Chen in parentheses, all other character titles were Wang Xialiang’s translation.

<sup>34</sup> Chen, “Latinization of the Chinese Language,” 161.

<sup>35</sup> The Chinese version comes from *Chen Heqin Quanji*, Vol. 6, 164. The following English translation is mine, while Chen’s English original reads: “As the minds of the people were not ready to receive a reform so radical as the Romanized language, educators, philologists and reformers began to agitate for the improvement of the Chinese language. About a quarter of a century ago, Dr. Hu Shih, Tsai Yuen-pei, Mr. Y. T. Chien and others began to advocate the use of the vernacular language.” See Chen, “Latinization of the Chinese Language,” 159.

As the minds of the people were not ready to receive a reform so radical as the Romanized script, educators, philologists, and reformers began to agitate for the improvement of the Chinese written language. About a quarter of a century ago, Dr. Hu Shi, Cai Yuanpei, Qian Xuantong and others began to advocate the use of the *baihua* prose.

As Chen put it, the conceptual rift between “the Chinese written language” and “the Romanized script” was indeed “radical.” *Baihua* became the mitigating third party that was in itself a form of “Chinese written language” and at the same time had the potential of being transcribed in “the Romanized script.” Evoking big names such as Hu Shi, Cai Yuanpei, and Qian Xuantong, Chen implied that the conceptual leap of faith from *baihua* to Latinization, however troubled, was a collective enterprise initiated by and passed down from the May Fourth leaders. Chen more than anyone else would know that the true name of “the Chinese written language” from the May Fourth era ought to be *yutiwen*. However, were he to use *yutiwen* in place of *baihua*, the genealogy of Latinization that he aimed to create would collapse and the gateway through which “the Romanized script” could creep in would be foreclosed. By avoiding *yutiwen*, whether on purpose or not, Chen managed to shelve the inconvenient truth that *yutiwen* and Latinization, in support of two competing scripts, were in essence two projects at odds with one another. The silencing of *yutiwen* gave voice to *baihua*, which allowed Chen to make a tenuous connection between the two scripts and the two projects. The multivalent *baihua* defined as plain speech found common ground with Latinization’s promise to transcribe plain speech. Therefore *baihua* as a written language with phonetic appeal provided a better case than *yutiwen* for the historical narrative of latinizing the Chinese script. Chen’s confusion and conflation was less of a symptom of any conceptual laziness

in retaining a clear distinction between language and script than a manifestation of his enchantment with the phonocentric residue in *baihua*,

The muddled use of *baihua* thus became the perfect camouflage that enabled and sustained the conflation between script and language. It kept alive the phonetic drive while the *yutiwen* practice continued to be the mainstay of modern Chinese language and literature. *Yutiwen* and Latinization, the two mutually exclusive projects, were made compatible through *baihua*. The silencing of *yutiwen* and the dissemination of *baihua* worked together to sustain the phonocentric dreams that kept haunting modern Chinese writing. An illusion was created where *yutiwen* would seamlessly merge into *baihua*, which would in turn invite phoneticization in the form of either Romanization or Latinization. As the Chinese outlook for the Second Sino-Japanese War took a toll, the discourse of phonetic pursuit gained new connotations that went beyond evolutionary linguistics. In the next section, we will see how the Chinese Latinization Movement became a symbol for national salvation, giving rise to a new theory and the practice of a different form of mass education and liberation.

### **Latinization, Wartime Mobilization, and the New Mass Education**

Tao Xingzhi was perhaps the most vocal advocate of *Sin Wenz* among the six hundred and eighty-eight proponents who signed off on the public letter “Our Opinion on the Promotion of the New Script” in December 1935.<sup>36</sup> Tao, like Chen Heqin, was also trained at Columbia Teachers College and was credited by John King Fairbank as “the most creative disciple of John Dewey,” one “who went beyond him in facing China’s

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<sup>36</sup> For a full list of the six hundred and eighty-eight signatures on the public letter, see *Tao Xingzhi Quanj* (1985), Vol. 3, pp. 50-55.

problems.”<sup>37</sup> Upon returning to China, Tao devoted himself to mass education in both urban and rural areas. Tao developed his own theory of education and launched a number of schools putting in practice his own education philosophy, the most famous ones being Xiaozhuang Experimental Rural Normal College 曉莊試驗鄉村師範 in suburban Nanjing and Yucai Middle School 育才學校 in Chongqing.<sup>38</sup> He became one of the most important educators in modern Chinese history, stirring up even beyond his death great interest and controversy within both the GDM and the CCP. On the GMD front, Tao’s work with Xiaozhuang attracted the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, who after paying the school a visit decided to shut it down while forcing Tao into a brief exile in Japan between October 1930 and January 1931. In spite of this difficult episode, Tao remained influential and was chosen as a “People’s Ambassador”; he visited twenty-six countries between 1936 and 1938, seeking international support for Chinese resistance against Japanese invasion. He also served as one of the mediators between the GMD and the CCP upon the eve of the Civil War in 1945 and died in 1946 from apoplexy before the GMD could assassinate him (Figure 4.4).<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Tao’s relationship to the CCP was

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<sup>37</sup> John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 200. Among the other Chinese students who could claim to have extensive contact with John Dewey were Hu Shi, Zhang Boling (President of Nankai University), Jiang Menglin (President of Peking University), and Guo Bingwen (President of Southeastern University). Dewey’s Chinese students were instrumental in bringing Dewey to China on the eve of the May Fourth Movement. For an extensive account of Fairbank’s personal contact with these Chinese intellectuals, see Fairbank, *Chinabound: A Fifty-Year Memoir* (New York: Harpercollins, 1983). For an overview of John Dewey’s education theory in China, see Wang Ying 王穎, *Duwei jiaoyu xuepai yu Zhongguo jiaoyu* 杜威教育學派與中國教育 (The Dewey School of Education and Education in China) (Beijing: Beijing Institute of Technology Press, 2007). Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the relationship between Columbia Teachers College and China is yet to be explored and awaits more scholarly treatment.

<sup>38</sup> Tao’s other educational institutions included the Chinese Nonprofessional School in Hong Kong and the Society University in Chongqing, as well as a number of education societies, such as the Life Education Society and Shanhai 山海 Work Study Society.

<sup>39</sup> Tao was neither a member of the CCP nor the GMD and claimed political neutrality, as he was registered with a third party – the China Democratic League founded in 1941.

also a fraught one at best. Though the CCP leaders mourned Tao's death and lauded him as the "People's Great Educator" and "a non-party Bolshevik," Tao's writings on Wu Xun 武訓—a late Qing Dynasty beggar turned educator—aroused severe posthumous criticism of Tao, which was seen as a preamble to the Cultural Revolution.<sup>40</sup> Tao's many activities as an educator and political activist seemed disparate, but they were all anchored in Tao's approach to literacy. Tao's writings about *Sin Wenz*, I suggest, provided a new prism to reflect on the entanglement of literacy, education and politics, articulating the triangular connections amongst the Chinese Latinization Movement, the Second Sino-Japanese War, as well as the education and liberation of the Chinese people.

After signing the public letter endorsing *Sin Wenz*, Tao penned within a few months' time in 1936 a series of articles in relation to the Chinese Latinization Movement.<sup>41</sup> These writings established and consolidated a three-way relationship

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<sup>40</sup> Wu Xun was a Qing dynasty beggar-educator, who funded his own schools through begging. Tao Xingzhi appreciated immensely Wu Xun's devotion to grassroots anti-illiteracy movements and his self-sacrificing spirit. Not only has Tao himself written many essays in honor of Wu Xun, he also encouraged the director Sun Yu 孫瑜, another Columbia alumnus, to make a biographical film of Wu Xun. This was the 1950 film, *The Life of Wu Xun*. Initially well received, it soon incurred severe criticism from the CCP officials as high up as Mao Zedong. The political criticism targeted Wu Xun's approach as a revisionist compromise with the anti-revolutionaries. The Wu Xun campaign was the first case of party politics interfering with artistic production in the PRC. For a brief introduction of the film and the film director, see Zhang Yingjin and Xiao Zhiwei, "Sun Yu" in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 324-25. For an overview of the campaign, see Yuan Xi, *Wu Xun zhuan pipan jishi* 「武訓傳」批判紀實 (The Historical Account of the Critique of The Life of Wu Xun) (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2000). Criticism of Tao lasted during the Cultural Revolution and Tao's name was not rehabilitated until 1981.

<sup>41</sup> Tao composed the following on the issue of *Sin Wenz*: "China's New Language" (in English); "*Sin Wenz* ge 1, 2, 3" 新文字歌 1, 2, 3 (Three Songs of *Sin Wenz*), "Wenzi xinlun" 文字新論 (New Theory of the Script), "Dazhong Jiaoyu wenti" 大眾教育問題 (The Problem of Mass Education), "Xin wenzi wei tuijin dazhong wenhua zhi zui youxiao de gongju" 新文字為推進大眾文化之最有效的工具 (*Sin Wenz* as the Most Efficient Instrument to Promote Mass Culture), "Xin zhongguo yu xin jiaoyu" 新中國與新教育 (New China and New Education), "Zai Guangdong sheng Sin Wenz yanjiu hui chengli dahui shang de yanji" 在廣東省新文字研究會成立大會上的演詞 (The Speech at the Inaugural Meeting of the Guangdong Provincial *Sin Wenz* Research Society), "Zhongguo Sin Wenz" 中國新文字 (China's *Sin Wenz*), in *Tao Xingzhi Quanji* (1991), Vol. 4, Vol. 6, and Vol. 7.

amongst *Sin Wenz*, national salvation, and a new mass education movement. In an article entitled “The Problem of Mass Education 大眾教育問題,” Tao made clear, first of all, the instrumental role that *Sin Wenz* ought to play in the cause of national salvation.

新文字.....有易學的好處，大眾聰明的一天學會，笨的一月也學會，我們唸過 ABCDE 的，很快就學會.....我們要做先生的人要教學生，學生又做先生，再去教學生，所以我們更要趕快學會.....大家都可以讀書閱報，明白道理，運用力量來救國了。<sup>42</sup>

*Sin Wenz*... has an advantage in that it is easy to learn. Intelligent people can learn it in a day; unintelligent people can learn it in a month. For those of us who have learnt ABC, it will take only a while... We ask teachers to teach students. After the students have mastered it, the students can also function as teachers and teach their own students. Therefore we need to hasten to learn... Everyone can learn to read and to reason. We will gather the strength to save the nation.

Tao suggested that *Sin Wenz*'s real advantage—even more than its simplicity as a writing system—was its efficiency as a social medium. This new medium, easy to access and available to all, could be used to channel the strength of the people for the purpose of national salvation. Tao went on to argue in an English version of the article written around the same time that *Sin Wenz* was first a revolution in literacy and social medium and then a “cultural revolution” that “should be inextricably connected with the movement for national liberation.”<sup>43</sup> However, this did not mean that the new script—latinized and simplified—was only meaningful inasmuch as an instrument to “save the nation.” Aside from its contribution to national defense, it also redefined the conditions of mass education and liberation. In another 1936 article, Tao responded to Li Jinxi's

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<sup>42</sup> “Dazhong jiaoyu wenti” 大眾教育問題 (The Problem of Mass Education), in *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1991), Vol. 4, 58. 1936, 5.1

<sup>43</sup> Tao, “The New Mass Education Movement,” pp. 152-153.

comparison between GR and *Sin Wenz*. Refuting Li's criticism of *Sin Wenz*, Tao pointed to the real difference between the two writing systems:

黎先生說：“G.R. (國語羅馬字)十分認識清楚了，將來這種新文字實實在在是要政治的大力量來推動的，我們管不著。”我們在這一點上也和黎先生的見解不同。我們十分認識清楚了，現在這種新文字（中國新文字），實實在在是中華民族大眾爭取解放之重要工具，要由整個民族的大力量來推動，我們既是國民一分子，就得盡一分子的力量，就管得著！<sup>44</sup>

Mr. Li (Li Jinxi) says, “GR understands clearly (the reality). In the future, it will take a major political force to propel the project of *Sin Wenz* forward. It is none of our business.” In regard to this point, we respectfully disagree. We understand clearly that at present this new script (*Sin Wenz*) is genuinely a crucial instrument for mass liberation for all Chinese people. To promote it requires the big power of the entire nation. Now that we are part of the nation, we have the obligation to make it our own business!

The crucial disagreement between Li and Tao was not whether a new writing system should embrace or resist the so-called “major political force.” After all, neither Romanization nor Latinization was free from political complicity. Tao's disagreement with Li was rather what one should make of the “major political force.” Was the new writing system to be divorced from the making of the political force? Were the people supposed to be active participants in creating and seizing the power, or were they passive subjects insulated from the historical and political struggle? In what ways did GR and *Sin Wenz*, as an “instrument,” channel or filter people's political consciousness? Li was perhaps correct in admitting that GR, difficult in design and never popular, would need strong administrative reinforcement before it could go beyond a scholar's study and reach the common people. Li's “major political force” was therefore imagined as no more than

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<sup>44</sup> Tao, “*Sin Wenz* he GR – dafu Li Jinxi xiansheng” 新文字和國語羅馬字——答覆黎錦熙先生 (*Sin Wenz* and GR – In Response to Mr. Li Jinxi), first published in *Life Education* 生活教育 Vol. 3, No.4, cited from *Tao Xingzhi QuANJI* (1985), Vol. 3, pp. 41-42.

a top-down administrative chain of orders. Tao, on the other hand, saw in *Sin Wenz* an opportunity to reshape the definition of “political” and “force.” If *Sin Wenz* managed to deliver more efficiently than GR its promise of low-cost literacy, then it has created, within itself and without the aid of an external political power, a different kind of politics and a new power dynamic. The new politics was created in a process where the underprivileged and illiterate massed literacy turned into active political agents by accessing a Latinized literacy. These newborn agents and their political engagement constituted a new “major political force.” Instead of waiting around for one form of external power to disseminate literacy, *Sin Wenz* fomented the integration of a relatively easy dissemination of literacy and mass liberation, which ushered in, as Tao argued a different form of “major political force.”

On top of the connections drawn separately between *Sin Wenz* and national salvation, as well as *Sin Wenz* and mass liberation, Tao pressed further to tie together national salvation and mass liberation. Tao stressed the insoluble bonds between the two causes at various occasions.<sup>45</sup> According to Tao, true people’s liberation could hardly be meaningful without true national salvation, while true national salvation could not be obtained at the expense of people’s liberation. Tao concluded, based on the “circularity” of the two, “national salvation and mass liberation are one inseparable great

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<sup>45</sup> Tao, “Dazhong jiaoyu wenti” 大眾教育問題 (The Problem of Mass Education) (May, 1936), “Dazhong jiaoyu yu minzu jiefang yundong” 大眾教育與民族解放運動 (Mass Education and The National Liberation Movement) (May. 10, 1936), “Minzu jiefang yu dazhong jiefang” 民族解放與大眾解放 (National Liberation and Mass Liberation) (May. 17, 1936), “Puji minzu ziji de jiaoyu” 普及民族自救的教育 (The Popularization of the Education of National Salvation) (June, 1936), “Xin zhongguo yu xin jiaoyu” 新中國與新教育 (New China and New Education) (July. 16, 1936), in *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1985), Vol. 3 and *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1991), Vol. 4.



revolution.”<sup>46</sup> Thus Tao established the three-way interconnection amongst the Chinese Latinization Movement, national salvation, as well as mass education and liberation. *Sin Wenz*'s battle against the Chinese character was analogized to the Chinese combat in the Second Sino-Japanese War. The struggle of *Sin Wenz* against illiteracy turned into a symbolic call for military resistance. Tao wrote:

拼音新文字是大眾的文字。有了新文字，大眾只須一個月半個月的工夫，便能讀書、看報、寫文。初級新文字教育只須三分錢就能辦成，大眾教育可以不再等待慈善家的賑濟。的確，文化賑濟是和麵包賑濟一樣悲慘，一樣靠不住……新文字！新文字！新文字是大眾的文字。它要講大眾的真心話。它要寫大眾的心中事。認也不費事，寫也不費事，學也不費事。筆頭上刺刀，向前刺刺刺，刺穿平仄聲，刺破方塊字，要教人人都認字，創造大眾的文化，提高大眾的位置，完成現代第一件大事。<sup>47</sup>

The alphabetic *Sin Wenz* is the script of the masses. With *Sin Wenz*, people need only a month or half a month to learn to read and write. Elementary *Sin Wenz* education costs only three cents. Mass education can afford not to wait around for philanthropists' charity. Indeed, cultural charity is as woeful and unreliable as food charity... *Sin Wenz!* *Sin Wenz!* *Sin Wenz!* is the script of the masses. It will convey true words of the masses. It will compose true stories of the masses. It is not difficult to read, write, and master. It is the bayonet of the pen, charging ahead to stab again and again. It pierces through the tonal distinction and tears apart the square character. *Sin Wenz* will teach everyone to read, to create the culture of the masses, and to promote the status of the people. Hence we will accomplish the foremost mission of our time.

The metaphorical use of *Sin Wenz* as a bayonet against illiteracy evoked the real bayonet used in fighting Japanese imperialism in the Second Sino-Japanese War. The widely

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<sup>46</sup> Tao's Chinese formulation reads, “民族解放與大眾解放的連環性” and “民族解放與大眾解放是一個不可分開的大革命。” See “Minzu jiefang yu dazhong jiefang,” in *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1991), Vol. 4, 96, 97.

<sup>47</sup> Tao, “Dazhong jiaoyu yu minzhong jiefang yundong” 大眾教育與民族解放運動 (Mass Education and The National Liberation Movement), first published in *Mass Education* 大眾教育, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 10, 1936, cited from *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1985), Vol. 3, 63. The quotation here is the lyrics of the second of a total of three “Songs of *Sin Wenz*.” For all three songs, please see *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1991), Vol. 7, pp. 432-434, 574.

affordable and readily available bayonet sharpened the triangular bond between the script revolution, national salvation, and mass liberation. The solution to the national crisis and mass liberation, as Tao suggested, rested in the implementation and dissemination of the new script. Tao proffered his diagnosis by grafting his own “Song of *Sin Wenz*”—starting from the “*Sin Wenz! Sin Wenz!*” onward—onto discussions of mass education and national liberation. The laudable *Sin Wenz* was the only instrument that the people could rely on to do away with the charity of the philanthropists, to efficiently learn by themselves to read and write, and eventually to charge ahead and fight. Characterized in this way, *Sin Wenz* was transformed into a people’s weapon to defend the nation. To *Sin Wenz* advocates like Tao, it seemed more important at the height of the Second Sino-Japanese War to endorse the symbolic spirit of the new script than to commit themselves to writing in the Latinized Chinese. With national survival at stake, *Sin Wenz* experienced a semantic transference from an anti-character writing system to an anti-aggression call to arms.

Tao took the symbol of *Sin Wenz* further to illustrate and facilitate a form of national alliance, which later came to be known as “The Second United Front.”<sup>48</sup> To account for the history of the Second United Front would be the burden of a different project, but it suffices to establish for now that Tao saw the alliance between the CCP and

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<sup>48</sup> The First United Front took place in the 1920s and disintegrated in 1927 after the GMD’s purge of the CCP. The Second United Front was the anti-Japanese alliance formed after the Xi’an Incident in 1936. On December 12, 1936, Marshal Zhang Xueliang (also known as Chang Hsueh-liang or Peter L. Chang) and General Yang Hucheng kidnapped Chiang Kai-shek to Xi’an. Chiang was eventually released after he was forced to renounce his policy of “internal pacification before external resistance” and agreed to the formation of the Second United Front on December 24, 1936. The Second United Front became bankrupt as soon as the Second Sino-Japanese War ended. Tao, as a third-party member served as a mediator to maintain the Second United Front, an effort that came to no avail. For a picture of Tao accompanying Mao Zedong, Chen Cheng, and Zhang Zhizhong after a round of GMD-CCP negotiation in Chongqing in 1945, see *Tao Xingzhi Quanji* (1991), Vol. 4, figure 2.

the GMD—including the central government army and major warlords’ forces—as the necessity for the urgent task of national defense. The script contention served as a perfect trope for the internal tension that needed to be done away with for the realization of the United Front:

任何人要參加到戰場上來，不要拒絕它。又好比一個船在海中風平浪靜時，不管你主張新文字，我要保全國語、方塊字，大家夾七夾八，但這船遇盜了，不管主張新文字也好，方塊字也好，大家聯合打退強盜再說。<sup>49</sup>

Do not reject anyone who wants to join the battlefield. It is as though we are in a boat. When the waves are calm, it does not matter if you support *Sin Wenz* or if I want to preserve *guoyu* and characters. But when the boat runs into pirates, regardless if one is in support of *Sin Wenz* or characters, you and I need to first of all form an alliance and fight off the pirates.

Making use of the antagonizing political affiliation between Latinization and Romanization, Tao implicitly made the point that party allegiance should take a second seat to the safeguarding of national security. Be it *Sin Wenz* or characters, the top priority ought to be the formation of a United Front against foreign aggression. The tolerance, or the endorsement of *Sin Wenz* symbolized the sincerity of forming a national alliance. When asked if he himself would be willing to “step up and initiate” the United Front, Tao resolutely confirmed, “Yes!”<sup>50</sup>

Tao Xingzhi kept his word. He did his fair share in bringing about the United Front; he even looked beyond national solidarity, and sought international support for China’s military resistance. Between July and September 1936, Tao gave several interviews and produced a series of writings arguing for the necessity of cooperation

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<sup>49</sup> “Kuoda lianhe zhanxian shi dangqian jiuwang de weiyi zhengce” 擴大聯合戰線是當前救亡的唯一政策 (The Extension of the United Front is the Only Solution to National Salvation), in *Tao Xingzhi Quanji* (1991), Vol. 4, 119.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

between the GMD and the CCP in face of unprecedented national crisis.<sup>51</sup> The most influential was a coauthored treatise “Several Basic Conditions and the Minimum Requirement for Uniting against Humiliation 團結禦辱的幾個基本條件與最低要求.”<sup>52</sup> This piece, later circulated as a pamphlet, made direct appeal to the different parties involved—the central government led by Chiang Kai-Shek, southwestern warlords, as well as the CCP—to cease domestic conflicts and unite against foreign aggression. It caused widespread repercussions and led to a prompt response from Mao Zedong, urging the GMD to cease fire with the CCP and to unite against the Japanese army.<sup>53</sup> In a few months time, the Xi’an Incident was set off, catalyzing the birth of the Second United Front on December 24, 1936.<sup>54</sup>

If Tao’s writing facilitated national alliance, then his wartime travel rallied international support for the Chinese war efforts. Tao, pleased to see the materialization of national solidarity, had not, as he himself put it, “forgotten to cultivate international-mindedness,” which was “the foundation of world peace.”<sup>55</sup> Tao went on a two-year trip

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<sup>51</sup> “Da xingzhou jibao jizhe wen” 答星洲日報記者問 (An Interview with Xingzhou Press)(July, 1936), “Lianhe shi ke jiu zhongguo” 聯合始可救中國 (Only the United Front Could Save China)(July, 1936), “Xin zhongguo yu xin jiaoyu” 新中國與新教育 (New China and New Education) (July, 1936), “Wo dui lianhe zhanxian de renshi” 我對於聯合戰線的認識 (My Understanding of the United Front)(August, 1936), “Guogong hezuo zhujian chengshu” 國共合作逐漸成熟 (Cooperation between the GMD and the CCP is Maturing) (September, 1936), *ibid*, pp. 131-162.

<sup>52</sup> The article was drafted by Shen Junru, Zhang Naiqi, Zou Taofen, and Tao. It first appeared in a Hong Kong journal called *The Daily Life*, July 31, 1936 and then in *Life Education* on August 1, 1936 before its circulation as a pamphlet. *Ibid*, pp. 163-203.

<sup>53</sup> For Mao’s response, dated August 10, 1936, please see *ibid*, pp. 183-192.

<sup>54</sup> Please see footnote 49 for a brief description of the Xi’an Incident. Marshal Zhang Xueliang gave a firsthand account of the incident. See “Peter and Edith Chang Papers,” Butler Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

<sup>55</sup> Tao’s complete quote is as follows: “In spite of our national crisis, we have not forgotten to cultivate international-mindedness. International-mindedness is, needless to say, the foundation of world peace. The

from July 1936 to October 1938 and visited a total of twenty-six countries, seeking moral and financial support for the Chinese resistance from both the international society and the overseas Chinese community. Tao argued, five years before the Pearl Harbor Attack, that the outcome of the Second Sino-Japanese War determined “the collective security of the Pacific,” which had significant bearings on world peace.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, intervention in the Second Sino-Japanese War became strategic to the development of WWII. Tao’s purpose was to raise international awareness that to provide war relief to China against the Japanese was in essence to contribute to the eventual defeat of the Axis Alliance in WWII. Tao presented at academic conferences, gave interviews and speeches, attended functions, and paid visits to a variety of locales including Marx’s grave in the U.K., Mexican farms, and Egyptian mosques.<sup>57</sup> One of Tao’s achievements during his visit to the U.S. was securing a public letter under the name of John Dewey, and endorsed by Romain Rolland, Albert Einstein, and Bertrand Russell, petitioning to “all countries” to

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teachers of the masses in China dare not forget this important principle.” Cited from “The New Mass Education Movement,” in *Tao Xingzhi Quanji* (1991), Vol. 6, 153.

<sup>56</sup> “Taipingyang jiti anquan yu zhongguo minzu jiefang yundong” 太平洋集體安全與中國民族解放運動 (The Collective Security of the Pacific and the Chinese National Liberation Movement), *ibid*, Vol. 4, pp. 47-48.

<sup>57</sup> Tao left two accounts of his two-year sojourn “Haiwai de gushi” 海外的故事 (Stories Overseas) and “Haiwai guilai tanhua yaodian” 海外歸來談話要點 (Talking Points after the Return from Overseas), *Tao Xingzhi Quanji* (1991), *ibid*, pp. 233-244. Aside from the two articles that he himself wrote after the two-year trip, discussions of Tao’s overseas activities are scarce. Tao’s manuscript showed that he kept incomplete records of his daily activities between 1936 and 1938. During this period, he paid visits to the Mexican president, met with Nehru, Gandhi and Henry Norman Bethune, and had extensive contact with Chinese Muslim groups in Egypt. It is beyond the scope of this project, but Tao’s international and internationalist visits to Mexico, India, and Egypt merits serious scholarly attention. For Tao’s manuscript, please see the archive of Tao Xingzhi Museum, She County, Anhui Province, China.

“organize voluntary boycott against Japanese goods” and to provide “every possible assistance to China for relief and self-defense.”<sup>58</sup>

Tao’s wartime activities, far from mere public services external to Tao’s vocation as an educator, contextualized Tao’s understanding of literacy and education. Because of the Second Sino-Japanese War, we see a reshaping of Tao’s theory of a “new mass education movement.” This “new mass education movement” adjusted the expectation of *Sin Wenz*, revamped John Dewey’s education philosophy, and signaled a changing focus from the educator to the educated. Tao remained a steadfast advocate of *Sin Wenz*. But now that it has become a trope in service of the Second United Front and a symbol of national salvation, its symbolic value outweighed its technical execution and factual realization. Therefore Tao, though proclaiming that *Sin Wenz* would eventually prevail, did not hesitate to concede that in face of the war all forms of literacy—characters, National Alphabet, and *Sin Wenz*—should all be employed to maximize wartime mobilization.<sup>59</sup> This indiscriminate treatment of scripts, a new development for the Latinization Movement in service of the war, allowed room for the contradictory coexistence of alphabetic Chinese and character literature. As discussed in the next sections, *yutiwen* literature proliferated, as the support for *Sin Wenz*—though enormous—grew increasingly nominal.

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<sup>58</sup> Tao drafted the letter for Dewey, which was addressed to Gandhi. The letter is worth quoting in its entirety in its English original: “Wish you join us making following statement. Same request has been sent Messrs. Romain Rolland, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell. Cable suggestion to 320 East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street New York. Consent understood without hearing contrary in five days. In view of wanton destruction of Oriental civilization and for the sake of humanity, peace and democracy, we propose peoples of all countries organize voluntary boycott against Japanese goods, refuse to sell and loan war materials to Japan and cease cooperation with Japan in ways that help her aggressive policy while giving every possible assistance to China for relief and self-defense until Japan has evacuated all her forces from China and abandoned her policy of conquest.” See “John Dewey’s Statement,” in *Tao Xingzhi Quanji* (1991), Vol. 6, pp. 471-472.

<sup>59</sup> Tao Xingzhi, “Shishi minzhu jiaoyu de tigang” 實施民主教育的提綱 (Outline for Implementing a Democratic Education), in *Tao Xingzhi Quanji* (1985), Vol. 3, 546.

The second aspect of the “new mass education movement” was its update on John Dewey’s brand of progressive education. Most crudely put, progressive education rejected traditional and classical learning, and embraced a holistic experience of learning. Scholars debate how much bearing Dewey’s interpretation of progressive learning actually had on Tao, and if Tao was influenced more by the Wang Yangming School of Confucianism.<sup>60</sup> It was clear however that, as exemplified by his Xiaozhuang Normal College, Tao’s earlier theory and practice was much in compliance with the credited Dewey motto, “education is life” – a motto that characterized the breaking of the boundary between school and society while paying special attention to the individual “experience.”<sup>61</sup> Tao revised Dewey’s motto from “education is life” into “life is education”—coupled with “society is school”—and established his new theory “teaching, learning, and doing all in one 教學做合一.” (Figure 4.3) These should in fact all be considered as continued efforts to adjust the progressive education model to Chinese

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<sup>60</sup> Hubert Brown argued that Tao did not have extensive contact with Dewey until 1919 during the latter’s visit to Nanjing, and Tao remained heavily influenced by a Ming dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming’s theory on direct intuition and the unity of thought and action. Please see Hubert O. Brown, “Tao Xingzhi: Progressive Educator in Republican China,” *Biography*, Volume 13, Number 1, Winter 1990, pp. 21-42. Brown is right in pointing out Tao’s inheritance from Wang Yangming since Tao changed his name from Tao Zhixing to Tao Xingzhi, from “knowing-doing” to “doing-knowing” in admiration of Wang’s philosophy. However, Dewey’s influence was also visible, as Philip Kuhn and others shown in systematic comparisons between Tao and Dewey’s education philosophy. Please see Philip Kuhn, “T’ao Hsing-chih, 1981-1946: An Educational Reformer,” *Harvard Papers on China* Vol. 13, 1959, pp. 163-195; Makino Atsu, “Guanyu Tao Xingzhi zai meiguo liuxue qijian xuexi yu shenghuo de ruogan kaocha” 關於陶行知在美國留學期間學習與生活的若干考察 (Tao Xingzhi’s Life and Study During the Time in the U.S.) and Wu Junsheng, “Tao Xingzhi yu duwei zai zhongguo de yingxiang” 陶行知與杜威在中國的影響 (The Impact of Tao Xingzhi and John Dewey in China) in Zhou Hongyu ed., *Tao Xingzhi yanjiu zai haiwai* 陶行知研究在海外 (Overseas Tao Xingzhi Studies) (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), pp. 144-162, 399-400; Also, Su Zhixin, “Teaching, Learning, and Reflective Acting: A Dewey Experiment in Chinese Teacher Education,” *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 98, No. 1, Fall 1996, pp. 126-52.

<sup>61</sup> The famous quote was attributed to Dewey based on his 1915 book, John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1915). “Experience” was a key term that Dewey shared with his mentor William James, which connected for both men their interests in philosophy, psychology, and religion. See John M. Capps and Donald Capps eds., *James and Dewey on Belief and Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

circumstances. Real changes did not take place until the threat of war with Japan loomed closer and larger after the 1931 Mukden Incident. Around the same time, Tao grew increasingly discontent with the old mass education model. As more and more institutions including James Yen's Ting Hsien project decamped from areas under Japanese threat, Tao saw the need to redefine a new mass education movement with an explicit sense of class consciousness. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, Tao found it necessary to draw a distinction between the old and new mass education in his 1936 English article "The New Mass Education Movement":

The new mass education movement, which was initiated in Shanghai, should not be confused with that type of education advocated by Mr. James Yen at Ting Hsien. In the Chinese language the Ting Hsien type of education is called "*ping ming giao yü*," meaning the common people's education, while the New Mass Education is called *Dazhong Giao Yü*, meaning the education of the great masses. The difference in terminology implies fundamental differences in essentials. Ting Hsien *advocates* mass education, but in practice it results in an education of the few, while the new mass education aims at a real education of the mass, by the mass and for the mass.<sup>62</sup>

"The great masses" reshaped both Tao's theory and practice. Tao realized that in the face of total war with Japan, progressive education could continue to function in China only if it took seriously the masses rather than the few elites or those "high-class Chinese" as true agents of history.<sup>63</sup> The split between the old and new mass education, as Tao articulated, was a manifestation of the internal tension within progressive education theory between the individual and the social. The old mass education, with its emphasis on the individual enlightenment became, as Tao argued, the education of the few. Tao's

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<sup>62</sup> Romanization and italicization is Tao's original. See Tao, "The New Mass Education Movement," *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1991), Vol. 6, pp. 151-152. Tao's more lengthy critique the old mass education movement could be found in his Chinese article "Dazhong jiaoyu wenti" 大眾教育問題 (The Problem of Mass Education), *ibid*, Vol. 4, pp. 50-52.

<sup>63</sup> Tao, "Education Fled Away," *ibid* (1985), Vol. 3, 36.



rejection of the few and celebration of the masses marked his departure from liberal education reform and signaled his gravitation toward more socialist ideals. Granted that Tao, as a Christian, was most likely not unfamiliar with the teachings of Christian socialism, Tao's interpretation brought out the class issue in an otherwise class-neutral aspiration.<sup>64</sup> This was showcased in Tao's 1934 children's play, "At the Door of the Young Master." The one-act play brought to life a moment of awakening amongst lower-class children represented by a child beggar, a young vegetable vendor, and a newspaper boy; the children discovered that together they could defeat the little bully – the "young master." The play could be read as an allegory of a future revolution—potentially violent—mobilized by the union of lower-class masses against the privileged elite few.<sup>65</sup>

Last but not least, the new mass education movement saw a shifting focus from the educator to the educated, and a new definition of children. After the shutdown of the Xiaozhuang Normal College, Tao turned his attention from normal school to child education, culminating in the foundation of the Yucai Middle School for refugee children in 1939. In the meantime, the image of children also underwent an interesting makeover from the "little teacher"<sup>66</sup> during the literacy campaign to the "little worker" in the national crisis. As though a prelude to his class-conscious interpretation of the new mass education, Tao in a 1932 speech gave a new definition to the new generation of children.

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<sup>64</sup> There were embedded connections between progressive education and the social gospel movement, as both strived for individual salvation, social change, and Christian socialism. When Tao gravitated toward socialism, he was at the same time reiterating the belief of Christian socialism, while drifting away from the tradition of liberal individualism. For the relation between Christianity and socialism, see L. Abbott, "Christianity versus socialism," in Paul Boase ed., *The Rhetoric of Christian Socialism* (New York: Random House, 1969).

<sup>65</sup> Tao, "Shaoye men qian" 少爺門前 (At the Door of the Young Master), in *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* (1991), Vol. 5, pp. 777-782.

<sup>66</sup> Chao Yuen Ren composed the melody for Tao's "Song of the Little Teacher." See *ibid.*, pp. 810-811.

He argued that “children in the new age are little workers,” who should engage in both physical and mental labor.<sup>67</sup> The theme of “little worker” intensified in another 1938 speech entitled “Children are the Future Giants of the Nation” 民族未來的巨子. Tao argued:

小孩子都是將來的主人，戰勝敵人的後備軍，建國時代的戰鬥員。目前小孩子所受的教育，應該是工學的教育，應在各地建立難童的工學團。<sup>68</sup>

All children are masters of the future, army reserves to defeat enemies, and combatants during times of nation building. At present, the education that children ought to be receiving is an industrial one. For the refugee children, there should be established local groups of industrial learning.

Tao was explicit—even blunt—in confronting China’s dire need for industrialization when the nation risked defeat in an industrialized war such as WWII. For a nation in danger, her children could hardly afford to remain carefree playmates, but instead they ought to shoulder, however prematurely, the heavy responsibilities of “little teachers” and “little workers.” Historical contingency dictated that this new generation of children had to take a different path from their older generations. If developmental discourse in the interwar period molded children into “bourgeois consumers of culture,”<sup>69</sup> as Andrew Jones argues, then it changed course during the war, aiming to produce “little workers” to aid the industrial warfare. These little workers, not unlike child laborers rampant during the interwar period, were subjected to surplus exploitation. Their exploitation was

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<sup>67</sup> Tao, “Zenyang xuanshu” 怎樣選書 (How to Choose a Book), *ibid*, Vol. 5, 758.

<sup>68</sup> Tao, “Xiaopengyou shi minzu weilai de juzi” 小朋友是民族未來的巨子 (Children are the Future Giants of the Nation), *ibid*, Vol. 4, 258.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 112.

legitimized insofar as that they worked toward national salvation. Lu Xun's leitmotif of "saving the children" was no longer applicable as the call to save the nation outweighed both the Confucian oppression and capitalist exploitation of children. In a new society where a young working class would wrest leadership from the old elites, these "little workers" would become "giants of the nation."<sup>70</sup> The changing conceptualization of children flagged a cultural and literary shift from the old paradigm of the May Fourth enlightenment to the unfolding of the new mass education movement, reflected in its contemporary literature.

As seen above, the new mass education movement readapted understanding of literacy and education to the wartime situation. *Sin Wenz* functioned, rather than as a telos of the scriptal revolution, as a symbol of armed resistance fighting for both mass liberation and national salvation. Similarly, wartime education was transformed from the progressive education model to an increasingly class-conscious mass education movement, giving rise to the reinvention of the child as the "little worker" laboring for the nation's liberation. Historical contingencies such as the Second Sino-Japanese War not only redefined literacy and education, but also impacted the making of modern Chinese literature. As the demand for effective wartime mobilization superseded the implementation of an alphabetic literacy, literature written in characters continued to thrive. The triangular nexus of literacy, education and war was reconfigured in such a way that the former two came into service to the war crisis. Such reconfigurations effectively gave room to the proliferation of the kind of *yutiwen* literature that conformed to the ideals of the new mass education movement. Such works of education literature

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<sup>70</sup> Tao, "Xiaopengyou shi minzu weilai de juzi," 258.

written in *yutiwen* marked the historical transformation from the May Fourth model of enlightenment to the wartime discourse of salvation and liberation. These pieces also reflected a changing focus from the progressive educator to the class-conscious educated, and pondered how critical realist writing negotiated the making of revolutionary subjectivity.

### ***Yutiwen* as Modern Chinese Literature**

The literary critic Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨 maintained that Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶 (also known as Ye Shaojun 葉紹鈞) was *the* writer of Chinese education literature.<sup>71</sup> Ye's long lasting and prolific literary career—since his first publication in 1914 until his death in 1988—was praised by C. T. Hsia to have “best stood the test of time.”<sup>72</sup> Ye started out writing short stories in emulation of Washington Irving and Oliver Goldsmith, first for the commercial magazine *Saturday*, which quickly disgusted Ye since his true aspiration lay in critical realism.<sup>73</sup> Then at the invitation of Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, major Chinese historian and Ye's life-long friend, Ye Shengtao began to compose for the journal *New Tide*. Ye's craftsmanship attracted Mao Dun and Zheng Zhenduo, who

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<sup>71</sup> Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨, “Ye Shaojun de chuanguo de kaocha” 葉紹鈞的創作的考察 (Examining the Writings of Ye Shaojun), in *Xiandai zhongguo wenxue zuojia* 現代中國文學作家 (Contemporary Chinese Literary Writers), Vol. 2, March 1930, cited from Liu Zengren and Feng Guanglian eds., *Ye Shengtao yanjiu ziliao* 葉聖陶研究資料 (Research Materials on Ye Shengtao) (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1988), 380.

<sup>72</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 55. Hsia went on to praise Ye that “in his quiet and methodical way,” he “has maintained in over half a dozen collections a standard of competence which few of his contemporaries could rival.” Ibid, 58.

<sup>73</sup> Ye confessed that his first *Saturday* story entitled “Qiongchou” 窮愁 (Dearth and Depression) was written in imitation of Washington Irving. Aside from a few *Saturday* essays written in classical Chinese, the rest of Ye's corpus was all in *yutiwen*, see “Zatan wo de xiezuo” 雜談我的寫作 (Miscellaneous Comments on my Writings), in *Ye Shengtao yanjiu ziliao*, pp. 245-247.

invited him to become one of the twelve founding members of “The Literary Research Society 文學研究會” in January 1921.<sup>74</sup> Ye went on to create many “firsts” in modern Chinese literary history. He produced the first collection of children’s literature, *The Scarecrow* 稻草人 in 1922, the first novel and the first *Bildungsroman* in modern Chinese literary history *Ni Huanzhi* 倪煥之 in 1928, and the first of what could be called a novelistic writing manual of *yutiwen* entitled *Wenxin* 文心 (*The Heart of Writing*) in 1934.<sup>75</sup>

Two themes dominated Ye’s literary production—first his preoccupation with children and education, and second his tireless attention to language, which corresponded to Ye’s multiple roles as an educator, as well as an editor and publisher. A devoted educator, Ye taught primary and middle schools for more than a decade starting in the 1910s and served as the vice-minister of the PRC’s Education Department after 1949. In his role as an editor and publisher, Ye worked first at the Commercial Press and then Kaiming Bookstore, both of which were dedicated to the promotion of what was in essence *yutiwen*, and of many younger writers such as Ba Jin and Ding Ling. Having his entire career evolve around writing during a period that redefined Chinese language and literature, Ye was hardly exempt from the historical struggle of *Sin Wenz* vis-à-vis *yutiwen*. In fact, the accomplished practitioner, promoter, and teacher of *yutiwen* was among the six hundred and eighty-eight supporters who signed the 1935 public letter

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<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 3, Footnote 80 for a complete list of twelve founding members of the Literary Research Society.

<sup>75</sup> Ye says that *Wenxin* “用小說體敘述學習國文的知識和技能 (used the format of novel to convey the knowledge and skills of learning Chinese).” See Ye, “Zatan wo de xiezu,” 246. Here Ye used the term *guowen* (the national prose), which I translated as “Chinese.” Discounting the connotation of “the nation,” a more accurate term to describe the kind of Chinese being taught in *Wenxin* and in which *Wenxin* was written, was *yutiwen*.

endorsing the new alphabetic Chinese.<sup>76</sup> Therefore Ye Shengtao, with his literary stature, devotion to language, and investment in education, offered us a unique on how linguistic reality, education theory, and political contingency entered the literary consciousness of modern Chinese writing. In the following pages, I take two major novels from Ye—*Ni Huanzhi* (1928) and *Wenxin* (1934)—and propose a rereading of the two pieces through the lens of *yutiwen*. By restoring the previously neglected *yutiwen* writing to its central position in both pieces, I raise a new set of questions: What did writers like Ye who became *Sin Wenz* advocates write in their literary endeavors and why? How did their choice of literary language inform and interact with their subject matter? If their adoption of *yutiwen* was the result of negotiating between a literacy revolution, education reform, and war crises, then has the added dimension of *yutiwen* literature proffered something new to the old structural interconnections amongst literacy, education and war?

*Ni Huanzhi*, the first novel in modern Chinese literary history, was arguably Ye's most ambitious work. Before *Ni Huanzhi*, Ye mainly engaged with short stories.<sup>77</sup> His attempt at novel writing was encouraged by his editor friends Li Shicen 李石岑 and Zhou Yutong 周予同, who commissioned *Ni Huanzhi* for its year-long serial publication in the *Journal of Education* 教育雜誌, from January to November 1928.<sup>78</sup> It received instant

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<sup>76</sup> Ye's biographical information is taken from Shang Jinlin, *Ye Shengtao Nianpu* 葉聖陶年譜 (A chronology of Ye Shengtao's life) (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1986).

<sup>77</sup> For instance, “Gemo” 隔膜 (Barriers), “Fan” 飯 (Rice), “Huozaì” 火災 (The Fire Incident), “Pan xiansheng zai nan zhong” 潘先生在難中 (Mr. Pan in Distress), and “Xiaozhang” 校長 (The Principal). See *Ye Shengtao Ji* 葉聖陶集 (The Collected Works of Ye Shengtao) (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1987), Vol. 1 and 2.

<sup>78</sup> Ye divided the writing into twelve installments, each month working consecutively for seven to eight days from January to November 15, 1928. Ye, “*Ni Huanzhi* zuozhe zixu” 倪煥之作者自序 (Preface by *Ni Huanzhi's* Author), in *Ye Shengtao Ji*, Vol. 3, 285.

critical attention. Qian Xingcun called it a “very powerful *Bildungsroman*.” Mao Dun commended it to be a “weighty piece of work” 扛鼎之作 of the post May Fourth literary world. Xia Mianzun 夏丏尊 hailed it as “opening a new era.”<sup>79</sup> This “powerful” piece of work, the first of its kind in modern Chinese literature, is written in the third-person perspective of its eponymous protagonist – a village primary school teacher named Ni Huanzhi; it captures key episodes of modern Chinese history starting from the Revolution of 1911, to May Fourth, and eventually the failure of the First GMD-CCP United Front in 1927. A thinly veiled autobiographical novel, it narrates in a linear chronology Ni’s growth, maturation, and eventual demise as a progressive educator, believer of romantic love, and revolutionary youth.<sup>80</sup>

Ni Huanzhi starts out as an enthusiast of education reform despite considerable resistance against the progressive education measures that he tries to implement at his local school in a village near Shanghai. Shared education ideals bring together Ni and his love interest Miss Jin Peizhang 金佩璋. Disillusioned by married life and inspired by May Fourth, Ni leaves his village for Shanghai. He throws himself into radical politics in the city, refashioning himself as an “educator for revolution.” He begins to design a rural normal college and gives speeches at street rallies. The May Thirtieth Movement in which Shanghai police opened fire on protesting workers and students, teaches Ni the

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<sup>79</sup> Qian Xingcun, “Guanyu Ni Huanzhi wenti” 關於《倪煥之》問題 (On the Problem of *Ni Huanzhi*), in *Ye Shengtao yanjiu ziliao*, 397. Xia Mianzun, “Guanyu Ni Huanzhi” 關於《倪煥之》 (Regarding *Ni Huanzhi*) and Mao Dun “Du *Ni Huanzhi*” 讀《倪煥之》 (Reading *Ni Huanzhi*), in *Ye Shengtao Ji*, Vol. 3, 281, 279.

<sup>80</sup> Marston Anderson also formulated the reasons of Ni’s unfortunate life story as the result of his troubled endeavors in “each of three arenas of his life”: “the pedagogical, the romantic, and the political, each time with unsatisfactory results.” See Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 110.

brutality of revolution and the hollowness of his own “sermans.” Lapsing into grave doubts about the legitimacy of his enlightenment project, he becomes increasingly dismayed at the prospects of the revolution and his own future in it. Ni is further saddened by the death of his Communist friend Wang Leshan 王乐山. After the First United Front crumbles, Ni dies from typhoid and disillusionment after having a fantastical dream, leaving behind his wife, son, and an unfinished blueprint of the rural normal college.

Previous scholarship on *Ni Huanzhi*, from its composition to the present, largely concurred that the novel consists of two separate sub-novels: the first eighteen chapters constitute an education novel that takes place in a village, and the latter twelve chapters comprise as a revolutionary novel set largely in the city of Shanghai. Some scholars focus on the novel as a literary treatment of the 1920s education reform, analyzing the work in relation to the mass education movement and progressive education model, while taking the latter half as nothing more than political background.<sup>81</sup> Others pay little attention to the educational content and opt for a political reading of the novel, suggesting that it accurately captured the destined fall of “the petty-bourgeois intellectuals” in an age of revolution.<sup>82</sup> Though usually laudatory in their respective appraisal of the two parts

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<sup>81</sup> Pan Maoyuan, “Cong zhongguo xiandai jiaoyu shi de jiaodu kan Ni Huanzhi” 從中國現代教育史的角度看《倪煥之》 (Reading *Ni Huanzhi* from the Perspective of Modern Chinese Education History), in *Journal of Xiamen University*, No. 1 (January 1963); Xu Longnian, “Cong Ni Huanzhi kan Ye Shengtao de zaoqi jiaoyu zhuiqiu” 從《倪煥之》看葉聖陶的早期教育追求 (Understanding Ye Shengtao’s Early Educational Pursuit from *Ni Huanzhi*), in *Journal of the Chinese Society of Education*, No. 8 (August 2003).

<sup>82</sup> Mao Dun was the first to define *Ni Huanzhi* as such. See Mao Dun, “Reading *Ni Huanzhi*.” The other critics who valorized the revolution part over the education part include, Xia Mianzun, Qian Xingcun, Wolfgang Kubin. See Xia, “On the Problem of *Ni Huanzhi*,” Qian, “Regarding *Ni Huanzhi*,” and Mao Dun, “Reading *Ni Huanzhi*.” Also Wolfgang Kubin, Xiao Ying and Shen De trans., “Deguo de youyu he zhongguo de panghuang” 德國的憂鬱和中國的徬徨 (The German Melancholy and the Chinese Wandering), in *Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Science)*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2002), pp.



individually, critics were more often than not discontent with the sense of disparity between the two parts of the novel. C. T. Hsia criticized *Ni Huanzhi*, claiming that it “does not come off very well as a novel,” before conceding that it was nonetheless “a notable achievement.”<sup>83</sup> Even Marston Anderson, in a much more sympathetic reading of the novel, pointed out that “the novel remains disconnected.”<sup>84</sup> Critics might be right in recognizing a level of formal incongruence between the two parts, which was partially created by the narrative clumsiness Ye’s narrator seemed to display. What the critics might have missed, I suggest, was *Ni Huanzhi*’s structural ingenuity that, on the one hand provided a concrete linkage between the two sub-novels, and on the other, came very close to an important historical insight on the fall of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and the failure of the United Front. The key was the centrality of writing, or *yutiwen* writing to be more precise.

At the risk of stating the obvious, writing brings with it the concept of literacy – a fundamental concern for education, which is in turn integral to the process of mass mobilization requisite to any meaningful revolution. Although the same chain of relations applies in *Ni Huanzhi*, the role of writing and its centrality operates in Ye’s narrative at much more tangible levels. Writing—as content, format, and mode of representation—stands at the center of all Ni Huanzhi’s life endeavors, from professional career to love relations, from revolutionary zeal to final disillusionment.

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75-78. The original article is in German „Der Schreckensmann – Deutsche Melancholie und chinesische Unrast: Ye Shengtaos Roman *Ni Huanzhi* (1928),“ published in *minima sinica* 1/1996, pp. 61–73.

<sup>83</sup> Hsia, 64.

<sup>84</sup> Anderson, 116.

First, writing is part and parcel of Huanzhi's pedagogical responsibility as a teacher. At the same time, it is the narrative frame through which the progressive educational program that Huanzhi supports is presented. Huanzhi chooses to teach "baihua" as he calls it to his students. Literacy in *baihua* necessarily entails how to read and write. Writing therefore is a daily activity that Huanzhi engages in. Before we explore the issue of the written language further, let us consider how writing is related to the other aspects of the kind of education that Huanzhi is to promote. Chapter One of the novel unfolds on a boat trip from Huanzhi's previous teaching position to his current one. On the boat, we are introduced to our protagonist and his future brother-in-law Jin Shubo 金樹伯, who is sent by Huanzhi's new principal Jiang Bingru 蔣冰如 to guide his way. Jiang, a hopeless idealist of education reform, is introduced through a conversation between Huanzhi and Jin Shubo along with a piece of his own writing. Having remarked that Huanzhi shares the principal's air of idealism, Jin informs Huanzhi that Jiang "wrote an article on education" and that "the article is his dream,"<sup>85</sup> which arouses deep curiosity in Huanzhi. He considers the article to be a token of his "new life" and cannot wait to read it upon his first meeting with the principal.

煥之接稿子在手，是二十多張藍格紙，直行細字，塗改添加的地方確實不少，確還保存著清朗的行款。<sup>86</sup>

Huanzhi took over the article and held it in hand. It was roughly two-dozen pieces of blue-grid paper. Small characters ran in a vertical direction. There were indeed many corrections and insertions, but the handwriting kept a style that was clean and brisk.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ye Shengtao Ji*, Vol. 3, 6.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 30. My translation is modified from A.C. Barnes, trans., *Schoolmaster Ni Huan-chih* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1958).

As soon as this piece of writing is handed over to Huanzhi and introduced into the narrative, it assumes considerable agency for almost one third of the novel. The article circulates, invites ample discussions, but refuses direct quotations from it. A capable narrative device, it enables the introduction of the educational ideals and measures to be brought to the village school. It also functions as a signifier that denotes the kind of pedagogical rigor and educational idealism that distinguishes progressive educators such as Jiang and Huanzhi from the rest of the conservative faculty members. The content of the article, or the signified, is in essence an argument for and a program of progressive education. In discussions of the article in the ensuing chapters, we learn that “a school should be, instead of a special environment for students, a conducive environment for them to live in.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, a school should not focus merely on book learning, but ought to include its own “factory, farm, music hall, hospital, library, shops, and news press.”<sup>88</sup> Ye Shengtao’s narrative is clearly informed by the progressive education reform popular at the time. It is reminiscent of Dewey’s “education is life,” even directly comparing at some point Jiang Bingru’s thought to Dewey’s theory.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, it gestures to Tao Xingzhi’s “teaching, learning, and doing all in one.” However, for the progressive educator in the novel, Huanzhi finds to his dismay that the textual rehearsal of the ideas in the article turns out to be far more attractive than the execution of them in the real world. In the end, though summoned by revolutionary spirits of May Fourth and May Thirtieth, Huanzhi’s attempt at revolutionizing normal education does not fare far

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, Chapter 21, 197. Dewey’s influence on Ye can be traced to as early as a 1919 article entitled “Xiaoxue jiaoyu de gaizao” 小學教育的改造 (Educational reform in primary schools), in *New Tide*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (December 1919).

beyond textual musings. Huanzhi's penchant for and reliance on writing is, on the one hand, as Mao Dun diagnoses, symptomatic of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals' "uselessness" 不中用,<sup>90</sup> and on the other, telling of his own limitation in terms of narrative tactics. Be it education reform or radical politics, external reality has to be inflected through writing before Ye's narrator could make use of it.<sup>91</sup> Ye is forthcoming in acknowledging his own narrative constraints, saying elsewhere that "I understood neither the workers and peasants, nor the wealthy merchants and bureaucrats; the only group I was familiar with was the intellectuals and the urban petty bourgeoisie."<sup>92</sup> Following the lead of his own characters, writing is the key narrative frame through which almost everything is grasped. Granted that it is true that the preoccupation with writing limits *Ni Huanzhi's* representational possibility, it perhaps unwittingly points to the essential dilemma of the petty-bourgeois educator's struggle with enlightenment and revolution. To tackle this dilemma, we must first pay heed to the problem of language.

The problem of language—written language to be exact—expresses itself most distinctively in the love letters exchanged between Ni Huanzhi and Jin Peizhang. A New Culture sympathizer, Huanzhi believes in the efficacy of the so-called *baihua* prose, in which he composes his love letters. Huanzhi explains to Peizhang his choice of language:

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>91</sup> Jaroslev Prusek and Marston Anderson traces Ye's literary influences to Chinese *biji* 筆記 (literary jotting) writing and works by Anton Chekhov, which according to Anderson "exhibit a highly restrained use of narrative resources." Anderson, 95. Also Jaroslev Prusek, "Yeh Shao-chün and Anton Chekhov," in *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 178-194.

<sup>92</sup> Ye's Chinese original is as following, "我不了解工農大眾，也不了解富商巨賈跟官僚，只有知識分子跟小市民比較熟悉。" See Ye Shengtao, "Ye Shengtao xuanji zixu" 葉聖陶選集自序 (Author's preface to Selected Works of Ye Shengtao), in *Ye Shengtao xuanji* 葉聖陶選集 (The Selected Works of Ye Shengtao) (Beijing: Kaiming Bookstore, 1951), 8. Anderson rightfully points out that Ye's early writings, including *Ni Huanzhi*, display "a high degree of self-reference and sentimentality." See Anderson, 94.

試用白話體寫信，這還是第一次。雖不見好，算不得文學，確覺說來很爽利，無異當面向你說；這也是文學改良運動會成功的一個證明。你該不會笑我喜新趨時吧？<sup>93</sup>

This is my first time to try my hand at the *baihua* style to pen letters. Though it is neither good nor could be considered literature, it feels crisp and sharp. It is not much different from speaking in front of you. This is also a testimony to the future success of literary reform. You won't laugh at my preference for the new and pursuit of the trendy?

Huanzhi's prose, rather than the plain speech as *baihua* that he dreams of pouring out to Peizhang in person, is in fact *yutiwen*. Classical formulations such as “確覺” “無異” and “喜新趨時” betray Huanzhi, since they are highly literary and not at all colloquial. Despite the colloquial marker “吧,” what Huanzhi claims to be a *baihua*-style is at best a compromise between the literary and the colloquial, hence *yutiwen*. As a matter of fact, the language employed not only in Huanzhi's own writing, but also the narrative voice as well as character dialogue, is all dominated by *yutiwen*. The only exception is interestingly Jin Peizhang's writing. Peizhang, although in principle endorses New Culture spirit, decides that one has to write decent *wenyan* before one can be trusted with the “*baihua*-style.” In response to Huanzhi's explosive confession, Peizhang resorts to the formal classical expression:

白話體為文確勝，宜於達情，無模糊籠統之弊。惟效顰弗肖，轉形其醜，今故藏拙，猶用文言。先生得毋笑其篤舊而不知從善乎？<sup>94</sup>

*Baihua*-style indeed excels in composition, benefits the conveyance of emotions, and eliminates ambiguity and generalization. I fear only (were I to write in *baihua*) that my inadequate imitation will expose its unhandsome nature. Therefore I conceal my clumsiness and keep to *wenyan*. Will you please not mock my nostalgia and obduracy?

<sup>93</sup> Ni Huanzhi, in *Ye Shengtao Ji*, Vol. 3, 140.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

My translation hardly captures the sense of formality of Peizhang's classical language, which is formulated mostly in four-character expressions such as “宜於達情” and “效顰弗肖.” Though conceding to the superiority of the “*baihua*-style,” she insists on writing in *wenyan* and plays up the dichotomy between the two. By framing the two as antithetical, her *wenyan* letter, like Huanzhi's *baihua*-style letter, corroborates that *wenyan* and *baihua* are two contrasting but commensurable written languages. The fantasy of plain speech is brought back to the literary reality of *yutiwen*.

If letter writing bears witness to Huanzhi and Peizhang's budding romance, then it also embodies the disillusionment of the relationship. Once the everyday chores of married life eat up Huanzhi's passion and Peizhang's energy, he grows increasingly disappointed in her and departs for Shanghai, leaving her at home with their son and his mother. Upon receiving another *wenyan* letter from Peizhang, Huanzhi feels as if he has eaten “some stale fruit.” He could not help but wonder what Peizhang would be like had marriage and child rearing not ruined her: then “when she writes, it must be succinct *baihua* and definitely not tangled up in some classical markers such as ‘ye.’”<sup>95</sup> The classical writing is thus feminized and stigmatized by the metaphor of the “stale fruit,” while *baihua* gains authorial masculinity. An analysis of the relationship between writing and gendered inequality belongs to another place. What pertains to our immediate interest is how Huanzhi's own future is not exempt from the judgment of writing. If Peizhang's ruin is manifested through Huanzhi's musings about her writing style, then Huanzhi's own demise is also announced through reflections in regard to writing.

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<sup>95</sup> The Chinese quote goes, “寫起信來，是簡捷的白話，決不會什麼什麼‘也’地糾纏不清……” Ibid, 218.

Ni Huanzhi has to die, but why? Ye Shengtao's contemporary critics such as Mao Dun and Qian Xingcun maintained that death was the fate of the May Fourth petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Their enervation and melancholy determined their demise, which was mandated by the advent of a new revolution. Mao Dun and the others might be right to a large extent, but the question remains: why was Ni Huanzhi made a representative of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, and had to die on behalf of them? Marston Anderson proffers another reading of "the demise of the questing bourgeois self," through the prism of the novel form:

In *Ni Huanzhi*, Ye Shaojun posits such a notion of the self as he experiments with the novel form, but in the end he subjects both to a reflexive moral examination that proves profoundly subversive. Realist fiction, formerly entrusted with the self's creation and expression, is in the end left only the task of enacting its deconstruction, a narrative suicide.<sup>96</sup>

As Anderson suggests, the dilemma of *Ni Huanzhi* is "the problem of the self and its expression" – its pedagogical, romantic, and political expressions. The "narrative suicide" is set up from the onset as Ye's Neo-Confucian notion of the self comes into clashes with the realist novel form.<sup>97</sup> The Neo-Confucian idea of the correspondence between man and his outside world fails Huanzhi on all three levels. Unable to remedy the gap between Huanzhi's personal subjectivity and the exigencies of his world, the narrative has to terminate the "bourgeois self" that it starts out to forge.

Anderson's formulation of the "narrative suicide" merits special attention. Yet instead of reading the narrative suicide as instantiating the fatal conflict between the Neo-Confucian self vis-à-vis the realist novel, I argue that there is another way to interpret the

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<sup>96</sup> Anderson, 118.

<sup>97</sup> For Anderson's discussion of Ye's influence from Neo-Confucianism, *ibid*, 117.

“narrative suicide.” It is embedded in the novel’s preoccupation with writing and embodied in a moment of Huanzhi’s realization. That moment comes in Chapter 23 in the immediate wake of the May Thirtieth Movement. In a factory area in suburban Shanghai, Huanzhi enters a silent soliloquy; written in the first person, it offers the reader a direct depiction of Huanzhi’s psychological state:

在這一回的浪潮中，農民為什麼不起來呢？他們太分散了。又該恨到中國的文字。這樣難認難記的文字，惟有沒事做的人纔能夠學，終年辛苦的農民就只好永沒有傳達消息的工具；少了這一種工具，對於外間的消息當然隔膜了。<sup>98</sup>

Why did peasants not rise with this tide? It is because they are too scattered. It is also the Chinese script that is to be blamed. How difficult it is to recognize and memorize these characters. They are only meant for the leisurely. These poor peasants who labor all year around cannot but be forever deprived of an instrument of information dissemination. Lacking this instrument, (they) are naturally barred from outside information.

The Chinese script is once again faulted for its difficulty and inaccessibility. Ni Huanzhi now sees the script clearly as a social medium, instrumental to the mobilization of the peasants. However, the difficulty of the characters stand in the way of information dissemination and hence the success of the revolution. What should be done with the “hateful” script? Ni Huanzhi offers no answer. As the psychological depiction takes place in *yutiwen*, it would have been preposterous to hail the alphabetization of Chinese. The narrative thus takes a turn. Huanzhi’s soliloquy continues:

對於日來說教似的自己的演講，他不禁懷疑起來了……眼前引起的疑問是：他們果真知道得太少麼？他們的心意果真象空空的一張白紙或者混沌的一塊石頭麼？自己比他們究竟多知道一些麼？自己告訴他們的究竟有些兒益處麼？……<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ni Huanzhi*, 213.

<sup>99</sup> The first ellipsis mark is mine for a more apt quote and the second is Ye’s original. *Ibid*, 214.



Reflecting on his sermon-like speech during the day, he could not help his own skepticism... The immediate questions in front of him are: Do they (the peasants) really know too little? Are their minds truly as empty as a piece of blank paper or as cluttered as a block of stone? How much more does he know than them? What good does it do for them to listen to what he has to say? ...

If there is nothing to be done with the hateful script, then there must be something else one could do for the revolutionary cause: self-reflection. The chain of questions that Huanzhi raises here is so fatal that none of them could be answered in any substantial way. All these questions shoot right through the heart of the May Fourth enlightenment project. They crumble the theoretical, moral, and intellectual ground upon which the power relations between the preaching intellectuals and the listening masses is imagined and practiced. They question the authority of the intellectuals and destroy the legitimacy of the enlightenment paradigm. By circumventing the unsolvable problem of the script, the narrative falls into another dead end: the negation of the intellectual. If a *yutiwen* narrative dare not venture the elimination of the script of characters, then the alternative it has to confront is the annihilation of the intellectual – the spokesman of the character-literacy. Ni Huanzhi, with his sensitivity to writing, zest for the revolution, and his class nature as a petty-bourgeois intellectual, unwittingly serves as the perfect victim of a structural narrative suicide. Though Huanzhi's demise is already determined, the narrator could not announce his sentence on the spot. The long winding section of self-reflection thus ends in an ellipsis. Following the ellipsis mark, we see the gradual decline of our protagonist as he bids his old friends farewell, mourns the death of his new comrade, is tormented by his stalled progress with the rural normal college, and eventually stricken by typhoid and dies. The representative of the petty bourgeois intellectual has to fade out before the new blood makes their entrance.

## The Heart of Literature

*Wenxin* 文心 (*The Heart of Literature*) was co-authored by Ye Shengtao and Xia Mianzun between 1931 and 1934. It was the last novel that Ye Shengtao wrote before his writing shifted to education and the teaching of what was in nature, *yutiwen*. Ye and Xia, who became in-laws during their co-authorship of *Wenxin*, were both editors for a Kaiming Bookstore journal called *Middle School Students* 中學生. *Wenxin* was first serialized in that journal to teach teenagers in a fictional form “the total knowledge of the Chinese language.”<sup>100</sup> Two older literary works framed the conceptualization of *Wenxin*. First was an early sixth century work credited to Liu Xie 劉勰 entitled *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Minds and the Carving of the Dragon*). The first systematic Chinese literary criticism, it was also the first book about “the total knowledge of the Chinese language” and the source of *Wenxin*’s title. The second line of origin, as observed by the scholar Charles Laughlin, was Edmondo De Amicis’ 1887 novel *Cuore, Libro per I ragazzi* (*The Heart of a Boy*). Xia Mianzun translated a Japanese version of it into Chinese in 1923, entitled *Ai de Jiaoyu* 愛的教育 (*The Education of Love*), which provided the structural prototype for *Wenxin*.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Chen Wangdao, “Preface,” *Wenxin* 文心 (*The Heart of Literature*) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1983), 1.

<sup>101</sup> For Charles Laughlin’s discussion of both *Wenxin* and the so-called White Horse Group of writers which includes Xia Mianzun, please see Charles Laughlin, “Wenzhang Zuofa: Essay Writing as Education in 1930s China” in Kang-I Sun Chang et al., eds., *Tradition and Modernity: Comparative Perspective* (Beijing : Beijing University Press), pp. 188-205; Laughlin, Chapter 3 “Learning: The White Horse Lake Group” in *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), pp. 77-102. The two other works mentioned here are Liu Xie, *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Minds and the Carving of the Dragon*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008); Edmondo De Amicis, *Cuore: The Heart of a Boy*, trans. Desmond Hartley (London: Peter Owen, 1986).

Combining the theme of *Wenxin Diaolong* and the student-centered structure of *Cuore, Libro per I ragazzi*, the 1934 *Wenxin* depicts life in a certain No. 1 Middle School in H city over the course of thirty-two chapters.<sup>102</sup> While the narrative frames the school life as part of the social and political panorama of the time, it is deeply anchored in the literary and language education in the school. From a third person perspective, our young protagonist Zhou Lehua 周樂華 takes the readers through a multi-layered education process – literary education, wartime education, and life education. The story takes an unexpected turn as Lehua drops out of school and starts working at a local iron factory. The narrative comes to an end as Lehua grows into a factory leader and writes to his former classmates congratulating them on their graduation. Read in this light, *Wenxin* is more than a novel in and about *yutiwen*; it is also a *Bildungsroman* of how a young student grows into a “little worker.”

Before we can make sense of *Wenxin* as a historical *Bildungsroman*, we need to first reckon with its nature as a *yutiwen* story. While Charles Laughlin demonstrated convincingly the structural connection between the Chinese and Italian hearts of literature (*Wenxin* and *Cuore*), he also points out that the Florentine Italian used in *Cuore* contributed to the establishment of Florentine as the standardized modern Italian language. Laughlin’s comparison stopped right there. However, upon closer examination, the dimension of linguistic standardization showcased in *Cuore* finds a similar and more self-reflexive expression in *Wenxin*. As mentioned before, the whole story is written in

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<sup>102</sup> The H city No.1 Middle School was most likely the Hangzhou No.1 Middle School (formally Zhejiang Secondary Normal School 兩級師範 and Zhejiang Provincial No. 1 Normal School 省立一師), where an exceptional group of faculty congregated in the 1920s and 30s. Aside from Xia Mianzun and Ye Shengtao, Lu Xun, Jiang Menglin, Li Shutong, Feng Zikai, Zhu Ziqing, Xu Shoushang, Jing Hengyi, Shen Junru, and Liu Dabai among others were all associated with the school.

and about *yutiwen*, and its literary origin, literary history, diction, syntax, grammar, and composition. Unlike other contemporary works in *yutiwen*, like *Ni Huanzhi*, in which the *yutiwen* issue is implied and hidden, the narrative in *Wenxin* owns up to its linguistic materiality. In Chapter 9 of the story, during a class discussion of a popular column called “Wenzhang bingyuan” 文章病院 (Composition Hospital) in Ye and Xia’s journal *Middle School Students*,<sup>103</sup> one of Lehua’s classmates comments on the three pieces of composition in the said column: “Those three pieces are all *wenyan* prose, while what we write is *yutiwen* 那三篇文字都是文言文，而我們寫的語體文。”<sup>104</sup> *Yutiwen* it is. Read in this light, *Wenxin* is to my knowledge the only modern Chinese novel that acknowledges its linguistic reality in its most accurate term – the colloquialized written language. A work dedicated to the teaching and learning of *yutiwen*, it contributes, not unlike the Italian heart of literature, to the standardization and consolidation of *yutiwen* as the main staple of modern Chinese literature.

Set on the eve of the full outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, this *yutiwen* novel registered the zeitgeist of national salvation and mass liberation. The plot development is driven, sometimes in an overly mechanical fashion, by the development of the war, from the January 28th Incident in 1931 to the fall of Yuzhou into Japanese hands in 1933. Accordingly, the kind of education that Lehua and his classmates receive and participate in creating is in fact the kind of new mass education that Tao Xingzhi

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<sup>103</sup> 病院 is a loanword from the Japanese *kanji* formulation. The popular column “Composition Hospital” stirred at the time great controversy and faced censorship, as it published articles critiquing the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Censorship on Ye Shengtao continued in Taiwan after 1949, since Ye stayed on in the Mainland and served government positions in the PRC. In a 1977 edition of *Wenxin* published by the Taiwan Kaiming Bookstore, Ye’s name was erased from the book, leaving only Xia Mianzun as the author, who passed away in 1946. In the same edition, a whole chapter on “Composition Hospital” was removed as well. See, Xia Mianzun, *Wenxin* (Taipei: Kaiming Bookstore, 1977).

<sup>104</sup> *Wenxin*, 59.

advocated. As Lehua's father loses employment due to the war, Lehua is made to shoulder the household responsibility. Upon departing school, a farewell party is held in Lehua's honor. Lehua's teacher and classmates, though regretful to see Lehua leave, all welcome Lehua's new role as a "little worker." They criticize mere book learning as "the expression of the selfishness of the upper and middle-class" and reassure Lehua that true learning "can take place wherever and whenever."<sup>105</sup> Lehua, the little-worker-to-be, gives the concluding remarks:

我還想讀不用文字寫的書，我要在社會的圖書館裡做一番認識、體驗的工夫。<sup>106</sup>

I also want to read books that are not written in characters. I shall learn from and experience the library of society.

As though answering Tao Xingzhi's call for the "little workers," Lehua begins his career in the much-needed enterprise of national industrialization and wins overwhelming respect amongst his classmates and teachers. As the narrative concludes, the readers are led to anticipate, like Lehua's classmates, the little worker's speech at the school congregation.<sup>107</sup>

Granted that *Wenxin's* subject matter of language teaching and its at times didactic tone compromised its literary merit, it captured accurately the nature of modern Chinese literary writing, and presented a practical and rare manual for *yutiwen* writing. It corroborated and consolidated *yutiwen* as the staple of modern Chinese literature. It was also an insightful literary sketch of a historical moment when China, in order to defend

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 257.

herself, had to rediscover her children, revamp her education system, and reinvent her writing system. As the old petty-bourgeois teacher faded out and the young student-worker entered the historical stage, it ushered in a new age of revolutionary literature in modern Chinese literary history.



(7456)	來
(7540)	這
(8072)	全
(9524)	人
(10036)	有
(10248)	他
(10381)	上
(12103)	我
(12835)	是
(12879)	了
(13793)	一
(15135)	不
(29592)	的

Figure 4.2: The most frequently used characters and the number of times they appear in the total 554,478 characters (in parentheses), *Yutiwen yingyong zihui*, 116.



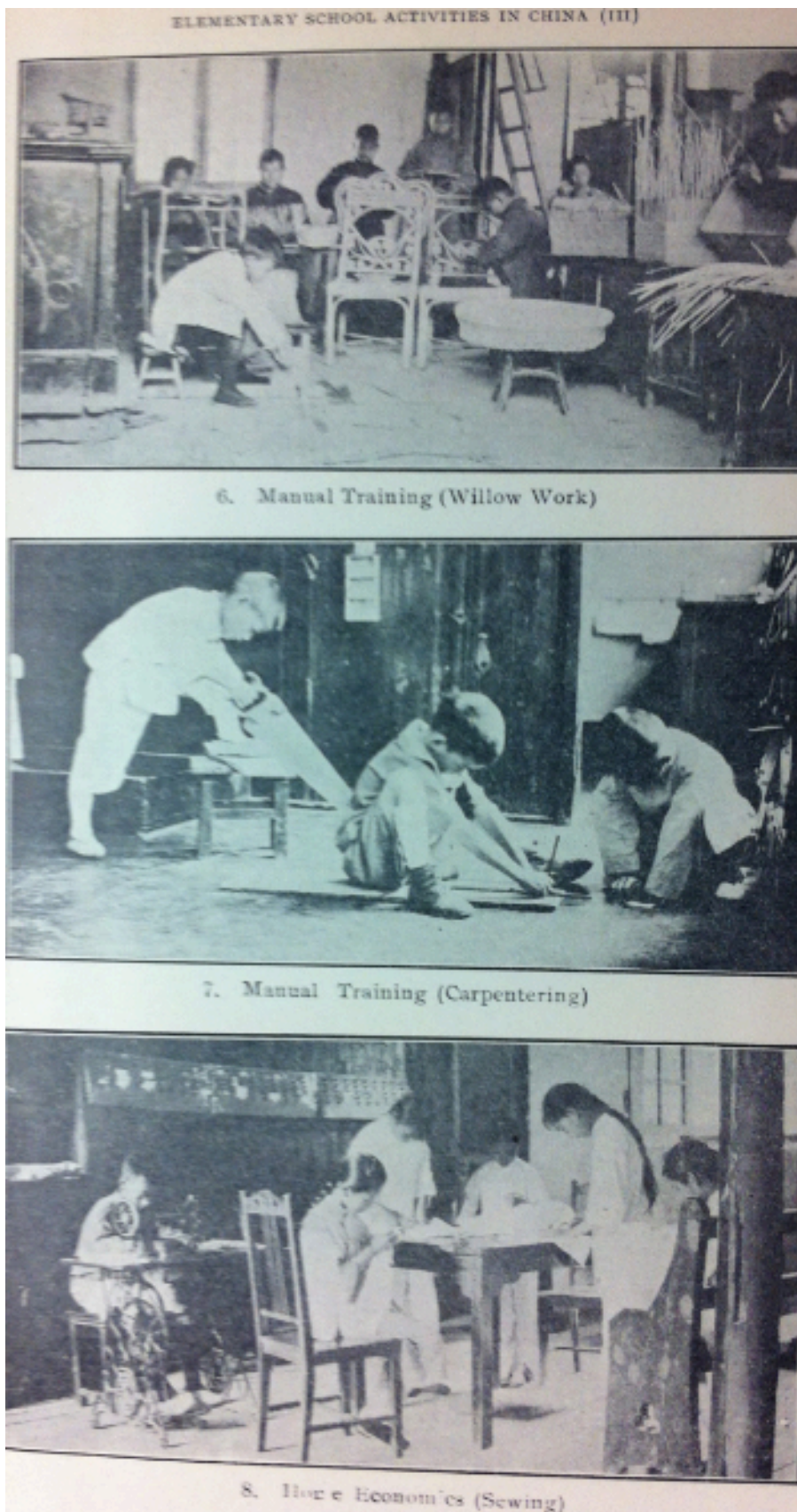


Figure 4.3: Elementary School Activities in China as a combination of “Life is Education” and “teaching, learning, and doing all in one,” in Tao, *Education in China* (1924).



Figure 4.4: Tao (first on the right) as a third-party mediator between the CCP and the GMD representatives in Chongqing in October 1945, *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì*, Vol. 3, Figure 2.

## EPILOGUE

**Scripts of Modernity**

On January 10, 1958, Zhou Enlai 周恩来—the first Premier of the PRC—delivered a report entitled “Current Tasks of the Script Reform” 当前文字改革的任务 at the plenary session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress. Zhou announced and explained at length measures that were to be taken to reform and preserve the Chinese script. However, the obvious question of “the future of the Chinese script” was not brought up until the very end of the speech:

汉字在历史上有过不可磨灭的功绩，在这一点上我们大家的意见都是一致的。至于汉字的前途，它是不是千秋万岁永远不变呢？还是要变呢？它是向着汉字自己的形体变化呢？还是被拼音文字代替呢？它是为拉丁字母式的拼音文字所代替，还是为另一种形式的拼音文字所代替呢？这个问题我们现在还不忙做出结论。<sup>1</sup>

Historically, Chinese characters had accomplished indelible achievements. This much we all agree on. As for the future of the Chinese script, will it or will it not live ten thousand years without changing? Will it evolve in accordance to its own morphology or will it be replaced by an alphabetic script? Is that alphabet a Latin one or another one of a different form? This question is too soon for us to conclude.

However, has not “this question” already been concluded? Was there not a death verdict on the Chinese script since 1916 if not earlier? Was Zhou not informed of his own party’s engagements in alphabetizing Chinese writing?

The answers to all the above are yes. Zhou’s speech, far from an attempt to blot out the history of Chinese alphabetization movements, should be read as a difficult

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<sup>1</sup> Zhou Enlai, “Dangqian wenzi gaige de renwu” 当前文字改革的任务 (Current Tasks of Scriptal Reform), in *Dangdai zhongguo de wenzi gaige* 当代中国的文字改革 (The Script Reform of Contemporary China) (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1995), pp. 556-569, here 568. I use simplified characters for quotes from this particular speech to mark its content and significance.

announcement of the CCP's policy change in its approach to the Chinese script. As one of the top leaders of a party that championed Latinization, Zhou was put in an awkward position to make public the CCP's ostensible departure from its prior linguistic policy. Were he not fully aware of the history of the Chinese alphabetization movements and the CCP's role in it, Zhou would not have felt compelled to introduce the thorny problem of the survival of the Chinese script at the end of his speech, one that defended its preservation.

Up until 1956, the preservation of the Chinese script was out of the question. Members of the CCP, having driven the conservative GMD out of Mainland China, saw themselves as the true heir to a comprehensive revolution including a script revolution. The Second Sino-Japanese War and the ensuing Civil War (1947-1949) had put the Latinization Movement on hold for almost a decade. Upon the victory of the CCP, it seemed as though the time for a Chinese alphabet has finally come. Between 1949 and 1956, the CCP was, in fact, determined to carry through the script revolution. As early as August 1949, two months before the foundation of the PRC, Mao Zedong among others initiated the formation of the Association of Chinese Script Reform 中國文字改革協會, a national organization dedicated to latinizing Chinese writing. By February 1952, it morphed into the Research Committee of the Chinese Script 中國文字改革研究委員會, researching and collecting proposals of a new Chinese script. By October 1954, the Research Committee was recast into the Committee on the Chinese Script Reform 中國文字改革委員會, under the direct leadership of the State Council. Within this period, top party cadres—including Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Chen Yi, and Wu Yuzhang—maintained and reaffirmed on different occasions that Chinese characters ought to be

“pinyinized” 拼音化 (phoneticized and spelled).<sup>2</sup> The Committee on the Chinese Script Reform invited proposals from all over China to pinyinize Chinese writing. A total of six hundred and thirty three people mailed in six hundred and fifty-five versions of the new Chinese script including corresponding spelling plans.<sup>3</sup> Chinese characters approached, as it seemed, their final demise.

As demonstrated in Figure 5.1, some of the contenders did not choose the popular form of the Latin alphabet. In search for the perfect “national form” of the new Chinese script, some proposals experimented with alternative scripts such as the National Alphabet, Cyrillic, Hangul, Kana, self-designed signs, music notations, and even numerical marks. None proved satisfactory.<sup>4</sup> While the pursuit of the perfect Chinese alphabet continued, the Committee on the Chinese Script Reform began its work on the simplification and standardization of Chinese characters. In October 1955, the first PRC

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<sup>2</sup> *Dangdai zhongguo de wenzi gaige*, pp. 57-65. For instance, the CCP central committee issued “An Order in Regard to the Script Issue” 中共中央《關於文字改革工作問題的指示》 on January 27, 1956 saying, “Chinese Characters must be reformed. Chinese Script reform has to follow the common route shared by script all over the world: alphabetization. But before its realization, we must simplify characters to expedite their use and engage actively in all aspects of the alphabetization campaign.” 漢字必須改革，漢字改革要走世界文字共同的拼音方向，而在實現拼音化以前，必須簡化漢字，以利目前的應用，同時積極進行拼音化的各項工作。 Ibid, 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Gedi renshi jilai hanyu pinyin wenzi fang'an huibian* 各地人士寄來漢語拼音文字方案匯編 (A Compilation of Plans for Alphabetic Chinese Mailed in from All Over China) (Beijing: Zhongguo wenzi gaige weiyuanhui pinyin fang'an bu, 1955). There are two volumes to the book. To my knowledge, the National Library of China (Beijing) is the only library that has the second volume of the book. I have yet to track down the first volume.

<sup>4</sup> The discussion of “National Form” could be traced to Mao Zedong’s 1938 article “Zhongguo gongchandang zai minzu zhanzheng zhong de diwei” 中國共產黨在民族戰爭中的地位 (The CCP’s Status in the National War), which established the key to the CCP’s future as the combination of international content and national form. See Mao, *Zhongguo gongchandang zai minzu zhanzheng zhong de diwei* 中國共產黨在民族戰爭中的地位 (The CCP’s Status in the National War) (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 1958). The pursuit of national form in the political realm was extended to literature, art, and in this case script reform. According to Zhou Youguang in an interview with Peter Hessler, Mao was swayed from latinizing the Chinese script to inventing a Chinese script of national form by Stalin during his trip to Moscow. Peter Hessler, *Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 417.

National Script Conference was held in Beijing. For the first time, the simplification of characters was brought on the official agenda for the PRC. The 1955 National Script Conference effectively prepared the ground for the CCP's eventual change of policy. Between 1956 and 1958, different plans for simplified characters were proposed, announced, discussed, and revised. When it was time to make the plan official, Zhou Enlai delivered his 1958 speech on the script reform. It bears pointing out that he did not mention even once “script revolution.” In a most matter-of-fact manner, Zhou laid out at the very beginning of his speech three new tasks of the script reform:

当前文字改革的任务，就是：简化汉字，推广普通话，指定和推行汉语拼音方案。<sup>5</sup>

The current tasks of script reform are: simplify characters, promote *putonghua*, issue and implement a *pinyin* plan.

These three measures effectively put an end to the modern Chinese script crisis. Seemingly a “betrayal” of the Latinization Movement, these measures could hardly be taken at face value, for they epitomized a compromise between speech and writing. They recuperated characters' dominance in Chinese writing, relegated schemes of alphabetic Chinese to an auxiliary status, while affirming the increasing importance of the oral. The key was the conceptualization of *pinyin*. Literally meaning, “sound spelling,” *pinyin* created a productive ambiguity linking together orality and literacy. On the one hand, it was an auxiliary spelling plan, laying no claim to becoming an official script. On the other, it managed to implement, however auxiliary, an alphabetic script into the Chinese writing system, nodding to the legacy of the script revolution. The coinage of *pinyin* functioned as a mediatory third party that enabled the contradictory coexistence between

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<sup>5</sup> Zhou, 556.

characters and alphabet, thus concluding, at least momentarily, the half-century struggle between alphabetic universalism and Chinese writing. From the perspective of the characters, the *pinyin* resolution was a moderate success, for characters survived but only under the premise that they would be reformed and simplified. For the Roman/Latin alphabet, it marked a tolerable failure, not least because of *pinyin*'s auxiliary status to spell *putonghua*, but more importantly the door was kept open for future script revolutions. To wit, *pinyin* consolidated the phonetic mimetic relationship between speech and writing in the Chinese context and preserved the possibility to replace characters. Zhou Enlai's non-committing questions toward the end of his speech, while suspending the script revolution for future generations, left room for a potential comeback of the alphabetic script. The current tasks were made to focus on the script reform, aiming to transform Chinese writing.

### **The Case of Simplification**

The foremost transformation was the standardization of the simplified characters. On January 28, 1956, the State Council passed a draft of "The Scheme of Simplified Characters" consisting in three parts: 230 simplified characters to be put in instant use; 285 beta simplified characters; and 54 simplified radicals for further discussion.<sup>6</sup> After a two-year period of experimentation and revision, the draft was finally passed by the First National People's Congress on February 10, 1958. This first scheme, unlike the later 1977 version of "The Second Scheme of Simplified Characters," did not invent many characters, but limited itself to collecting and compiling a list of simplified characters

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<sup>6</sup> *Dangdai zhongguo de wenzi gaige*, 74.

already in use by people. Two sources consisted of these ready-made simplified characters. First and the majority of cases were the historical simplified characters. According to Chao Yuen Ren, up to “eighty percent” of the simplified characters adopted in Mainland China were “Song Yuan popular characters” habitually used in the cursive script.<sup>7</sup> These characters, because of their “folk” nature and historical status, encountered little resistance. The second source was, as Zhou Enlai acknowledged in his speech, a round trip loan of “some simplified *kanji* formulations from Japan”<sup>8</sup> such as “国,” “体,” and “党” to list a few. Simplification, so it seemed, became the fated course for the East Asian common script.

The GMD in Taiwan felt the same, in spite of its political difference with the Mainland. The May Fourth veteran and scholar Luo Jialun 羅家倫 summed up the necessity of simplification as such, “Chinese script has to be simplified to be preserved. Only simplification meets the survival need of the modern Chinese nation. This is the urgent call of the time and the people.”<sup>9</sup> According to Luo, there was no reason to resist

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<sup>7</sup> Speaking in 1974, Chao was clear in maintaining that the mainland simplified characters as well as the Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas’ use of traditional characters were all to some extent simplified. Here Chao was referring to the historical period of Song Dynasty (960-1279) and Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), which saw significant development of simplified characters. See Chao Yuen Ren, “Yuen Ren Chao, Chinese Linguist, Phonologist, Composer and Author,” in *Zhao Yuanren Quanjì* 趙元任全集 (The Complete Works of Zhao Yuanren) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2007), Vol. 16, 245.

<sup>8</sup> Zhou’s full quote reads, “因此, 我们应该说, 远在文字改革委员会成立之前, 人民群众早已在改革文字, 而文字改革委员会的工作, 无非是搜集、整理群众的创造, 并且经过各方的讨论加以推广罢了。同时, 我们也采用了某些日本简化了的汉字。” (Therefore we should say that people had been reforming the Chinese script a long time before the establishment of the Committee of the Chinese Script Reform. The task of the Committee is no more than collecting and compiling the creation of the people, while promoting such creation through wide discussions. In the meantime, we have also adopted some simplified *kanji* from Japan.) Zhou, 559.

<sup>9</sup> Luo’s book for simplification was written in the so-called traditional characters. His original quote reads, “中國文字需要簡化, 才能保存, 才能適合現時代中國民族生存的需要。這是時代的要求, 也是我們廣大民眾迫切的要求。” See Luo Jialun 羅家倫, *Jiantizi yundong* 簡體字運動 (The Movement of the Simplified Characters) (Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongyingshe, 1954), 1.



the historical force simply because the CCP was following it.<sup>10</sup> Now that “personal correspondences, journalistic articles, and even official reports” were “replete with simplified characters,” simplification advocates like himself, “merely recognized the trend and wanted to follow the sentiments of the people.”<sup>11</sup> Luo even quoted Chiang Kai-shek in a speech in December 1953 proclaiming, “The promotion of the simplified characters is indeed of grave necessity.”<sup>12</sup>

Call it simplified or traditional characters, the Sinograph was heading toward simplification with varying degrees in different regions, for it was the only chance for the Chinese script to withstand challenges from the alphabetic world. To avoid complete annihilation, the Chinese script had to undertake certain measures of sacrifice. The simplified script—whether by name or by essence—combined with *yutiwen* writing, became the operative norm of modern Chinese writing. In the meantime, alphabetic writing and phonetic universalism found other expressions.

### A Multi-script state

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<sup>10</sup> The GMD’s rhetoric of conservative revolution (radical right) as a response to the rise of Communism (radical left) was carried over to Taiwan, as the GMD was defeated in 1949. By the time of Luo’s book on simplification, the GMD already developed a “vernacular anti-communism” which was reflected in Luo’s book. See Luo, 46-49. Arif Dirlik discusses the GMD’s conservative revolution in Dirlik, “The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution,” in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (August 1975), 945-980. For the legacy of the conservative revolution in Taiwan, see Brian Tsui, “China’s Forgotten Revolution: Radical Conservatism in Action, 1927-1949” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2012), pp. 271-280.

<sup>11</sup> Luo’s full quotes read: “祇看個人的信件，新聞記者的文稿，乃至正式的公文裡，那處沒有簡體字，甚至於充滿了簡體字”；“我們研究提倡簡體字的人，不過是認清了這個潮流，想順民之情，因勢利導……” Ibid, pp. 1-2. Luo was accused of leaning toward the CCP for advocating simplification. Luo had to draw the distinction between Wu Yuzhang and himself, two major simplification supporters across the strait, while standing firm on the ground that simplification was already in practice in ROC and would be the future.

<sup>12</sup> Chiang’s original quote reads from a meeting minute as follows, “簡體字之提倡，甚為必要。” Ibid, 4.

One of such expressions was the “neologism” of *pinyin*. According to Zhou’s 1958 report, “*The Scheme of Chinese Pinyin* should be used to denote the pronunciation of characters and to promote *putonghua*. It was not to be used as a phonetic alphabet that would replace characters.”<sup>13</sup> Thus Zhou’s official verdict brought about a semantic transference for *pinyin*. It was made over from a general term referring to phonetic mimetic representation to a special terminology reserved for the PRC’s special auxiliary spelling scheme. The new term served as a linchpin—thanks to its non-official status and alphabetic nature—connecting not only the script revolution and the script reform, but also the spoken language and the written language. Clouded by the ambiguity of *pinyin*, the new Chinese writing system was structured either wittingly or unwittingly to protect Chinese characters, promote a new national pronunciation, while preserving the possibility of future alphabetization.

Granted that the 1958 report reinstated character-literacy for the PRC, its definition of *pinyin* betrayed the CCP’s inability and reluctance to part with its own history of Chinese alphabetization. *Pinyin* functioned as a symbol of inheritance that acknowledged the course of linguistic and script evolution, if not directly beckoning its eventual prevail. Although Zhou put a hold on the process of alphabetizing Chinese by saying that “the future of the Chinese script” did not “belong to the current tasks of script reform,”<sup>14</sup> his speech lent room for real “alphabetization” in other writing systems, those

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<sup>13</sup> Zhou says, “应该说清楚，《汉语拼音方案》是用来为汉字注音和推广普通话的，它并不是用来代替汉字的拼音文字。” Zhou, 562. The pronunciation of *putonghua* conformed to the 1924 “new national pronunciation” based on Pekingese. It jettisoned the term “national language” and adopted “common speech,” popular during the Mass Culture Movement.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 568.

of the minority communities. Zhou approached the issue from the perspective of the minority brethren:

许多兄弟民族都表示这样的愿望，就是要同汉族在字母上取得一致，以便于交流文化，学习汉语和吸收汉语的名词术语。前几年，汉语采用什么字母还有些举棋不定，使一些兄弟民族创造和改革文字的工作也受了影响。现在西南区已经有十几个民族创造了拉丁字母的民族文字，但是他们还是不大放心，因为我们的方案还没有最后定案。因此，汉语拼音方案再不能拖延下去了，否则还要耽误人家的事情。汉语现在既然决定采用拉丁字母作为拼音字母，应该确定这样一条原则：今后各民族创造或者改革文字的时候，原则上应该以拉丁字母为基础，并且应该在字母的读音和用法上尽量跟《汉语拼音方案》取得一致。

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Many brother nations expressed the will to achieve agreement with the Han people in terms of the form of the script (to be adopted in their writing systems), so as to facilitate communication and absorb the Chinese language and terminologies in it. Several years ago, it was still uncertain what form of alphabet the Chinese written language was going to take. It resulted in setbacks in their work on script creation and script reform. Now there are already more than a score ethnic nations in the southwest that have devised their own Latinized scripts. They remain ill at ease, for our scheme has not been finalized. Therefore, the Chinese *pinyin* scheme cannot be put off any longer. Otherwise, it will hold up progress for the others. Since we have decided on the Latin alphabet for *pinyin*, we should lay down such a principle: From now on when all ethnic nations create or reform their respective script, they should adopt the Latin alphabet in principle and should strive for agreement with *The Chinese Pinyin Scheme* in pronunciation and usage.

A proper discussion of the PRC's ethnic minority policy in regard to language and script policies—whether it was Han chauvinism or socialist egalitarianism—belongs to another place.<sup>16</sup> Yet we need to ask: Why was an auxiliary pronunciation scheme such as *pinyin*

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 546.

<sup>16</sup> Zhou Minglang has extensive critique of the CCP's script and language policy after 1949. See Zhou Minglang, *Multilingualism in China: The Politics of Writing Reforms for Minority Languages, 1949-2002* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003); Also Zhou Minglang ed., *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China: Theory and Practice since 1949* (Boston; Dordrecht; New York; London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004).

able to “hold up” script reform and creation for the ethnic minority groups? The key was the implicit proposition that the Latin alphabet was to eventually serve as the shared alphabet for all fifty-six ethnic groups in the PRC. Alphabetic universalism was given such weight that it embodied ethnic solidarity between the Han and other Chinese nationalities. The scriptal difference between the simplified characters and the Latin alphabet was no more than a temporary phenomenon, for the future of the Chinese script—in fact all Chinese scripts—was the Latin alphabet. Through the script reform of the ethnic minority groups, the legacy of the Latinization Movement in both China and the Soviet Union lived on. Shifting its focus from Chinese characters to the scripts of the minority groups, Latinization in the 1950s saw the creation of fourteen Latinized new script for ten ethnic minority groups including Zhuang, Buyi, Yi, and Miao among others, with the Latinized Zhuang script being the most successful case.<sup>17</sup> These new Latinized scripts added to the cluster of scripts already in use in other ethnic groups such as the Manchu alphabet, the Mongolian script, the Tibetan alphabet, and the Uyghur Arabic script to name a few (Figure 5.2).<sup>18</sup> Along with the characters, they constituted the multi-script Chinese writing system, one that was caught in between script variety and alphabetic universalism. The Chinese script revolution, initially lured by the search for

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<sup>17</sup> The Zhuang Latin script did not experience much objection, though some Zhuang people still preferred to use the so-called “Zhuang Characters,” or “sawndip,” created in the seventh century. Please see Nie Hongyin 聶鴻音, *Zhongguo wenzi gailue* 中國文字概略 (A Concise Introduction to Chinese Writing) (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 1998), 232. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to do justice to the writing systems of the ethnic minority groups. For a historical survey of the script development of the Chinese ethnic groups, please see *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenzi* 中國少數民族文字 (Chinese Writing for Ethnic Minority Nationalities) (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue shubanshe, 1992). Thomas Mullaney also discusses briefly the “minority language script development” in *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 43.

<sup>18</sup> The Uyghur Arabic script was restored in 1982 after unsatisfactory experiments with both the Uyghur Cyrillic script and the Latin new script. See Nie, 228.

the perfect writing system, had to contend with the tradition of character literacy and account for the coexistence of multiple scripts. For the newly founded PRC, character simplification proved sufficient for the spread of literacy, while script-coexistence amongst the fifty-six nationalities conformed to the socialist ideal. The script crisis shelved its phonocentric dreams and revolutionary passion—at least for now—and concluded its chapters with the scripts of modernity.

方案拟制人		陈先拙、方先坤		拟制日期		1955.4.28	
声				母			
生字母	ㄅ	ㄆ	ㄇ	ㄏ	ㄐ	ㄑ	ㄒ
字母	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
生字母	ㄓ	ㄔ	ㄕ	ㄖ	ㄗ	ㄘ	ㄙ
字母	ㄗ	ㄘ	ㄙ	ㄚ	ㄛ	ㄜ	ㄝ
韵				母			
生字母	ㄧ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄚ	ㄛ	ㄜ	ㄝ
字母	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
生字母	ㄖ	ㄗ	ㄘ	ㄙ	ㄚ	ㄛ	ㄜ
字母	ㄗ	ㄘ	ㄙ	ㄚ	ㄛ	ㄜ	ㄝ
拼写举例							
257 17 ㄗ64 lana 8n2 3n72e8,							
我 傍 着 船 - 棚 远 望,							
註: 音节第一个字母是辅音时, 声调用 1 2 3 4 表示阴阳上去四声; 如果							
音节第一个字母是元音时, 声调用 5 6 7 8 来表示阴阳上去四声。							

Figure 5.1: An example of the “national form” of the Chinese script, in *Gedi renshi jilai hanyu pinyin wenzi fang'an huibian*, 117.



Figure 5.2: Five different scripts of *pinyin*, Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Zhuang (from top down and left to right) on the one hundred RMB Bill in the upper-right corner.

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