

## Japanese and Modernization of the Chinese Language

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## Japanese and Modernization of the Chinese Language

SHEN Guowei\*

The largest change to Chinese during the process of development into a modern language after the May Fourth Movement was the disyllabization of the lexicon. With disyllabization, Chinese changed in the following ways:

1. It became possible for words to shift between substantives and declinable parts of speech.
2. Through frequent use of auxiliary verbs (*jinxing* 進行, *jiayi* 加以, *geiyu* 給予) and disyllabic prepositions (*duiyu* 对于, *guanyu* 關於, *zuowei* 作為) adjectival nominative modifying clauses grew longer and changed sentence structure.
3. The modern transformation into a unified written and spoken language was achieved. Two possible explanations for disyllabization are the natural, organic evolution of Chinese and contact with foreign languages. Most previous research has focused on diachronic changes in Chinese that continued from the Han period; little research has been done on foreign factors, and in particular on the influence brought upon Chinese by the Japanese language. Recently my academic interests have focused on the influence on Chinese disyllabilization from translation of Western works against the backdrop of modernization of languages in countries using Sinitic characters. At the same time, I have also been elucidating the influence of Japanese on the disyllabilization process.

Disyllabilization had a tremendous impact not only on the Chinese lexicon, but as a phenomenon that extended to grammar and literary style it was the largest change characterizing modernization of the Chinese language. Disyllabization, which is purported to have begun as early as the Han period, accelerated through the translations of Buddhist scriptures in the Jin through Tang periods (265–907). In the nineteenth century, and particularly after the May Fourth New Culture Movement, the number of vocabulary words increased dramatically, shaping the nature of the language we find today. As

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is represented by senior scholars Wang Li 王力, Lu Shuxiang 呂叔湘, and others who are noted for their research on the motivations and mechanisms of the phenomenon of disyllabilism, as well as in more recent years, such as the work by Dong Xiufang 董秀芳 entitled *Cihuihua: Hanyu shuangyin ci de yansheng he fazhan* 詞彙化：漢語雙音詞的衍生和發展 (Lexicalization: The Origin and Evolution of Chinese Disyllabic Words, first edition 2002; revised edition 2010), there is great interest in this area. Dong claims to examine the process of disyllabilization continuously through synchronic and diachronic methodologies, yet the author does not always consider linguistic phenomena since the nineteenth century, and it must be concluded that the research is removed from the modern language. Dong is not alone; there has been a lack of research on the formation of modern Chinese during the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries in general. There has been a dearth of research conducted based on the viewpoint of how Chinese grew from an early modern to a modern language.

On the other hand, there has been strong interest in the importation of new concepts and technical loan words in research on early modern Sino-Japanese lexical exchange. Yet few have delved into the influence on lexical systems or word formation. It is time for a new approach. I received a research grant from 2010 to 2012 for my research topic, “Integrated Research on the Evolution of an Early Modern ‘National Chinese Language’: The Influence of Westernized Grammar and the Japanese Language.” My research involved examination of foreign elements in the modernization of the Chinese language, and in particular, the influence of Japanese on a lexical level. In the course of my research, I verified 16,292 Sino-Japanese homographs out of 56,006 words listed in the *Gendai Chūgokugo jōyō shiihyō* 現代中國語常用詞彙表 (in conformance with the fifth edition of *Kōjien* 広辞苑). Based on this research, I edited the *Jindai Rizhong xingyu yuyuan zidian* 近代日中新語語源辭典 (to be published by the Commercial Press: Shangwu Yinshuguan 商務印書). Sino-Japanese homographs consist of thousands of disyllabic terms (*gakkō/xuexiao* 學校, *hōan/fangan* 方案, *kaizen/gaishan* 改善, *hakujaku/boruo* 薄弱) in addition to Japanese-originated Chinese expressions (*tetsugaku/zhexue* 哲學, *gimu/yiwu* 義務) and Japanese-originated new synonyms (*kakumei/geming* 革命, *keizai/jingji* 經濟). The latter are nouns, many of them nominals. The former exist across all parts of speech, characterize the modern language, and form the basis of today’s language culture. Many of them are seen in the character strings of the Chinese classics, and were suddenly activated at the end of the nineteenth century. Activation of this disyllabilization is a phenomenon seen in various languages in countries using Sinitic characters. It has become clear through research of the exchange of early modern lexica that chronologically, this phenomenon occurred in Japanese, Chinese,

Korean, and then Vietnamese. Naturally, mutual influences must also be considered. In addition, there are many phenomena that suggest metalingual characteristics of the notation system of Chinese characters. My research attempts to illuminate the activation of disyllables in the early modern period as a phenomenon straddling typologically different languages; at the same time I examine the influence of Japanese in that process. The Japanese language contributed not only to Chinese but to other lexical systems in the Sinitic notation cultural sphere that once used or still use Chinese characters.

Formerly, research on disyllables before the nineteenth century was for the most part conducted on the evolution of the usage of individual terms. There have been sporadic word-formation studies on the development from collocation to compound words, but in all cases they focus solely on the internal causes for developmental trends in the Chinese language. Yet disyllabilization of the contemporary language occurred over a short period of time. The speed of the increase cannot be explained from simply the viewpoint of lexicalization because an extended period of time is necessary for such a process. As Dong points out, realization of lexicalization requires the “prior condition” of “contiguous co-occurrence and high frequency of use.” In any case, Chinese translations of Japanese texts are profoundly connected with the process. That is, the rapid rise of disyllabilization lies in the unique modern condition in East Asia of language contact brought about by human and textual exchanges. This foreign element in language transformation must be added to any consideration of the issue, and a new perspective on mutual usage of the languages in the written language in the Sinitic cultural sphere is necessary. It is my aim to understand changes in early modern Chinese by using a “peripheral research” approach to examine not only documentation internal to China but also peripheral materials with a close historical relationship to Chinese and research on the Chinese language and by taking advantage of the methodology of corpus etymology. By following the temporal axis of periods of rapid increase and time lags of disyllabilization in both Japanese and Chinese, I have been able to chart the process and analyze each genre of language documentation and style to grasp the influence relationship between the two languages.

Japanese has had the profoundest influence on the modern Chinese lexicon. Through an integrated observation of the seemingly unrelated phenomena of borrowing Japanese translation terms via early modern Sino-Japanese lexical interaction, the rapid increase in disyllabilization, appearance of synonyms, and semantic subdivisions, the mechanism of disyllabilization and foreign elements becomes clear. It goes without saying that Japanese texts translated into Chinese and Japanese dictionaries used in the compilation of Chinese dictionaries (Chinese-Chinese dictionaries, English-Chinese dictionaries, tech-

nical dictionaries) are important in this process. In addition, I have effectively utilized modern-language documentation corpora and Sino-Japanese homographs to elucidate developmentally from the viewpoint of auxiliary verbs and disyllabic prepositional phrases the influence that Japanese has had on activation of modern Chinese disyllabilization. In concrete methodological terms, I have used the completed chart on “Sino-Japanese homographs,” and have recorded the changes in frequency of disyllabization in the process of the development of character strings into compound words through use of the corpus. I am researching not only each individual term, but the occurrence of new collocations and differences in the two languages. I am focusing mainly on the following points:

- a. The correlation between the increase in disyllabization and formation of technical terminology
- b. The increase in disyllabization and the appearance of hundreds of word groups containing the same Sinitic characters (*gai* 改, *gaige* 改革, *gaishan* 改善, *gailiang* 改良, *gaibian* 改變, *gaijin* 改進, *boruo* 薄弱, *weiruo* 微弱, *ruanruo* 軟弱, *cuiruo* 脆弱); differences in distribution between the two languages.
- c. The increase in disyllabization and auxiliary verbs (*jinxing* 進行, *jiayi* 加以), occurrence of disyllabic prepositional phrases (*duiyu* 对于, *guanyu* 關於, *zuowei* 作為) and lengthening of attributive modifiers.

The formation of modern Chinese cannot be discussed without a narrative on the influence of Japanese or Western languages. Wang Li in his *Hanyu shigao* 漢語史稿 (1958) and Beijing Normal University’s *Wuxi ilai Hanyu shumian yuyan de bianqian he fazhan* 五四以來漢語書面語言的變遷和發展 (1959) pointed out this directionality quite early on, but there has been little empirical research. I intend to continue pursuing inquiry into the phenomena of current and continuing modernization of Chinese as a process rather than researching the early modern and modern lexica as disparate units, as has tended to be the case until now.