



Chinese Language and the Modern: Contemplating Chinese in the East Asian Linguistic Environment

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Chinese Language and the Modern:

Contemplating Chinese in the East Asian Linguistic Environment

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1. Introduction

First of all, let us clarify the title of this paper. What is “the Chinese language” (漢語): Chinese (中文); vernacular Chinese (普通話); national language (國語); standard Mandarin(官話); poetic language (雅言); standard written Chinese (白話); or dialects (土白)? All of these appellations manifest certain aspects of the language used by the people who have lived their lives in the great expanses of land from the western rim of the Pacific Ocean to the feet of the Kunlun Mountains, from the basin of the Yellow River to that of the Yangtze. If we include foreign perspectives, we also have names such as Mandarin, Tang speech (唐話), Qing language (清語), and *Shinago* (支那語), a term used after the beginning of the Meiji period.

In the same vein, what is “modern”? *Kindai* 近代 is the Japanese translation of “modern,” a term that expresses the classification of time periods by Western historians. When peoples, cultures, and languages differ, however, the methods and the measurements by which the great currents of history are divided also differ. Thus, if there is overlap in the periods described by the English term “modern” and the Japanese and Chinese *kingendai/jinxiandai* (近現代), there are also areas that do not. Even within China, historians and Chinese linguists classify time periods differently.¹⁾ However, if we investigate carefully into the true essence of the “modern,” we find a plethora of keywords by which the concept can be framed, such as “civil society,” “nation-state,” “the Industrial Revolution,” “Enlightenment,” “a progressive view of history,” “knowledge,” or “rationality.” Moreover, doubtless it is “science” that is the iron-clad standard that informs the modern.

What associations are there between the “Chinese language” and “the modern”? Whenever we associate a language with a certain era, we tend to focus on the epochal features of that language. In my

1) Among scholars of Chinese history, “modern” (近代) is defined as the period from the Opium War of 1840 to the New Culture Movement of 1919, while anything after that is defined as “contemporary” (現代). However, in Chinese linguistics studies, the Song and Ming periods are also generally included in the term “modern.”

endeavors to examine the Chinese language in a modern—particularly an East Asian—linguistic environment, the issues I have focused on in the past decade or so can be summarized as the following:

1. Research pertaining to the modernization of the Chinese language
2. Research pertaining to the modernization of Chinese language studies
3. Research pertaining to the correlation between the modernization of the Chinese language and the modernization of East Asia

To accomplish the goals of the research described above, new ideas about both research methods and linguistic sources are necessary.

2. Chinese language and foreign languages

From antiquity, there have been differences in the Chinese language between elegant/poetic language (雅言) and dialects (方言). Such differentiation could be considered as a simple recognition of the distinct variations in Chinese common language and dialects, but this recognition does not extend outside the Chinese language. With the establishment of trade and tributary systems, interpreters emerged who transmitted the words of the “barbarians;” these interpreters were pioneers in the experience of linguistic contact. After the large-scale translations of Buddhist materials during and after the Han and Tang dynasties, followed by the arrival of Jesuits in China at the end of the sixteenth century and of Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century, people began to become keenly aware of the existence of “foreign languages” that had distinct writing systems that could not be contained in the contemporary notion of “dialect.” English language education in China began after the Opium Wars, through the work of missionaries in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. In the 1860s, the Qing government established the Tongwen Guan 同文館 (School for Combined Learning) in Beijing and the Guang Fangyan Guan 廣方言館 (School for Dispersing Languages) in Shanghai as organizations for the study of foreign languages. At the end of the nineteenth century, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 made the following point concerning English language studies in the Chinese coastal cities:

We must learn the language of the West. Today, those who speak of Self-Strengthening all recite the same litany; but if there are those studying to become an interpreter or a “broker” in order to make living wages, there are also those who wish to forge understanding between all peoples, to seek knowledge, and to strengthen the country. We must consider the self before beginning our studies. Now in the Yangtze valley and in the maritime regions, the schools that teach English—the so-called halls of Western learning—are beyond number.²⁾

The sudden explosion in the number of institutions for the study of English and the diversification of their goals can be glimpsed in the above passage. In addition, the Japanese language, which had been overlooked by most Chinese, became a target of foreign language studies after China’s defeat in the

2) 「西文西語之當習。今之談洋務者莫不言之矣。雖然有欲學焉，而為通事為買辦以謀衣食者；有欲學焉，而通古今中外，窮理極物，強國保教者。受學之始，不可不自審也。今沿江沿海各省，其標名中西學館、英文書塾以教授者，多至不可勝數。」梁啟超，『中西學門徑書七種·幼學通議』（1898）。

Sino-Japanese War. As opposed to the motivation for English and other language studies of “becoming an interpreter...to make living wages,” studying Japanese was considered a shortcut to absorbing the new knowledge from the West, and swelled into a boom at the beginning of the twentieth century. Through encounters with foreign languages, the Chinese language became a relative concept; editors of textbooks and dictionaries attempted to build a corresponding relationship with other languages at the lexical level. That process involved a marked increase in words created by translation and new coinages. It also brought about great changes in writing styles and sentence structures. Extensive contact and reciprocity are modern features of East Asian languages, including the Chinese language. Modern linguistic contact—indirect contact with a language as the medium through which new knowledge is transmitted—is more significant than direct contact that occurs through intermingling and emigration at border regions and through trade. The former appears mainly via written language, bringing about the emergence of lexica for abstract concepts and furthering changes in stylistic forms, while the latter is often focused on spoken language, creating phenomena such as loanwords for material objects and pidgins in daily life.³⁾

3. Research pertaining to modernization of the “Chinese language”

Language is constantly changing; this is a common truth in every time period. In Chinese linguistic studies, it is even held that the millennium from the ninth to the nineteenth century belonged to “modern Chinese.”⁴⁾ Changes in the Chinese language occurred at an extremely slow pace, against a backdrop of “super-stability.” From the nineteenth century onward, however, the tempo of change in the Chinese language accelerated. The Chinese language changed at a dizzying pace. The conversion from Southern Mandarin to Standard (Beijing) Mandarin; the shift from classical written style to colloquial style; the generation of new coinages and words from translation; the emergence of new linguistic structural patterns and stylistic forms; the widespread usage of modifying expressions; the establishment of a common tongue known as 普通話; and the abbreviation of written characters (簡体字) resulted in Chinese undergoing greater transformations in the slim space of a few decades than it had over the previous thousand years.⁵⁾

We must answer two questions regarding linguistic changes: Why do languages change, and do those changes have any direction? Certainly, there has been a trend in modern times to regard linguistic changes as evolutionary—that is, perfecting gradually in a certain direction. It can be said that this trend derives from the influence exerted upon our linguistic consciousness by the Western progressive view of history. For instance, we once believed that ideographs like Chinese characters were uncivilized, that

3) See Uchida Keiichi and Shen Guowei, ed. *Gengo sesshoku to pijin—19 seiki no Higashi Ajia 言語接触とピジン——19世紀の東アジア [Linguistic Contact and Pidgins: East Asia in the Nineteenth Century]*. Tokyo: Hakuteisha, 2009.

4) Wang Li states that from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century (the Opium Wars) was the era of modern Chinese (*Hanyu shigao* (漢語史稿), Chungghwa Book Co., 1980, 35. Similarly, Lu Shuxiang places the beginning of modern Chinese in late Tang, that is, the ninth century (see Lu Shuxiang’s foreword in *Jindai hanyu duben* 近代漢語讀本 by Lu Jian (劉堅), Shanghai Education Press, 1985.

5) According to Wang Li, “From a lexical standpoint, the pace of change in the Chinese language in the last 50 years has been quicker than in all the millennia of the past,” (*Hanyu shigao*) and “In the short span of twenty years from the beginning of the Republic to the present, there have been greater grammatical changes than during the time from the Han to the Qing” (*Zhongguoyu fa lilun* 中國語法理論 [Principles of Chinese grammar], 1944 in *Wang Li wenji 1* 王力文集1, 1984, Shandong Education Press).

progress toward phonetic writing was inevitable, and that ultimately a replacement would be made. Advocates of both Romanization and character simplification sought rationale in this change-centered view. However, the demands of the times and societal changes, particularly the extralinguistic factor of political interference, had a strong impact, and while it is true that those factors can alter language either temporarily or permanently, we must recognize that language is fundamentally something that changes autonomously.⁶⁾ Obviously, this does not refute truths such as the following. Modern changes in East Asian languages—more than the results of various autonomous linguistic developments and the tempo of those changes—were largely stimulated and accelerated by the influx of new knowledge from the West, or so-called “Western learning, Eastern movement” (西学東漸).⁷⁾ Thus, the most important points in the discussion on progress in linguistic change are the linguistic contact and reciprocal effects that have occurred within East Asia as well as between the East and West.⁸⁾

As for the “modernization” of the Chinese language, what was the greatest impetus for change, and what was the largest change? Concerning the modern changes in the Chinese language thus far, Lu Shuxiang 吕叔湘 points out:

At the same time, contact with Western civilization has influenced our language. The most significant effect is the modification of lexica. Neologisms have entered the language, riding on the raging tides of new things and ideas. The next is the aspect of grammar. New sentence structures have also grown in number.⁹⁾

As this passage indicates, the impetus for change goes back to contact with Western languages. Inquiries were carried out under the rubric of “the Westernized syntax phenomenon in contemporary Chinese” (現代中国語の欧化語法現象). Influence of the Japanese language was disregarded either intentionally or unintentionally. It is a fact that the Japanese language most influenced the Chinese language lexicon, but

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- 6) Recently, such reflections are also seen in literary studies. For instance, Yuan Jin 袁進 points out: “We once made a great mistake, which was to accept without question the tenet of the May Fourth era new literati that ‘replacing literary language with colloquial language is a great step forward.’ This was to hold the conviction that language is something that constantly evolves. I also subscribed to this way of thinking, but it is not necessarily correct. According to linguistic studies, it is impossible to say that language evolves. Certainly, it is in constant flux, but we cannot determine whether the results of the changes are progress or regression.” (*Zhongguo wenxue de jindai bianqian* 中国文学的近代变革, Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006) 60.
 - 7) Wang Li occasionally places the motivation for the Westernization of Chinese grammar inside the Chinese language itself, and states that external stimuli caused the possibility to be realized. (Wang Li, *Zhongguoyu fa lilun*, 1944 in *Wang Li wenji*, 1984, 435.) In his aforementioned work, Yuan Jin says the following, quoting the words of a foreign scholar: “In cases where large linguistic changes have arisen, there is sometimes a connection to outside changes. ‘If, regarding the circumstances of a people, there has been a sudden external change and linguistic changes are accelerated, the language will return to its original free state, and can only continue the process of autonomous change’” (60).
 - 8) Thus far, writings such as the following have also been published: *Hanyu shigao* 漢語史稿 (Wang Li, Chunghwa Book Co., 1958); *54 yilai hanyu shumian yuyan de bianqian he fazhan* 五四以來漢語書面語言的變遷和發展 (ed. Beijing Normal University Department of Chinese Language Teaching and Research, 1959); *Xiandai Hanyu ouhua yufa gailun* 現代漢語欧化語法概論 (Xie Yaoji 謝耀基, Hong Kong: Guangming Book Co., 1990); *Huayu bainian* 華語百年 (Ichikawa Kan 市川勘 and Komatsu Arashi 小松嵐, Shanghai Educational Publishing Co., 2008); *Xiandai Hanyu ouhua yufa xianxiang yanjiu* 現代漢語欧化語法現象研究 (He Yang 賀陽, Commercial Press, 2008).
 - 9) 「西洋文明的接觸同時直接在我们的語文上發生了影響，最重要的是詞匯的改造，新的詞語跟着新的物件和新的思想像潮水一樣的涌進來；其次是文法方面，也增加了好些新的語句組織的方式。Lu Shuxiang, *Zhongguo wenfa yaolue* 中国文法要略, Commercial Press, 1942 (reprint 1982), 5.

until recently, there has been a trend to consider such lexical growth as unrelated to the essential qualities of a language. When Wang Lida 王立達 claimed that compound prepositions such as 關於 and 對於 were borrowed from Japanese,¹⁰ his theory received adverse reactions. Of course, the words 關於 and 對於 do not exist in Japanese. The purpose of Wang's paper was to point out the phenomenon of the occurrence, or indeed, the frequent usage of the compound prepositions 關於 and 對於 in Chinese due to the influence of the Japanese 関して and 対して. Today, 關於 and 對於 are used even more frequently as prepositions that allow an object to be stated clearly before the verb than they were fifty years ago when Wang produced his paper. I consider the greatest modern changes in the Chinese language to be the following three points:

- Acquisition of the means to convert parts of speech between substantive and inflected (poly-syllabification)
- Reinforcement of modifying functions (increased activity of compound prepositions due to lengthening of modifying phrases)
- Diversification of narrative angles (growth of the passive voice)

I consider these factors to be demands from within the language attempting to adapt to societal changes. Essentially, we must make an effort to clarify the hidden truths of the “Westernized syntax phenomenon,” including participation of the Japanese language.

Linguistic changes manifest in three aspects—vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar—but we must also note that such changes in language itself arise originally in the linguistic consciousness of those who use that language. From modernity onward, language has been assigned a societal importance that it lacked before. That is, language has become the vital apparatus for establishing the triple identities of state, ethnicity, and individual. The formation of the modern nation-state transformed the level of language from “dialect” to “national language,” and users of that language acquired the ideology of “national language.”

So, what process did the transition from “dialect” to “national language” entail? Take the example of Europe. The vernacular began to provide letters and grammar, giving rise to the possibility of recording works of literature; then, following the formation of national literature, it ultimately attained the status of “national language.” This process and its various concomitant phenomena are called “the modernization of language.”¹¹ Liu Jincai 劉進才 has the following interpretation of Benedict Anderson's statement regarding the relationship between the rise of modern nationalism and the establishment of a national language:

Regarding the contemporary genealogy of the linguistic development of all the peoples of Europe, the birth of the language of each people is a process of breaking away from an ancient holy language—Latin, Greek, Hebrew—then, through contact with regional dialects, establishing a written language for each dialect-region via modern print-languages.

Liu also points out that for post-Qing China, the rise of nationalism and the birth of print-languages

10) *Xiandai Hanyu zhong cong Riyu jielai de cihui* 現代漢語中從日語借來的詞彙. *Zhongguoyu wen* 中國語文, 1958

11) Yamamoto Mayumi 山本真弓, *Gengoteki kindai o koete* 言語的近代を超えて (Beyond the Linguistic Modern). Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2004, 10.

differed from circumstances in Europe.¹²⁾

It is quite true that the different circumstances in China and in the various nations of Europe, particularly with respect to print-languages, cannot be viewed in the same light.¹³⁾ In one aspect, however, Europe and Asia were exactly the same. In the nations of East Asia, the problem was not simply one of linguistic issues in each individual country, but also a common, modern task of how to develop regional vernaculars and dialects into various “national languages.” This means that changes in the many languages of modern East Asian countries are more significant than those that took place in all other eras of history.

Each of these various themes concerning the process of the modernization of the Chinese language itself deserves thoughtful inquiry.

4. Research pertaining to the modernization of Chinese language studies

All peoples reflect on their own language, engaging in practical contemplation. In China, too, before the late nineteenth century, there was a tremendous amount of literature that introspectively described the Chinese language. There was an extraordinary amount of research into grammatology, exegetics, phonology, and the rhetoric of poetry and prose. The Qing period *Xiaoxue* 小学 (lesser learning) also yielded great scholarly results, but the field of “linguistics” had not yet been developed in China. In other words, “scientific” language studies did not exist. Inquiries regarding language were all subordinated to Confucianism, and were believed to stem from the view of linguistic application expressed in the phrase “writing is for conveying truth” (文以載道).

No one denies the argument that “scientific” language studies were introduced by the West. Missionaries, or European scholars who used the linguistic material provided by missionaries, analyzed and described Chinese within the framework of Western languages such as Latin. Among the incentives for this effort were the mastering of Chinese for missionary work and the desire to convey to Western readers the nature of the Chinese language. The *Xiru ermu zi* 西儒耳目資 (Aid to the Eyes and Ears of Western Literati, 1626) became the first of the linguistic-related books written in Chinese by a missionary; although it was labeled for “Western scholars” (西儒), there is little doubt that the author had Chinese readers in mind. The *Xiru ermu zi* incorporated Western phonological knowledge, but it would be nearly two more centuries until the appearance of grammar books for the Chinese language. Robert Morrison’s *Yingguo wenyu fanli zhuan* 英国文語凡例傳 (A Grammar of the English Language, 1823), a handbook prepared for the students of the Anglo-Chinese College (英華書院) in Malaysia, left concepts for the parts of speech such as nouns and verbs in English. The author was unable to translate these terms into Chinese. Subsequently, Lobscheid’s *Yinghua wenfa xiaoyin* 英話文法小引 (*Chinese-English Grammar*, 1864) used Chinese translations of these terms. Ada Haven Matteer, the author of *New Terms for New Ideas, A Study of the Chinese Newspaper* (1913) and widow of the well-known missionary Calvin Wilson Matteer (alias Di Kaowen 狄考文), used the terms, but at the time, grammar-related terms created

12) Liu Jincai 劉進才, *Yuyan yundong yu zhongguo xiandai wenxue* 語言運動與中國現代文學, Chungwa Book Co., 2007, 13–14. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1991 (Tr. Wu Ruiren 吳睿人, *Xiangxiang de gongtongti* 想像的共同体, Shanghai People’s Press, 2005 ed.), 38–47.

13) “Print-language” is a set of two interrelated issues—the circulation of books brought about by printing technology, and the acquisition of written language.

by missionaries were not generally recognized.¹⁴⁾ It can be said that the books and dictionaries produced by Westerners in Western languages achieved a tentative success at depicting Chinese phonology, grammar, and vocabulary within the framework of Western linguistics. However, those works written in Chinese were not adequate for indicating new paths in language studies to Chinese readers. Ma Jianzhong's 馬建忠 *Mashi wentong* 馬氏文通 (Basic Principles for Writing Clearly and Coherently by Mister Ma, 1898) and Yan Fu's 嚴復 *Yingwen hangu* 英文漢詁 (English Grammar Explained in Chinese, 1904) both actually applied the knowledge derived from the body of Western literature. It is true that thus far, no one had pointed out that much of the knowledge of Western linguistics in Chinese was attained through the process of studying the Japanese language. The fact that the great majority of linguistic terms were borrowed from the Japanese illustrates this point clearly. I would like to add here that "scientific" studies of language were a goal of Meiji-period scholars in Japan as well. With respect to the process of modernization of language studies, including the Chinese language, there are many points that must be clarified concerning the influences of foreign countries, and particularly, of Japan.

5. Modernization of the Chinese language and modernization of East Asia

When we broaden our consideration of the issue of a nation's linguistic changes to include evolution from traditional language to the language of a modern nation-state, we confront facts such as the following. Chinese characters, which are ideographs (though they are also called phonemes and morphemes), do not have the religious sanctity that pervades other classical languages of Europe and Asia (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and so forth). This did not, however, prevent Chinese writing from becoming an orthographic system that transcended spoken language. Chinese characters offered all the lands of East Asia a means of recording text and language, and formed a collective body of civilization known as the Sinosphere (漢字文化圈). For the Sinosphere, the existence of Chinese writing made expression through written language possible. At the same time, it also had the effect of severely curtailing the freedom of expression of those using the language owing to the standards imposed by the Chinese classics. For this reason, when various languages within the territory of the Sinosphere were established as "national languages," they had to undergo a process of breaking away from classical Chinese literature. Chinese characters became the focus of various controversies, yet despite the implementation of many reforms, their status remained firmly in place.¹⁵⁾ In fact, even reception in the Sinosphere of new knowledge from Western modernity was realized through use of Chinese characters. Moreover, in the "national languages" of countries in which Chinese characters are no longer used, words derived from Chinese pronunciation rather than words written in Chinese, form the aggregate of written language.¹⁶⁾

Previous to the modern era, Chinese writing served as a written *lingua franca* in the Sinosphere.¹⁷⁾

14) Shen Guowei, "Xiyangren jilu de shiji zhi jiao de xin Hanyu" 西洋人記錄的世紀之交的新漢語 (Missionaries and the New Chinese Language at the Turn of the 20th Century: An Analysis of Two Books by A. H. Mateer and E. Morgan) in *Tozai gakujutsu kenkyūjo kiyō* 東西學術研究所紀要 (Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies), No. 42 (2009), 101–111.

15) It can be said that an inseparable mutual relationship between Chinese characters and the classical works written with Chinese characters does not exist.

16) Vietnam and North Korea, for instance, do not use Chinese characters, but there exists an extensive vocabulary that derives from local pronunciation of Chinese words.

17) It was in the twentieth century that Chinese writing (漢文) completely lost its status as a common language.

In comparison, Japanese was not a language essential to such varied arenas as trade, classical lore, and the reception of new knowledge. After the Meiji Restoration, however, Japanese was the first language to achieve transformation into a modern national language, acquiring the status of a medium to transmit new knowledge. Other countries and regions in the Sinosphere became aware that through Japanese it was possible to absorb new knowledge quickly from the West. For the first time in history, the Japanese language became an object of study by non-native speakers, and replaced classical Chinese writing, rising from a regional “dialect” to a predominant language of East Asia. The changes in the Japanese language since the Edo period are the result of the reception of new knowledge from the West, but in that process, Chinese characters played a definitive part in the creation of new words and translated terms.

Language, being the medium by which knowledge is transmitted and received, has a particularly close interactive relationship with social life. The introduction of new knowledge from the West hastened the changes toward modernization in the Chinese language, while at the same time the many modern changes in Chinese society were recorded in Chinese. In addition, due to the existence of the Sinosphere, modernization of Chinese was not limited to that language, but spread throughout East Asia. Just as the modernization of China and the Chinese language were deeply intertwined, Chinese characters and Chinese writing were closely related to the modernization of East Asia. Amid the great tide of “Western learning, Eastern movement” the Chinese language exerted tremendous influence upon other languages in the Sinosphere, while it also was influenced by those languages. In particular, the influence of Japanese was enormous, of which the most significant aspect was “synergy and integration” (共創、共有) with respect to the project of adopting new concepts from the West through use of Chinese characters. Within the Sinosphere, many abstract terms and keywords of the times exist in the form of homonyms (or homophones); there is no doubt that they are the result of linguistic contact and lexical exchange within the region. The differences in usage and meaning of the homonyms (homophones) that occur in these languages reflect the varied processes by each country or region that adopted new knowledge and concepts from the West. New lexica and expressions were needed to assimilate and manifest the new knowledge of modernity. It can probably be concluded that Yan Fu’s translations were ultimately not accepted by Chinese society because they were unable to meet societal demands on a linguistic front. The formation of new lexica and expressions, particularly keywords and basic terminology for specialized fields, comprises the foundation of the modern academic system. The history of keywords and basic terminology occasionally becomes the formative history of science; research pertaining to the modernization of language is the basis for other fields that bear the prefix “modern.”

6. Methods and materials

Our research must present a new methodology; it is necessary to re-evaluate linguistic data from new and different perspectives. In studies of the Chinese language and its history, the bodies of literature native to China are naturally primary sources. However, in the case of “modern” studies, we cannot afford to disregard sources from other countries. The following should also be included.

- From the West: Chinese-Western dictionaries; works in linguistic research by Westerners; dictionaries of specialized terms; textbooks in Chinese or in other languages; Chinese translations of Western writings, newspapers and magazines; etc.

- From Japan: Tang Chinese language (唐話) material, translations produced in the Meiji period, foreign-language dictionaries, terminology dictionaries, Chinese language textbooks, etc.
- From the Korean peninsula: Chinese language textbooks, etc.

These materials can be further classified based on whether they were produced by one person or in collaboration, and inside or outside of China. There is an urgent need to preserve and catalogue this material.

The active introduction of foreign literature signifies the proposal of a new methodology: the “periphery approach.”¹⁸⁾ Sayings such as “learn by others’ example” (他山の石—literally, “a stone from another mountain”) and “an outsider has the best perspective” (岡目八目—literally, “who looks on from the hill has eight eyes”) are intuitive expressions of this methodology. From the periphery, one can see to the heart of the matter. Truths of the Chinese language are discernible from outside perspectives, as can be seen in the literary sources from other countries, such as Westerners’ observations and descriptions of Chinese classifiers (量詞).¹⁹⁾ How can we make peripheral sources into our scholarly resources? At the present time, there is still room for improvement in the depth and breadth of systemics and investigation regarding the use of literature from other countries. I believe observation from a third-party perspective should become a prominent feature in the research of modern Chinese. The decade from the end of the nineteenth century to the dawn of the twentieth is the period in which the Chinese language underwent the most intense change. If we focus our attention on the dramatic changes that occurred in Chinese, the writings by Westerners in China who recorded those transformations become a most valuable resource for comprehending the process.

7. Conclusion: the evolutionary path of the Chinese language

Since modernity, the Chinese language has undergone great changes. In particular, the Chinese language went through a period of qualitative change from the end of the nineteenth century to the dawn of the twentieth. The “evolution” of the language continues even today. So can we call the “Chinese” we use today a “modern” language? The answer might be negative. The “modern” language of a nation-state must at the minimum have the following characteristics:

- The ability to cope with new concepts that continuously and daily increase in number (productivity)
- The ability to communicate and teach new knowledge (transmission capability)
- Written and spoken language that has a nearly perfect correspondence (diffusion ability)
- Understood by the great majority of citizens, and equally possible for all to learn (egalitarianism)

18) Uchida Keiichi, *Chūgoku gengogaku ni okeru shūen kara no apurōchi—bunka kōshōgaku no ichiryōiki toshite* 中国言語学における周縁からのアプローチ——文化交渉学の一領域として (Peripheral Approach to Chinese Linguistics as an Area of Cultural Interaction Studies) in *Higashi Ajia bunka kōshō kenkyū* 東アジア文化交渉研究, inaugural issue (2008), 29–43.

19) Masini, “Sōki no senkyōshi ni yoru gengo seisaku: 17 seiki made no gaikokujin no kango gakushū ni okeru gaikyō—onsei, goi, bunpō” 早期の宣教師による言語政策：17世紀までの外国人の漢語学習における概況——音声、語彙、文法 (Linguistic Policy of the Early Missionaries: Chinese Language Study by Foreigners until the 17th Century: Pronunciation, Vocabulary, and Grammar) in *Gengo sesshoku to pijin—19 seiki no Higashi Ajia* 言語接触とピジン——19世紀の東アジア (Linguistic Contact and Pidgins in 19th Century Asia), Uchida Keiichi and Shen Guowei, ed., 17–30.

Based on these criteria, it can only be concluded that “modernization” of the Chinese language remains incomplete. (The existence of periodicals entitled *Construction of Language* 語文建設 and *Modernization of Language* 語文近代化 also indicates that strenuous efforts toward this goal are still underway.) There are many relics from the past in the Chinese language that influence the direction of our literary standards. For instance, Chinese prose written by non-native speakers is accepted by Chinese society and extremely difficult to evaluate. These difficulties transcend individual intelligence and are even disproportionate to the efforts of scholars. It is a problem in the language itself. Long-term study, or study before the critical period of language acquisition, holds the key to success. Such a language cannot be said to belong to all peoples and nations.

The Chinese language is changing—those changes continue even now. To understand the process of change in the Chinese language historically and realistically, and to give an account of it, is the duty of linguistic scholars.