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Language Reform is not a Dinner Party: The Evolution of Language, Literacy, and Identity in China

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I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College community as a whole.

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_____ (3rd Reader's Name)

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my grandmother, Rose Steinmetz, who gave me two of the world's greatest gifts: love and an education. Thank you for everything (even the Easter dresses). This is for you, with all my love.

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Abstract

The Chinese language has been evolving since it was first developed. In the 18th century, however, under the onslaught of foreign encroachment in the China, reformers targeted language as one of the things keeping China backward. Instead of allowing the language to develop naturally, there was a period of artificial language development in the form of language reform. Various attempts at language reform occurred under the Qing Dynasty, the rule of the Guomindang in Republican China, and most recently under the Chinese Communist Party. These reforms fall into three categories. First, there were widespread attempts to create an alphabet to transcribe Chinese characters. Second, some characters were themselves simplified and their stroke order reduced. Third, a 'common speech' based on Beijing dialect was developed for the entire country. The purpose of this study is to examine the purposes of language reform and some of the effects it has had on the Chinese people. The main stated purpose of language reform was increased literacy, but it also had a great impact on Chinese identity. Throughout Chinese history, the ruling power has used language to control the population. The dynasties controlled access to language. The CCP granted widespread access to language, then used propaganda to control the population.

Introduction

The earliest known form of Chinese characters in the archeological record date to 1300 BCE and, in a testament to the continuity present in the development of characters since, many of these inscriptions can still be read.[1] These characters are found as inscriptions upon what are commonly known as oracle bones. Characters were carved into turtle shells or ox bones, and they usually asked a question. The bones were then cast into a fire, and the subsequent cracks made in the bones were read by diviners. As with characters throughout most of China's history, these oracle bones are associated with the imperial elite and the emperor, whose responsibility it was to divine the future from the oracle bones. Beginning with oracle bones and continuing throughout the development of the Chinese language, the Chinese dynastic elite used access to language to control the greater population of China.

Chinese is part of the sino-Tibetan family of languages, and is one of the official languages in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, and is also spoken by overseas Chinese all over the world.[2] Written Chinese began as symbols representing certain concepts, symbols which became steadily more abstract in both meaning and form. Spoken Chinese spread throughout the area that is now China, and extended periods of separation created a plethora of dialects. What is now China also contains a great many minority groups, each with their own language.

The Chinese believed in the dynastic cycle. When Heaven became displeased with the emperor, that emperor was allowed to be overthrown to make way for someone more worthy. In

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[1] Daniel Kane, *The Chinese Language: Its History and Current Usage* (North Claredon, Vermont: Tuttle, 2006), 79.
[2] Ping Chen, *Modern Chinese: History and Sociolinguistics*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

this way, the disruptive cycle of rising, falling, and rising dynasties was ingrained in the Chinese historical process. The notion of a cycle also reinforced an expected return to the status quo after each violent interruption. This cycle, and its returns to the status quo, was maintained throughout the dynastic period, lasting until the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Throughout this period, there were many institutions that remained consistent. For example, once the imperial examination system was established, it remained a vital part of the dynastic system until it was abolished just before the end of the Qing Dynasty. Despite times of great upheaval, the system always settled back into the established order. Even when China was conquered by outsiders, such as the Mongols who established the Yuan Dynasty, or the Manchus who established the Qing Dynasty, these groups believed enough in the superiority of the Chinese system to maintain it. The exam system, as well as the Chinese language, survived these trials, as well as the times of chaos when dynasties fell.

The dynastic cycle, however, ended in 1911 with the abdication of the last Qing Emperor. Even before 1911 the system had shown signs of cracking. Foreign encroachment, by missionaries, opium traders, and soldiers, was proving that while China's system had stayed mostly the same, the West had undergone an Industrial Revolution. China lost multiple wars, and was forced to sacrifice more and more sovereignty and territory. The establishment of the Republic of China in 1911 did little to assuage China's woes. Warlordism fractured the country, as did the rivalry between two major political groups: the Nationalists (or Guomindang) and the Communists. Together, these two groups were able to establish a modicum of control, but repeated betrayals by their supposed allies reduced the strength of the communists. The Nationalists had their own problems, sliding farther into corruption and reactionism as Japan became a major threat.

World War II saw China under the iron heel of the Japanese. Nationalist attempts at resistance were weak, and the communists were able to make a name for themselves as true Chinese patriots through their resistance efforts. When the war was over, the Nationalists were still in power, backed by American money, but they had lost the support of the people. Rivalry descended into civil war, which the Guomindang lost. They fled to the island of Taiwan, and until United States rapprochement with the communists, the Republic of China, based in Taiwan, was considered the legitimate representation of China, even though the Guomindang government controlled only Taiwan. On the mainland, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officially took power in October of 1949. The rising star and leader of the CCP, Mao Zedong, looked out over Tiananmen Square and proclaimed that the Chinese people had finally stood up.

Under the communists, China finally had a stable regime, but the party also caused a great deal of instability. This was the result of multiple political witch hunts, such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, which stifled opposition voices and increased the oppressiveness of the regime. There were also numerous massive political drives which involved the whole populace, such as the Great Leap Forward, a massive failure and attempt to increase Chinese industrial and agricultural output. Movements such as the Great Leap Forward and the equally disruptive collectivization of agriculture, completely redrew the Chinese political, economic, moral, and cultural landscapes. Language reform was another means that the CCP used to change the lives of the Chinese people in fundamental ways. Language, especially when there were dialects or minorities involved, served as a fundamental part of the identity of many Chinese, and the CCP sought to rewrite this identity to become more in line with communist doctrine and beliefs.

The CCP proceeded to wage war against the institutions which had served as the bedrock of Chinese society for centuries, institutions such as Confucianism. The class system was upended. A new elite, that of high level CCP cadres, replaced the imperial bureaucrat and the landowner. The Chinese language was another of the institutions which were reformed. The process had begun under the Qing Dynasty, but was only truly realized and institutionalized under the communists. The communist language reform consisted of three main parts: the development of a phonetic script, the simplification of Chinese characters, and the promotion of the 'common speech,' or *Putonghua*.

In 1958, Zhou Enlai, one of the most important CCP leaders at the time, gave a speech outlining CCP goals for language reform. He specified at one point during the speech that one of the aims of the CCP in language reform was to change "confusion into uniformity."[3] This is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the CCP over the other regimes which attempted to reform the language. During the Qing Dynasty and the Republican Period, new scripts, alphabets, and schemes proliferated. The governments did little to assuage this confusion, and often would accept one scheme only to later reject it out of hand. This is a reflection of the broader turmoil which afflicted China between 1900 and 1949. Governments rose and fell, multiple wars occurred, and even within governments, factions rose and fell quickly. For example, during the last years of the Qing Dynasty a modest reform movement built up within the government, resulting in what are known as the Hundred Days of Reform. The Qing dowager empress, however, was able to halt the reforms with a conservative coup. Events and conflicts such as this caused much flip-flopping of policy. This also occurred under the communists, but, at least with regards to language reform, to a much lesser extent. The Nationalists introduced a table of simplified characters, them quickly rescinded them because of conservative pressure.

The communists had a much greater hold upon China, so when conservative pressure mounted during the Hundred Flowers to take back the communist list of simplified characters, the party was able to resist, and even to push back against dissenters. Although these policies did not often have positive results for those caught up in their tendrils, the communists were able to bring a semblance of order to a language reform movement which had long existed in barely controlled chaos.

Language reform encroached upon a private aspect of Chinese life, following a broader trend of such invasions perpetuated by the CCP over time. It also impinged upon issues of Chinese identity. The Chinese linguistic landscape is as diverse as the people ruled by the CCP; it comprises not only the Han majority but also many minority groups, and even within the Han majority there are different dialects, each with their own pronunciation and terminology. Each of these linguistic groups have their own individual identities presented for all to hear via their obviously separate means of oral communication. Language reform, by changing the language landscape, also caused a rewriting of Chinese identity. This rewrite was not entirely successful; China still comprises a vast number of minority groups, languages, and dialects. But many elements of language have been standardized, and this has necessarily created some standardization of identity as well. That this standardization was perhaps purposeful does not make it inherently negative. Some of China's weakness in the era of the Unequal Treaties, it can be argued, was the result of China's regionalism in the face of centralized states such as Japan and the United Kingdom. Regionalism existed under the Qing Dynasty, and became even stronger during the chaotic warlord period which followed the 1911 Revolution. When the GMD finally gained control, they were resisted by the CCP. This means that throughout the period of language reform, China was experiencing a great deal of disunity, something which could be

[3] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 13.

combated in part through language reform, which could assist in providing a new, centralized identity.

Between 1900 and 1949 China witnessed the rise and fall of several regimes, each of which used language as a means to control portions of the population. The Qing Dynasty, like the dynasties before it, controlled access to language in order to maintain a status quo where elites with expansive knowledge of reading and writing controlled the wider populace. The GMD regime of the Republican period tried to control language reform in order to supplement their nationalist credentials. Finally, the communists attempted to provide universal access to language via the goal of universal literacy, but controlled the population through the propaganda disseminated in that language. And, in the case of minorities and dialect speakers, language education became a means of indoctrination into centralized communist culture. During this fifty year period, language reform waxed and waned with the goals of those in power. The common thread all these regimes shared, however, was the determination to control language in some way, and from there to control all of China.

This study examines the different aspects of language reform. Chapter 1 considers the development of the idea that Chinese can be written or annotated phonetically from its inception to the implementation of the Romanization system known as *pinyin*. Chapter 2 follows the simplification of characters and issues of literacy and education in China. Chapter 3 explores the development of the Chinese "common speech" (*Putonghua*) and its relationship to dialects and minority languages, especially under the CCP. There were a vast number of phonetic systems used throughout the period. In order to maintain consistency, I have used the *pinyin* Romanization system throughout, except in direct quotes and when the names of authors or places are better recognized in older Romanization systems. All characters used are in their

simplified form unless otherwise specified. The prevailing view of China in the 18th and 19th centuries was that of weakness, and this necessarily had great impact on the ideas behind language reform. When I speak of Chinese weakness I refer to the mainstream view of the time, and mean no disrespect to one of the world's oldest civilizations, one which at its high points eclipsed the world's other empires.

Chapter I

An Alphabet with Chinese Characteristics:

Phonetization of Chinese

Introduction

On January 10th, 1958, Zhou Enlai gave a speech outlining the language reform goals of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). One of the three main goals of this reform was "to draw up and popularize the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet."[4] This Scheme represented the next step in a historical process which had already been in motion for over three hundred years. During this time period the idea of a phonetic alphabet was studied by such disparate groups as Catholic missionaries and Russian communists. These and others spent years experimenting with various methods of making the Chinese language easier to learn for the masses of an emerging China or for the masses of foreigners flocking to its shores.

Many systems were developed, but the one that eventually came to preeminence was *pinyin*, developed under CCP auspices from several other schemes. Although there was a debate regarding its relationship to Chinese characters, it was eventually decided that the main purpose of *pinyin* was, as Zhou Enlai assured the populace in 1958, "to annotate the characters phonetically and to popularize the common speech. It is not to replace the Chinese characters."[5] *Pinyin* was part of a wider communist program to combat illiteracy and break the monopoly on power once held by dynastic elites, whose power was founded on their monopolization of the written word. The communists, however, also wanted to use *pinyin* to teach the masses to read in

[4] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958) in *Reform of the Chinese Written Language* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1958), 17.
[5] Ibid.

order to create a wider audience for its vast propaganda machine. The main argument of those who called for a phonetic script was that it would encourage literacy, in part because of an almost blind faith in the ability of science – in this case linguistic science – to solve the ills of China. The various ideologies which dabbled in phonetic reform went about it in different ways, but the motives of all the Chinese reformers were similar: they sought to improve China by bringing literacy to its people. This was predicated on the widely held assumption of both Chinese and Western scholars that Chinese characters were a barrier to mass literacy.

Dynastic Control of Language

Up until the abolition of the Imperial Civil Service Exams in 1905, and indeed until the end of the Qing Dynasty, language was one of the most important tools of the elite scholar-official class.[6] Learning both the complicated characters and the Confucian classics written in those ideographs could uplift even the son of a peasant to the government elite. But gaining the knowledge to pass the exams was costly both in terms of the time needed and the opportunity cost of studying instead of providing extra labor for the family unit. High barriers to entry meant that literacy sufficient to advance ambitions required both the money to hire tutors and the leisure time needed to study. One of the main reasons it was beleived that this process took so long was the extensive study needed to learn the host of Chinese characters involved. Some reformers later argued that learning a phonetic system instead of Chinese characters would save Chinese students two years of study.[7] The time saved could be used to study other subjects, such as science, which reformers hoped would help China compete with encroaching Western powers.

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[6] June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort. *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to World Power*, 3rd ed. (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 72.

[7]Harriet C. Mills, "Language Reform in China: Some Recent Developments," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (August 1956): 517-518. http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed March 15, 2011).

In some ways, the Civil Service Exams offered a chance for social mobility remarkable in the ancient world. Even a peasant could rise high in the imperial bureaucracy – if they could somehow find the time to study. When Chinese isolation ended, however, a string of catastrophic defeats by foreign nations began to show that the Chinese bureaucracy had lost its ability to innovate and respond creatively to crisis. This seemed exemplified by the exam system, which had come to test a candidate's adherence to the official line and their ability to memorize, rather than governing skills with more practical value. Such a system worked when a civil servant who had passed the exams received respect from individuals and from the system as a whole. As long as people believed that a degree-holder was powerful, the scholar-official class possessed both power and an element of control over China's population. As they failed time and again against foreigners the Chinese considered 'barbarians,' the scholar-officials and the entire dynastic system received novel scrutiny from the Chinese people.

During this period of embarrassments at foreign hands and the sweeping changes that followed contact with the Western world, reformers attacked anything related to the old system that seemed to have failed. Among the traditions put on the chopping block was the ancient Chinese language. Some reformers sought to simplify the existing ideographs (a method of reform discussed in more detail in Chapter 2). Others, however, looked to the more radical idea of fundamentally changing the Chinese language. Instead of using symbols to represent ideas, they sought to create or adapt a set of symbols to represent sounds. This method of reform, phonetization, had several antecedents in both China and abroad. It could take the route of either phonetization using the existing Chinese written ideographs, or getting rid of them entirely and using the Latin alphabet to represent Chinese sounds. Known as Romanization or latinization,

this is the method that eventually came to prominence, although it has yet to replace Chinese characters.

Learning from the Barbarians

By the time the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949 and began their own language reform work they had numerous examples of both phonetization and latinization schemes. The earliest examples were mainly from the West and Japan, foreign countries which played parts in China's 17th and 18th century embarrassments. As the drive to reform increased within China, many Chinese also began to look at the possibilities offered by phonetization. The earliest examples of phonetic systems came from foreign missionaries in China and from the Japanese. There were also other attempts by foreign individuals with interests in China to develop phonetic systems. The most famous of these is the Wade-Giles system, which until the acceptance of *pinyin* was widely used by foreigners. Although it was a system created for "the needs of sinologists," it has many problems, especially the fact that it "is primarily a transcription of Chinese writing rather than a means of recording Chinese speech. It has thus helped to perpetuate the monosyllabic myth" and is considered by many to be inferior to *pinyin*.[8] Although it served as an example and was used by foreigners, Wade-Giles was never widely used in China; other phonetic systems were much more popular. Reformers looked to many places when they created phonetic systems, and "most were inspired by such diverse phonetic systems as Western Romanizations, Japanese *kana*, and even the Mongol-Manchu script."[9] All of these examples played a role – positive or negative – in the creation of the Scheme eventually adopted by the Communist government, the system known as *pinyin*.

[8] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 201.
[9] Ibid., 51.

The Missionaries

Western missionaries in China were the first to develop phonetic systems for Chinese, and they would later influence Chinese reformers. "A brief examination of the personal background of the late Qing language reformers will show that they all came from areas where the Western and missionary presence was most established," which shows at least a geographical correlation between missionaries and language reformers.[10] The key is the difference between the earliest missionaries, Jesuits like Matteo Ricci, who used phonetic scripts to help themselves learn Chinese,[11] and later missionaries such as John Macgowan, who designed scripts to further Chinese literacy so that Chinese converts could read the Bible.[12] Both types of missionaries tried to use language to gain power, but approached this in vastly different ways. The earlier Jesuits mainly targeted the Chinese elite, and understood that in order to gain influence for themselves and their religion, they would need to know the Chinese language. Later missionaries also wanted to spread Christianity, but targeted Chinese peasants, many of whom needed to be taught to read in order to spread the Bible. In the end, the efforts of both kinds of missionaries were mostly unsuccessful. Missionaries left a legacy on language reform as some of the first to create phonetic scripts that was more wide-reaching than their influence on religion, as in the end, the Communists would have a much more lasting impact.

The Japanese

The fact that Chinese ideographs represented "independence of sound" allowed the Japanese, and indeed other surrounding Asian kingdoms, to adopt the Chinese writing system for

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[10] W.K. Cheng, "Enlightenment and Unity: Language Reformism in Late Qing China," *Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (May 2001): 477, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed January 28, 2011).
[11] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 241.
[12] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 33.

their own languages, even when "their speeches are very different from oral Chinese."[13] The Japanese development of their phonetic systems, which employed Chinese ideographs, is shrouded in mystery, but two different systems emerged: Katakana, created by "taking certain parts [of Chinese ideographs] to represent various sound values," and Hiragana, which uses "whole Chinese characters written cursively in highly abbreviated form."[14] Because of the prevalence of homophones, "a mixed style of writing employing both characters and kana developed in the eleventh century and has come down to this day."[15] Because the Japanese used Chinese characters, but assigned them different sounds, their reforms were an obvious place to look for examples. The systems could not be used exactly as they were in Japan because of differences in sounds and the potent nationalist deterrent of using a non-Chinese form, but it was a place to start. Even if reformers did not wish to acknowledge the inspiration, it was one of the best examples they had. *Zhuyin zimu*, the first government-sponsored phonetic system, greatly resembled Japanese kana.

In 1894, at the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War, the Qing Dynasty was making efforts to reform in the wake of embarrassments by foreign powers. The stress of the Self-Strengthening Movement was "Chinese learning for essential principles, Western learning for practical application."[16] This meant that while China would adopt the technology of the 'barbarians,' its culture, including its language, would remain untouched. A merely cosmetic set of reforms, these weak changes could not save China from the Japanese. By 1895, the Qing had suffered a

[13] Yu-kuang Chu and Koji Nishimoto, *A Comparative Study of Language Reforms in China and* Japan, (Saratoga Springs, New York: Skidmore College Faculty Research Lecture, 1969) 11.
[14] Ibid., 11.
[15] Ibid., 12.
[16] June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort. *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to World Power*, 53.

humiliating defeat at Japanese hands.[17] This proved to be a wake-up call for some in the Imperial administration, who initiated the Hundred Days of Reform. But more and more Chinese were looking to Japan to provide a model for future Chinese reform and development. Chinese students flocked to Japan, especially after the abolishment of the Civil Service Examinations left the sons of the gentry class without direction and searching for a new cause. "In 1905 there were about 5,000 Chinese student in Japan;" the abolishment of the exam system and a sense that greater opportunity existed elsewhere meant that "by the following year there were 13,000" such students.[18]

Japan also became a popular site for political exiles fleeing a Qing Dynasty that no longer wanted to hear their ideas for reform. These students had ample opportunity to experience the Japanese phonetization system, especially given that many of them learned the language. Later leaders of the cultural flowerings known as the May Fourth Movement and specifically the New Culture Movement, such as Chen Duxiu, returned to China from Japan after the 1911 Revolution determined to disseminate the ideas they had developed in Japan.[19] For reformers working from the Japanese model, "the emulation of Japan as to the form of the script is to be attributed in part to the admiration of Chinese nationalists for the achievements of their eastern neighbor and in part to their observation of the similarities between the systems of writing used by the two countries."[20] Zhou Enlai acknowledged the influence of Japanese reforms is his 1958 speech, where he mentioned that "we have also adopted a number of Chinese characters which have been

[17] June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort. *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to World Power*, 58.
[18] Ibid., 72.
[19] Ibid., 84-85.
[20] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform*, 52.

simplified by the Japanese."[21] An awareness of Japanese character policy would have extended to an awareness of their phonetic system as well.

Language Reform Under the Qing Dynasty

The Qing Dynasty went through phases of reform. During periods such as the Self-Strengthening Movement or the Hundred Days of Reform, it pursued a reformist line that often involved learning from the West. At other times, however, the more conservative members of the establishment held sway and quashed reforms of all types, including language reform, seeing it as a threat to continued Qing supremacy. Despite this unstable atmosphere, many Chinese worked to reform the Chinese language and to develop some sort of phonetic system. The general belief of many was "that all language has developed from pictographs to ideographs to phonetic script," a view that seemed based on science, which many Chinese saw as a powerful force for rescuing their country.[22] Many of these reformers were amateurs, swept up by grandiose dreams of saving China.

The focus of language reform during this period was radical and often utopian; some reforms saw in a phonetic system "popular enlightenment to serve the immediacy of national salvation."[23] Attention was paid to the importance of China's people and culture in modernizing and 'saving' China.[24] The problem lay, however, in balancing "the evolutionary patience of the people's enlightenment," which by necessity would take a great deal of time and effort, "with the pressing exigency" of "national extinction."[25]

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[21] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 13.
[22] Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang, introduction to *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary* (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 17.
[23] W.K. Cheng, "Enlightenment and Unity: Language Reformism in Late Qing China," 476.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

Partly, the issue was that people could not learn to read and write in the short time many reformers believed was needed to 'save' China. Because characters took so long to learn, it was believed that a phonetic system would speed up the process. This is shown in the emphasis on speed which peppered the claims of those who created phonetic scripts, which also had to teach massive numbers of people in order to truly impact China as a whole. An early script called the Mandarin Alphabet, it was claimed, possessed two of the most important characteristics necessary for a phonetic script before 1911: it allowed people "to be taught to read in a few weeks" and "altogether those who became literate through the medium of the new script were numbered in the tens of thousands."[26] The desire for a script which could be learned quickly and by many people was strong, as there was a potent sense of the imminence of China's collapse and the need to take swift action to avert disaster. Unfortunately, many of the claims regarding the numbers these scripts could teach were overblown, and even when people were taught, they quickly forgot all they had learned. By focusing on speed, many of the reformers of this era lost sight of the long term. Another issue with the proposed speed of language change was that if reforms moved too fast they were likely to be rejected by the people. A more practical, but no less pressing, concern was the economic cost of changing the entire writing system. This would require hiring teachers to spread the system, not to mention the cost of replacing all of China's signs, books, and the expensive set type used to print new books. Faced with these grave concerns, the government deluded itself into thinking that reforming the military would be sufficient to save China. Language reforms, along with many other suggested reforms, were rejected at this time by a moribund imperial conservative elite terrified of losing their power. Ordinary people, however, were wrestling with this problem, and many of them considered language reform an important gateway leading to the enlightenment of the masses. To elevate all

[26] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 44.

of China, it was believed the people should be elevated too, and a place to start was increased literacy, one of the traits the Chinese saw in the 'modern' Western world.

During the Qing Dynasty, reformers sought to gain the strength to fight off the imperialist powers that threatened to subsume China into their colonial systems. Reformers recognized that literacy was widespread in the lands of the Western powers and in Japan, and so they believed that effecting the same change within China would give them a chance to catch up. Chinese leaders were beginning to understand, and would see more and more clearly as time progressed, that "the countries with the greatest literacy were also the countries with the greatest power. [Reformers] were particularly struck by the fact that [Japan] possessed, hardly by coincidence, an army which was able to read as well as fight," and from here the connection was made that "in contrast to China the literate and powerful countries of the world, including even Japan with its several scripts, made use of some form or other of alphabetic writing."[27] They did not realize that Western and Japanese literacy rates had risen slowly and over time; this was not a change that could happen overnight. It would also take more than language to defeat foreign powers. Language was a symbol for the antiquated exam system and the bureaucratic elite, which were considered to have failed the Chinese people, but changing this symbol could not change the entire system.

Zhuyin Zimu

The 1911 Revolution removed the Qing Dynasty from power, establishing a Chinese republic. These were heady days, when reformers were in positions of power and everything denied by the Qing Dynasty now seemed possible. In the spirit of the times, the new Minister of Education pushed his ministry quickly towards reform. The first step was a conference in Beijing which quickly passed a Proposal for the Adoption of a Phonetic Alphabet, following which a

Conference on Unification of Pronunciation was called in 1913.[28] This conference had many purposes, one of which was to discuss the possibility of a phonetic system for Chinese. "It soon became apparent that the sentiment of the conferees was generally against the adoption of any system based on the roman alphabet and in favor of a system of symbols representing characters."[29] A variety of scripts were presented to the conference, an exhibit of the work done by native Chinese to Romanize or phonetize their own script. The result of the conference was *zhuyin zimu*.[30] *Zhuyin zimu* was "a character-based alphabet formed from simplified versions" of Chinese characters and was officially released in 1918 as the "first ever officially recognized alphabet."[31] In their use of Chinese characters to represent specific sounds, these symbols were resonant of the Japanese kana system.

Although accepted by the Conference on Unification of Pronunciation in 1913, *zhuyin zimu* languished in relative obscurity until official government recognition in 1918. Yuan Shikai, who by this time ruled China in a manner reminiscent of some of the dethroned emperors, had once advocated reform of the language in order to promote literacy, even sponsoring a phonetic script when he was merely a governor, but he did little to promote *zhuyin zimu*.[32] It was up to scholars and a select few government officials to lobby for the system. Wang Pu and others formed the Society for the Unification of Pronunciation, takings its name from the conference, and privately funded schools meant to teach the new phonetic system.[33] It was not until after the death of Yuan Shikai that supporters of the National Phonetic Alphabet saw it gain official

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[27] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 45.
[28] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 55.
[29] Ibid., 56.
[30] There are various names for this system. Zhou Youguang calls it the Sound-Notating Alphabet and the Phonetic-Notation Alphabet. Chu Yu-kuang calls it National Phonetic Letters. John DeFrancis refers to it as the National Phonetic Alphabet. This is further complicated that the name was later changed. I will refer to it by its Chinese name, *zhuyin zimu*.
[31] Zhou Youguang, "Understanding and Misunderstanding," *Journal of Macrolingustics*, no. 1(September 1992): 60.
[32] W.K. Cheng, "Enlightenment and Unity: Language Reformism in Late Qing China," 487.

support. And it was not until 1930 that the Guomindang (also known as the Nationalist Party) passed a resolution which favored *zhuyin zimu* with government support and called for a wider use of the symbols.[34] This occurred only after the name and direction change of *zhuyin zimu*, which implied that the symbols would not replace Chinese characters and would only ever be used to annotate them. The change allowed the GMD to support the symbols as a way to increase literacy without losing their position as the nationalist party which wished to preserve China's culture and language. China was in the midst of upheaval, plagued with warlords, corruption, and an increasingly edgy relationship with foreign powers. Language reform was not a priority.

Even beyond the lack of government enthusiasm, *zhuyin zimu* was plagued by other problems. Many reformers differed on aspects of "both the form of the script and its application."[35] One of the issues was the closed-door approach to determining the script. It was decided upon and promoted by a small group of intellectuals; this was more in keeping with the development of policy by the small clique of scholar-officials in Imperial China than with the newly utopian ideals of republic. Ideas for reform abounded in this period, searching for release after a long confinement under the Qing, but many of the potential reformists, such as monarchist Lao Naixuan, were not given invitations to official language reform conferences for political reasons.[36] Even in this new age, the Chinese Republic was far from the utopia many reformers had envisioned. Frustration at being left out seems to have only increased some reformer's belief in the superiority of their own particular systems when compared with the politically charged National Phonetic Alphabet. Many elements of the script had also not been made clear at its promulgation, such as how tones would be shown, and more importantly there

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[33] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 59.
[34] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 60.
[35] Ibid., 64.
[36] Ibid., 56.

was debate regarding "the relation of the symbols to the old script."[37] Whatever the original intentions of the conference, the government cleared up the issue in 1930 when it changed the scheme's name from *zhuyin zimu* to *zhuyin fuhao*; instead of a National Phonetic Alphabet the system was demoted to being merely National Phonetic Signs, reflecting the widely held opinion that the symbols should be used merely to annotate the existing characters.[38]

There was also the issue that, while *zhuyin zimu* might prove accessible to the Chinese populace, it was completely unintelligible to foreigners, as it used characters and not an internationally known alphabet.[39] This argument was part of a wider trend that rejected the Conference on Unification of Pronunciation's determination that the best phonetic system would be based on the existing Chinese ideographs; reformers were now looking with keen interest at the Latin alphabet. This was also a time of wide disagreement about which reforms – and how much reform – were needed to better China. Some advocates were fairly conservative, believing that not many changes were needed. In just this way many reformists saw *zhuyin zimu* as enough; the symbols could assist in teaching the masses, allowing a broader strata to become educated, which was seen as the main goal of language reform. For others, however, this was not enough. They saw the ideographs as wrapped in the Confucian ethos and scholar-official tradition which had kept China backward for so long. These reformists advocated the complete removal of Chinese characters from common use. Still others did not want any change at all. They saw symbols which might help increase literacy as a threat to a status quo they favored. But even within the group which agreed that reform was necessary, and even within groups advocating the same reform, there was a great deal of disagreement. Those who agreed that the ideographs should be replaced could not agree on what should replace them. Some advocated a

[37] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 65.
[38] Ibid.

Romanized system. Others wanted to replace the whole Chinese language with Esperanto. Such an atmosphere of debate led to the next major system of phonetization.

Gwoyeu Romatzyh

Gwoyeu Romatzyh[40] burst onto the scene in 1924.[41] Unlike *zhuyin zimu*, it was a Romanization system, which employed the Latin alphabet to represent the sounds of the Chinese language. It was based on the pronunciation of "educated" speakers of the Beijing dialect.[42] This marked a trend which gravitated towards national unity based on one pronunciation and away from individual Romanization schemes for dialects (discussed in chapter 3).[43] The main feature of Gwoyeu Romatzyh was its 'tonal spelling.' Instead of using symbols above letters to indicate tones, as some scripts had, tones were marked using different spellings for a word: "*guo, gwo, guoo, guoh*, the same word in each of the four tones."[44] This meant the system could be used to send telegrams or to write on a typewriter without the difficulties of a system employing diacritical (tone) marks, but it also made it highly unwieldy and challenging to learn.[45] It remained in use by foreigners for far longer than in China, as it was soon replaced by a rising star of Latinization, *Latinxua sinwenz.*

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[39] Zhou Youguang "Language Planning in China: Understanding and Misunderstanding," 60.
[40] G.R. did not experience nearly the huge variety in names as *zhuyin zimu* did. It is referred to as G.R., Gwoyeu Romatzyh, or in English as the National Language Romanization. I will use either Gwoyeu Romatzyh or G.R.
[41] Daniel Kane, *The Chinese Language: Its History and Current Usage* (North Claredon, Vermont: Tuttle, 2006), 21.
[42] John DeFrancis *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 245.
[43] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 75.
[44] Simon Walter and C.H. Lu, *Chinese Sentence Series*, vol. 1, *First Fifty Lessons* (London: Arthur Probsthian, 1942), 41.
[45] Zhou Youguang, *The Historical Evolution of Chinese Languages and Scripts* (Columbus, Ohio: National East Asian Languages Resource Center, Ohio State University, 2003), 102.

Latinxua Sinwenz

Sinwenz[46] was the final product of a long process of development which began in the Soviet Union. An effort was made by the communist government of the U.S.S.R. to provide its minorities with an easier, or sometimes a first, writing system. As there were collections of Chinese living in the Soviet Union at the time, they received the same treatment as many other minorities, such as the Kirghiz and Kazakh peoples.[47] Many of the Chinese in the U.S.S.R., while of Chinese descent, were not all Han Chinese, the majority ethnic group in China. Many were Chinese Muslims. This meant that, unlike G.R., *sinwenz* was based on "a vague version of Northern Chinese influenced by the speech of the Shangdong workers and peasants who constituted the majority of Chinese in the Soviet Union."[48] This system did not become popular in China until 1934, and then "its initial successes were far greater than those of *Gwoyeu Romatzyh* because many writers or culture and education workers like Cai Yuanpei and Lu Xun advocated making it part of the proletarian movement of the left-wing intellectuals.[49] The fledgling Communist Party threw its support behind the system, partly because it came from the communist Soviet Union and partly because it fit with the CCP aim of bringing literacy to the masses.

Sin wenz enjoyed considerable popularity, at least among communists and their supporters, but it was crushed by two wars. First the Japanese invasion and then the Chinese Civil War ensured that language reform or promoting a phonetic script was not a priority. Only

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[46] The full name of this system is *latinxua sinwenz*, but it was also known more simply as *sinwenz*. It was also called the New Latin Script.
[47] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 90.
[48] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 246.
[49] Cao Bohan, "The Chinese Language Movement Since the May Fourth Period," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 33.

the communists paid any attention to language reform during this period, and their efforts were limited to certain CCP bases in the countryside.

Pinyin

The Chinese Communist Party excelled, especially in its early days, at taking the best ideas from the variety of reform movements which peppered China throughout the twentieth century. The Romanization system *hanyu pinyin fang'an*, known more simply as *pinyin*,[50] shows how the CCP took the best language reform ideas and combined them together in one system that best fit the party's goals both for literacy and for greater equality. Previous rulers of China, especially the dynasties, had prospered by keeping most of the Chinese population in a state of complete or partial illiteracy. The control of language enabled those able to tap its power with control over the population. The CCP took an opposite approach to the same ends. It set out to bring full literacy and command of language to the whole Chinese population, which fit with communist ideals of equality. This also made the populace more receptive to party propaganda efforts disseminated widely through print. *Pinyin* was billeted for many tasks, but one of its main roles was to aid in teaching both Chinese characters and a unified national language to the broader populace.

The CCP efforts at developing a Romanization system formed one prong of the language reform program that the party began almost immediately after its defeat of the rival Nationalist regime in 1949. The idea of using the Latin alphabet instead of a system based on Chinese ideographs grew out of the May Fourth Movement, which the CCP celebrated, and the ideas of many reformers who worked after it. *Pinyin* took many of the features of the *sinwenz* system. It

[50] *Pinyin* has far fewer names than the phonetic systems which proceeded it, mostly because it was more centrally created and promoted. The CCP was in control of the dissemination of *pinyin* and was therefore also able to control what it was called.

continued the long-running trend towards promotion of the Beijing dialect as the standard, and was used in the dissemination of that dialect to the entirety of the Chinese population.

One of the earliest efforts towards phonetic script reform after Liberation was the creation of "a Communist-sponsored (but ostensibly private)" Association for Reforming the Chinese Written Language in October of 1949.[51] This organization retained its connection to past reforms because "the active members of its governing body all belonged to one of the two main movements for the Romanization of Chinese writing:" *sinwenz* or *Gwoyeu Romatzyh*.[52] The backgrounds of these reformers ensured that Romanization would be one of the main aims of the group. Mao Zedong, however, had other ideas. When the Association was reformed into the Committee for Research into Language Reform, the members were told by Mao to change direction, as, "our written language must be reformed. It should take the direction of phonetization common to all the languages of the world; it should be national in form; the alphabet and scheme should be devised according to the existing Chinese characters."[53] This went against the prevailing trend in phonetic script development in China, which since the demise of *zhuyin zimu* had been towards the more international Latin alphabet. Whether as a form of silent disapproval for Mao's directive, or for the actual reason given, namely that the directive was too challenging, the Committee submitted little of consequence to Mao between 1951 and 1954, and what little the committee did produce was rejected by Mao out of hand as being too complicated.[54] The cause of an official phonetic script stagnated until 1954.

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[51] Tao-Tai Hsia, "The Language Revolution in Communist China," *Far Eastern Survey* 25, no. 10 (October 1956): 146, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed March 15, 2011).
[52] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform" *The China Quarterly*, no. 53 (1973): 102, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed January 28, 2011).
[53] Hilary Chappell, "The Romanization Debate," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 4 (July 1980): 105, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 9, 2011).
[54] Ibid., 106.

In 1954, the original Committee was reorganized and became directly answerable to the powerful State Council, meaning "it became an institution at ministerial level."[55] To demonstrate the group's new, more active, role in language reform, 'research' was removed from the title.[56] The new name, and a better position within the government hierarchy, meant that "in February 1956, the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language published the first draft scheme for a phonetic alphabet," which would become *pinyin*.[57] Zhou Enlai only briefly addressed the concern about the use of the Latin alphabet in his seminal 1958 speech on the subject, where he noted almost as an aside the failed attempts of the Committee to use the ideographs to create a phonetic system.[58] What had been a debate only a few years before was now just an afterthought.

Pinyin used all of the letters of the Latin alphabet except for 'v,' and combined two letters to represent certain sounds rather than using the Cyrillic alphabet or creating new symbols, concepts that had been discussed for earlier systems, but were determined to cause undue complication. This decision recognized the widespread use of the Latin alphabet throughout the world, and also the move of the CCP away from the use of Russia as an example as relations between the two nations became frosty. Zhou Youguang, one of the officials who worked on the *pinyin* scheme, described it as "half like National Language Romanization and half like Latinized new writing [*sinwenz*] and takes its tone marks from *Zhuyin Zimu*."[59] Although there was a great deal of debate about the adoption of *pinyin*, not least regarding the threat it might pose to Chinese characters, from a purely educational standpoint *pinyin* had

[55] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," 105.
[56] Hilary Chappell, "The Romanization Debate," 106.
[57] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958) 25-26.
[58] Ibid., 26.
[59] Zhou Youguang, "Modernization of the Chinese Language," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 59 (1986): 17.

advantages over some of its opposing systems. A study of foreign students taught by either *pinyin* or G.R. showed that "effective learning of Mandarin Chinese can be done with [*pinyin*] without any loss in quality, and with greater short-term temporal economy and long-term practical applicability," at least as compared to G.R.[60] The Communists took advantage of the long incubation period experienced by the concept of a phonetic script and took the best qualities of the best scripts.

Because of top-level government support, *pinyin* became the main Romanization system used in China. This was not an easy process, but it was not an easy time in China. Criticism of language reform – including pinyin and the use of a Latin alphabet – was stifled in the disastrous conclusion of the Hundred Flowers and by continuing suppression of dissent against any CCP programs. For example, critics targeted everything from Chinese linguistics as a science, issuing charges of "dogmatism,"[61] to questioning the entire program, with some intellectuals claiming publically "I have fundamental doubts about taking the road of phoneticization for Chinese writing."[62] Through all of this criticism, however, *pinyin* managed to survive. This is at least partly due to the crackdown on intellectuals and others who expressed opinions contrary to CCP policy during and after the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957.

The continually changing status of phonetization also represents one of the main difficulties that plagued not only language reform, but the CCP as a whole. This was the balance to be struck between foreign imports and native Chinese inventions and systems. There was a great deal of rejection of foreign imports because of the Unequal Treaties and the Japanese invasion – imperialism aimed at China. The communists did not want to rely on the goods and

[60] Tonal Spelling versus Diacritics for Teaching Pronunciation of Mandarin Chinese, Scott McGinnis, pg. 234
[61] Wang Li, "The Present State of Chinese Linguistics and Its Problems," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 84.

expertise of these "barbarian imperialists," but wanted instead to rise above this and become a great power through their own effort, as a vindication of Chinese culture and nascent nationalism. At the same time, much of China's old "feudal" past was also being rejected by the communists, who sought to break with the past traditions which had allowed China to grow so weak compared to the West. Communism was a foreign import and Chinese characters a long-standing Chinese tradition. What was the proper way to approach these things? What developed was an ad hoc approach, where choices were made according to practicality and explained after the fact by sometimes twisted rhetoric. The debate regarding the Latin alphabet versus a phonetic scheme "national in form," as Mao originally advocated, went back and forth. When it was finally decided that the Latin alphabet would be used, weak attempts were even made to justify this by claiming that a foreign alphabet could also be "national in form."[63] The effort to balance foreign imports of ideas and 'native' Chinese ideas played an important part in CCP control of the population's ideology. After years of Western nations and the Japanese taking advantage of the weak Chinese nation with impunity, any group seeking to win the affection of the populace had to reject foreign control to some degree. The CCP took this farther by rejecting much that was foreign. There was also a desperate need to stimulate Chinese nationalism, which the party could then employ to mobilize its people. The balance between all of these elements was an uneasy one, but in the case of phonetic script creation the CCP took the practical approach and adopted the foreign Latin alphabet, which was in fact used by many of the despised imperialists. The party, however, never succeeded in using the Latin alphabet to completely replace Chinese ideograms.

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[62] Luo Ying, "A Biologist's Thoughts on Writing Reform," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 183.
[63] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," 105.

Tao-tai Hsia argues that, given the many priorities vying for CCP attention, it "certainly would not have hastened language reform in such a determined manner without cogent reasons relating to its program," namely greater reach for propaganda and declining access to older, 'feudal,' literature, in addition to the stated goal of increased literacy which meshed with CCP goals of a more egalitarian society.[64] Control of language in a fairly illiterate society, and the ability to alter language, offered the Communists an excellent opportunity to begin altering China's cultural landscape. The CCP took this opportunity, but not as far as they could have. For example, in Chinese the common address for 'brother,' is also a statement of hierarchal place, such as 'elder brother,' 'younger brother,' 'second younger brother,' and so on. The dramatic change from ideographs to a Latin alphabet offered the chance to phase out this reminder of the strict hierarchy of "feudal" China. This did not happen, in part because of the many upheavals which were constantly interrupting language reform and changing the people who were in charge of it. The Chinese language and the culture it was attached to, however, had power too. Originally, *pinyin* was conceived as the eventual replacement for Chinese ideographs. As of 2011, this has not happened. *Pinyin* has retained its auxiliary role as a means of learning the characters, especially for foreigners. New words have been added, but they have not replaced the four-character axioms that often reflect China's long history and the mark of its culture. These axioms are simply written out in *pinyin* along with their character forms. Despite all of the power wielded by the CCP, and all of the uses to which they put a Latinized language, they have never maintained the level of control that they sought. Like *pinyin*, their changes were mainly cosmetic; the soul beneath both the Chinese language and its culture remained firmly the same.

[64] Tao-Tai Hsia, "The Language Revolution in Communist China," 150.

Chapter II

Factory with No Workers, Love with No Heart:

Simplification of Characters

Introduction

For many Chinese language reformers, replacing Chinese characters entirely with a phonetic script was too radical. And even those who sought a switch to an alphabet understood that a transition would take time. What both parties could agree was that Chinese characters should be reformed through simplification. The main goal of this effort was increased literacy. The low literacy of most of the Chinese populace was seen as holding the country back. To communists, literacy through simplified characters offered a chance to improve the lot of the masses, and to break the language monopoly of the few literate elite. Thus, Zhou Enlai, in his 1958 seminal speech on Chinese Communist Party (CCP) language reform goals, declared that the "first task" in language reform "is the simplification of Chinese characters."[65] This was considered extremely important by the CCP, "in fact, the simplification of characters not only occupies first place among" the three major components of CCP language reform – phonetic script, simplified characters, and *Putonghua* – "but was also the first item of work started by the Chinese Government in the domain of language reform and first to meet with practical realization."[66] The reasons for simplification by the communists were "the urgent need to develop a corps of literate cadres as lower-level bureaucrats" and "as a means of achieving

[65] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958) in *Reform of the Chinese Written Language* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1958), 7.
[66] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform" *The China Quarterly*, no. 53 (1973): 111, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed January 28, 2011).

universal literacy."[67] The communists not only wanted to improve the skill base of the party, but also strove to bring universal literacy to a country where language had long been the province of a small elite.

Perceived Problems of Chinese Characters

Zhou Youguang, who was heavily involved with the development of *pinyin*, has indentified three "major defects" of Chinese characters, namely that "they are complicated to write; they are many in number; and their pronunciation is not precisely defined."[68] The third deficiency will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, as it was important in the development of *Putonghua*, the Common Speech. The other two issues, difficulty of writing and the large number of characters, were seen as having direct bearing on China's widespread illiteracy.

This was the prevailing view of most Chinese communist officials, as well as foreign scholars, at the time they took power in 1949. Not everyone, however, agrees that characters were the reason for China's low literacy rate. Alan L. Li has argued against this view, claiming instead "that economic factors may play a much greater role than Chinese characters in the attainment of mass literacy."[69] He compares the gross national product (GNP) of Korea and Japan, which also use Chinese characters, with that of China and the United States, finding that Korea and Japan were able to attain high literacy similar to that of Western countries because of their strong economies.[70] High rates of industrialization provided Korea and Japan with both more money to invest in education and more of a reason to teach their citizens to read. While Japan was modernizing, a majority of Chinese were still living in isolated farming villages,

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[67] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 259-260.
[68] Zhou Youguang, "Understanding and Misunderstanding," *Journal of Macrolingustics*, no. 1(September 1992): 61.
[69] Alan L. Li, "A Reexamination of Protoliteracy Through an Analysis of Modern Chinese Character Use," *Written Communication* 21, no. 2, (April 2004): 116.
[70] Ibid.

where the ability to read and write was not as important as growing food in order to survive the next winter. "The literacy difference between age groups [in China] provides a final piece of evidence for the correlation between China's economic growth and literacy."[71] Younger Chinese, who grew up during the economic modernization of Deng Xiaoping, are more literate than their parents. The smaller size of both Korea and Japan also undoubtedly allowed education to spread much more quickly through the general population. For example, "the total number of Chinese speakers in Mainland China, excluding…national minorities…at the turn from 1950's to 1960's, was estimated at about 540 millions."[72] This means that a low GNP and a huge population might well have been more of a factor in low Chinese literacy rates than Chinese characters.

Many Chinese, however, did not see language reform this way. One of the main issues for Chinese scholars was the fact that Chinese characters do not

> represent sound, but rather…represent meaning. Each character has a distinctive form, but, on seeing the form, one cannot read the sound, and upon reading the sound aloud, one cannot write the form; and when seeing the form and reading the sound, one still does not necessarily understand the meaning of the character.[73]

This disconnect between sound, meaning, and written form meant students of Chinese were required to spend a long time memorizing the many characters they needed to know. One of the main arguments for simplification was that a reduced stroke order could make this process shorter and easier, especially if simplification added more phonetic markers to some characters.

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[71] Alan L. Li, "A Reexamination of Protoliteracy Through an Analysis of Modern Chinese Character Use" 121.
[72] Rosaline Kwan-wai Chiu, *The Three-Fold Objective of the Language Reform in Mainland China in the Last Two Decades* (Quebec: Centre International de Recherches sur le Bilinguisme, 1969), 3.
[73] Yuzhang, Wu, "Writing Must Be Reformed Under Certain Conditions: Report to the Plenum of the National Writing Reform Conference by the Chairman of the Committee for Chinese Writing Reform," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 55.

Arguments Against Simplification

Many of the perceived problems of Chinese characters were subjective assessments; some Chinese, mostly cultural conservatives and elites, but also normal people, resisted changing the ideographs. Especially during the Hundred Flowers, but at all stages of character simplification, some Chinese therefore spoke out against it. Zhou Enlai claimed that these were "vicious attacks…alleging that the simplification of Chinese characters was a failure and that the masses opposed it…of course, the rightists had an ulterior motive in their attack…they used this pretext to assail the Party and the government."[74] This was a common response to outside attacks upon any CCP policy, not just language reform, after 1957, and Zhou Enlai's speech did not mention that many Chinese felt they were justified in calling for the recanting of simplification.

One of the most important arguments claimed that simplification and reduction of characters would cause confusion between words. This is similar to the argument against using a phonetic system to write Chinese. As there are a great deal of homophones, it could become difficult to grasp meaning if context did not make clear which meaning a character carried. What even CCP reformers came to understand was that "oversimplification would mean too strong similarity between many characters which would be difficult to tell apart, and therefore hard to remember."[75] In essence, this argument claimed that simplification "would render the texts easier to read, but more difficult to understand."[76] There was also a concern that the reduction of stroke order meant "the phonetic element has been destroyed," making it more difficult to understand the character's sound and meaning in favor of a simpler ideograph.[77] The more radical of the

[74] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958) 10-11.
[75] Harriet C. Mills, "Language Reform in China: Some Recent Developments," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (August 1956): 519, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed March 15, 2011).
[76] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," 112.
[77] Xi, Guan, "A Letter on Writing Reform," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 163.

simplification plans had the potential to create just such a nightmare, as it aimed to reduce the total number of characters in use to a mere 3,000 through massive substitution efforts.[78] In the end, however, this plan was considered too radical, and was scrapped. Opponents of simplification still argued that there was a potential for massive confusion inherent in even the most conservative simplification system.

Alternatively, some Chinese worried that calligraphy, the art of writing Chinese characters, would disappear due to the introduction of simplified characters. This concern must have been widespread enough that Zhou Enlai saw fit to mention and mollify the concern in his important 1958 speech. He reminded his audience that simplified characters were aimed more at printing, rather than individual use; it was understood that the CCP could not "compel everybody" to write with simplified characters.[79] The idea was to print newspapers, books, and signs with simplified characters so as to popularize them, and eventually make them the norm. Zhou Enlai tried to calm fears that the CCP would dictate how people wrote in private. As language is widely used in both the public and the private spheres, some feared an invasion of private life through the writing system. As the CCP would invade many aspects of Chinese private life, especially beginning with the Anti-Rightist Campaign, this represented a broader trend wherein the CCP encroached more and more upon the private, intimate lives of China's people.

Connected to the idea of Chinese characters as an art, one of the main concerns of conservatives was "a cultural demise that would result from script simplification." [80] Simplification's opponents saw just as clearly as its proponents that Chinese characters were

[78] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," 112.
[79] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 14.
[80] Zhao Shouhui and Richard B. Baldauf Jr, *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution, or Revolution?* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2008), 32.

tightly tied to both China's long history and to the Confucian status quo which had long existed there. Many, such as Tang Lan, a reformer, were also concerned about the culture that would be lost with the simplification of characters. Tang Lan favored language reform, but warned that the new characters "cannot be linked to the old and [simplification] will interrupt our culture."[81] While many reformers looked to the West for examples, conservatives feared that the influx of science and other ideas would bury Chinese culture, leaving a China that looked exactly like Western countries, from its social structure to its alphabet. "Traditional characters were seen as inextricably associated with ancestral roots, cultural heritage, and nationhood," all of which were - and still are - incredibly powerful ideas in China.[82] Connected to all three of these issues were the works of the Confucian classics. Chinese writing did not change overmuch between the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BCE) and the Republic of China. This allowed any literate person access to the definitive works of Chinese culture, creating a continuity rare even among countries with a shorter history. Simplification was perceived as putting a barrier between modern Chinese people and their heritage, as exemplified in the Confucian classics. The Nationalists never saw this as a set goal, because they sought to maintain some continuity with China's heritage in the midst of modernization. The Communists, by contrast, wanted to break with China's long past, and saw in simplification the opportunity to achieve literacy equality while also destroying a link to the past they generally despised.

The Simplification Scheme of 1935

While many amateurs were active in creating phonetic systems, simplifying characters was a more difficult task, one well suited to a government with more extensive resources than could be brought to bear by private individuals. The first government sponsored simplification of

[81] "A Record of the Forum on the Problems of Writing Reform," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 111.

Chinese characters occurred in 1935, under the Nationalist government of the Republic of China, at a time of great upheaval. The reform, "initiated and supported by a constellation of individual elitists in various disciplines, was purely an academic enterprise and can be seen as a typical bottom-up venture."[83] This was similar to the efforts to create a phonetic system around the same time, when linguists and scholars worked with the occasional nod to the amateur and gained government acceptance. In 1935, a list of 324 simplified characters was released by the Nationalist government "for official use but, due to conservative opposition, support for the reform was withdrawn in the following year."[84] The main motivation for this was probably to appease reformers, such as Qian Xuantong, who had long advocated for simplification. Although many dedicated linguists devoted themselves to this original simplification, political concerns finally brought it to its knees.

Qian Xuantong was one of the most influential figures in the simplification of 1935. As early as 1922, he submitted a "Bill to Simplify and Reduce the Strokes of the Currently Used Characters," likening the use of simplified characters to the use of the vernacular, which had already gained popularity in writing by this time; to Qian Xuantong, simplification of characters was the next step after adopting the vernacular and would be "easier to write and [would] save time."[85] In the end, however, Qian Xuantong's enthusiasm failed to convince the cultural conservatives, who were gathering more power at the time. The arguments against simplification described above still carried great weight, especially among the Chinese elite, who maintained a great deal of power under the Nationalists. But even more than the issue of conservative opposition, "it is believed that a more immediate reason for withdrawing the [simplification

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[82] Zhao Shouhui and Richard B Baldauf Jr., *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution, or Revolution?*, 32.
[83] Zhao Shouhui and Richard B. Baldauf Jr., *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution, or Revolution?*, 30.
[84] Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 80.

scheme of 1935] table was the impending struggle against the Japanese, who were to invade China two years later."[86] In general, however, the retraction represented a failure of the Nationalist government to connect to the common people. Simplification, first officially put forward under the Nationalists, became inextricably linked with their enemy, the communists; "simplification was regarded as akin to the ideological embodiment of the communist doctrine as there was seen to be an innate relationship between the ordinary people, simplification, and the mass movement."[87] Another reason for the Nationalist failure to stick by its simplification program was the fact that many in the GMD did not believe Chinese characters to be the main cause of illiteracy. A former GMD Minister of Foreign Affairs claimed in 1929 that not Chinese characters but "lack of opportunity, due principally to lack of schools, has been the main cause of illiteracy."[88] The same former minister noted that some Chinese were attempting to simplify their language, and that they had government support, but did not actively discuss their ideas in his Nationalist program. The GMD believed that schools were the most important method of combating illiteracy, and multiple wars prevented them from increasing access to education. If even their first method of increasing literacy was not widespread, the Nationalists could hardly be expected to pour effort and political capital into simplification, which they saw as both a secondary method and as the action of those outside the party. They were right in that simplification was accomplished by others; it was co-opted by the GMD's great enemies, the communists. The simplification put forward by the communists in 1956, which was considered a higher priority under the CCP, was much more successful than the Nationalist debacle, and is still used today.

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[85] Zhou Youguang, *The Historical Evolution of Chinese Languages and Scripts* (Columbus, Ohio: National East Asian Languages Resource Center, Ohio State University, 2003), 60-61.
[86] Zhao Shaohui and Richard B. Baldauf Jr., *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution, or Revolution?*, 37.
[87] Ibid.

Simplification Under the Communists

1956 was a major year for character simplification. The CCP revealed a three-prong approach in January, when it

> published the Scheme for Simplifying Chinese Characters. This Scheme falls into three parts. The first is a list of 230 simplified characters, which came into use when the scheme was published. The second is a list of 285 simplified characters, of which 95 came into use on a trial basis on June 1956. The third is a list of 54 simplified radicals. Thirty characters coined from the radicals in this list came into use on a trial basis, also when the scheme was published. In all, the number of simplified characters now adopted by newspapers and magazines totals 355.[89]

These lists reflected the two major types of simplification pursued by the CCP, which would be achieved by reducing the number of strokes required to write a character, or by either taking a character completely out of usage or replacing it with a simpler homophone in order to reduce the total number of characters in use.[90]

Cutting down on the number of used characters began in 1955, when a list of 1,050 characters for removal was published.[91] The main justification for their removal was that they were either repeats in meaning, or that the characters were not longer in use, and were therefore "dead."[92] For example, 只(*zhi*), replaced several other characters, all of which would henceforth

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[88] Chao-Chu Wu, *The Nationalist Program for China,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 30.
[89] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958) 7-8.
[90] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," 111.
[91] DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 260.
[92] Zhou Youguang, "Modernization of the Chinese Language," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 59 (1986): 12.

be written as 只 instead of their former character forms, which were abolished.[93] When Mao Zedong required that simplification should employ more cursive characters as written by the masses, however, simplification moved away from the removal strategy, meaning that there has been "a reduction of only 7 percent" of the total number of characters.[94] This directive reflected a major CCP attitude towards simplification, which wished to follow the masses. Informal simplification, for a variety of purposes such as use for shorthand or a calligraphy which allowed for quicker writing, had been going on in China for centuries, and the CCP wanted to tap this as a source for simplifications.

The official government line was that most simplifications were based on "shorthand forms that had been in use on an informal basis for many years. Thus, simplification was merely the formalization and standardization of these shorthand forms."[95] This allowed the CCP to keep the reforms close to the masses, instead of making simplification entirely dependent on government directives from above, in keeping with the CCP policy of the 'mass line' and with the image the CCP wished to cultivate, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, of the party which, in contrast to the Nationalists, took inspiration from and worked for the Chinese masses. To reflect this policy, the slogan "shu erh pu tso [*shu er pu cuo*] (to record without creating)" was adopted.[96] This meant that the party would, in theory at least, document popular forms of characters and bring them to the attention of the entire nation, thus making them into officially recognized forms. The difficulty for the CCP was to bring about this process "in a systematically

[93] Chen Mengjia, "On the Future of Chinese Writing," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 154.
[94] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 260.
[95] Zhou Youguang, "Understanding and Misunderstanding," 61.
[96] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," 111.

organized way."[97] There was enough confusion about simplification that Zhou Enlai saw the need to mention it in his 1958 speech. He claimed that "certain persons freely coin simplified characters which nobody except themselves can make out. This state of affairs is, of course, undesirable and should be properly controlled."[98] The CCP wanted to use forms created by the masses, but it ultimately wanted to be in control of the process. It sought "uniformity" in the way the characters were written, just as the party sought uniformity in the country's ideology.[99] Unlike phonetic script reform, which was in many cases carried out behind closed doors, simplification of characters involved the masses in many stages of their development. But the CCP wanted the people to understand that the party, not the people, had the final say.

The major push of simplification involved reducing the number of strokes used to write characters, using the forms created by the masses. In this endeavor the CCP has had significant success: "a count of a quarter of a million characters of running text showed that simplification had resulted in a reduction from 9.15 [average number of strokes] to 7.67," a reduction of 16.1 percent.[100] In many cases, this involved taking specific elements out of characters. For example, 心 (*xin*, meaning 'heart') was taken out of the character for love, resulting in 爱. The same thing occurred with the character for 'factory,' as the radical for 'workers' was removed. The argument against this method was that the deletion of elements often made no sense. In the example of 爱, it can be argued that the heart plays a large part in the concept of love, and that to take it out of the character would confuse the meaning of the character. In another example, 聽 became 听. Both mean 'to listen,' but while the first character contains the radical for 'ear,' the

[97] Rosaline Kwan-wai Chiu, *The Three-Fold Objective of the Language Reform in Mainland China in the Last Two Decades*, 7.
[98] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958) 12.
[99] Ibid., 13.
[100] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 260.

simplified version contains 口, or 'mouth,' instead. This logically does not reflect the fact that listening requires ears rather than a mouth, but it did succeed in reducing the stroke order and complexity of the character. This was the compromise that often had to be made, sacrificing some part of the character in order to reduce stroke order.

The implementation of simplification under the CCP was much more controlled than that of various phonetic alphabets, because while there were many different schemes advanced in both cases, simplification schemes all followed the same form, whereas there were many competing phonetic alphabets. The various schemes put forward for simplification represented tinkering with an existing framework to make it work more efficiently, while with each new phonetic alphabet the entire framework changed. Simplification was also carried out in a slow, systematic fashion. Reformers also allowed opportunity for ordinary Chinese to participate in the process, mainly through either "correspondence with enthusiasts for language reform and readers of the [Language Reform] Committee's publications" or by "arranging public discussion through publications and debates."[101] Wu Yu-chang claimed that "more than two hundred thousand people in various walks of life throughout the country took part in this discussion" about simplification.[102]

Literacy in China

Increased literacy was one of the main motivations for the CCP's pursuit of simplification. There has been some debate, however, over the state of literacy in China during the CCP's rise and takeover of power. There was a generally held view that a majority of Chinese people were illiterate at Liberation in 1949. This was not just a Chinese view, but extended to foreign scholars as well, many of whom saw "classical Chinese characters as simply

[101] Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," 115.
[102] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 32.

a formative stage in the development of alphabetic writing," and as "a premodern or incomplete form of literacy."[103] It was views such as these which encouraged both Chinese and foreigners to call for an alphabet or a simplification of characters. Evelyn Rawski has argued against this view, however, claiming that "information from the mid- and late nineteenth century suggests that 30 to 45 percent of the men and from 2 to 10 percent of the women in China knew how to read and write," for "an average of almost one literate person per family."[104] This measurement denies the static measurement which takes "the requirement of memorizing some 3,000 characters for basic literacy."[105] Rawski instead included in this measurement both the elite, who had the highest levels of literacy, and those who knew as little as a few hundred characters.[106] This is a less polarized view of Chinese society during the Qing Dynasty, showing that literacy was more widespread than predicted. This follows Alan L. Li's view that higher literacy rates in China are connected with economic progress, not language reform, that influences outside of language itself, not the nature of the characters, impacted literacy. While literacy might have been greater than once thought, it varied greatly depending upon the region of China. Illiterates were more common in the countryside; a CCP document from the party's time in the Chekiang-Kiangsi border region in the 1930's claimed that "at the present time the number of illiterates in Fukien, Chekiang and Kiangsi Provinces still exceeds 99% of the total population."[107] There are also important distinctions to be made regarding the importance of literacy to common people. A 1930 survey of Chinese villagers gave their main reasons for the importance of literacy: "about a quarter…said that literacy was most important to keep accounts (27%), or to read and write

[103] Alan L. Li, "A Reexamination of Protoliteracy Through an Analysis of Modern Chinese Character Use," 111.
[104] Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1979), 140.
[105] Alan L. Li, "A Reexamination of Protoliteracy Through an Analysis of Modern Chinese Character Use," 112.
[106] E*velyn* Sakakida Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*, 140.
[107] Hsueh-wen Wang. "A Study of Chinese Communist Education During the Kiangsi Period: Part III," *Issues and Studies* (June 1973): 71.

letters (26%); another goodly number mentioned to avoid being cheated (10%), and only a few (6%) added to read newspapers and books."[108]

CCP Motivations for Increasing Literacy

The CCP had many different motivations for increasing literacy among the Chinese populace. The first reason, and the one that was most stated by CCP officials, was the need to increase literacy in order to modernize and improve both the lives of individuals and the economic situation of the country. Simplified characters were a response to the view of learning Chinese characters as an arduous process, which kept many people from even trying to gain some literacy. "Weighing the necessary expenditure of time, energy and money required to learn the Chinese written language against the possible benefits made education a questionable pursuit," to many Chinese.[109] By reducing stroke orders, officials involved in language reform hoped that more people would be willing to learn to read and write. In general, "the popularization of simplified characters greatly facilitates children's education, elimination of illiteracy, and writing in general," according to the official party line.[110] This fit well with the communist vision of an equal society. As literacy was one of the most important elements separating class before the Communist takeover, improving the literacy of the masses, especially with forms created by those same masses, was believed necessary to achieve true equality.

Increased literacy for purposes of equality was a legitimate goal of CCP simplification efforts. But there were other concerns which led the party to seek a broader number of people

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[108]Charles W. Hayford "Literacy Movements in Modern China," in *National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 147-148.
[109] Peter J. Seybolt, "The Yenan Revolution in Mass Education," *The China Quarterly*, no. 48 (1971): 645, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 5, 2011).

who could read and write. One of the most important was "education for national defense," which was believed necessary by communists at least as early as 1937.[111] Education was heavily stressed in the Kiangsi Soviet, where it was seen as not just cultural advancement, but also as a means to "satisfy the war requirements and assist in war mobilization."[112] The war the masses were to be fighting was considered broader than just the war with the Japanese, and also included class warfare against China's upper classes. For both types of war, education was needed. The upper classes in China had long held the advantage in education, making it one of the easiest ways to bring about a more equitable society. If everyone in China was educated, the people would be on nearly equal footing, with only money to separate them, money which the CCP soon took away. Bringing education into the province of the masses was an important first step, however, and literacy was the first step to education. Literacy also made it easier to involve the masses in the war against Japan. It was no accident that the "premier cadre training institute" was called the "Resist Japan Military and Political University."[113] There was a belief that although

> the masses must be mobilized for active participation in the on-going struggle…in former times the peasants' illiteracy and vulgar language helped cut them off from the mainstream of Chinese life and undermine their self-esteem and confidence…if they had greater confidence, efforts to encourage their active participation in class and other warfare would be more successful.[114]

It was also easier to mobilize the masses for particular war efforts when pamphlets, posters, or other forms of the written word could be disseminated among the people, even behind enemy

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[110] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 34.
[111] Peter J. Seybolt, "The Yan'an Revolution in Mass Education," 646.
[112] Hsueh-wen Wang, "A Study of Chinese Communist Education During the Kiangsi Period," 79.
[113] Peter J. Seybolt, "The Yan'an Revolution in Mass Education," 651.
[114] Susan Biele Alitto, "The Language Issue in Communist Chinese Education," *Comparative Education Review* 13, no. 1 (February 1969): 49, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 5, 2011).

lines. Education and literacy also made people into useful communist cadres, but there was originally a fairly small pool to choose from. The idea of using "the services of the intellectuals at that time" was considered, but "within the Party itself, some cadres, taking the class standpoint…resolutely opposed" this policy.[115] This meant that the communists needed to fill their ranks with peasants, workers, and soldiers, but they also needed these new cadres to be able to read in order to be more effective. By the time the party established its base at Yan'an, "the primary task of middle schools would be to raise the level of cadres serving at present and train future cadres."[116] Increasing literacy created a broader base of candidates for the communists to chose from, and reading and writing classes had the potential to identify truly hard workers or talented individuals.

There was also the general idea of both patriotism and goodwill that the communists were able to add to their image, in part because of their efforts to increase literacy. It showed, first and foremost, that the communists were willing to break with the status quo and actually work to improve the lives of the Chinese masses. Other groups, such as the Nationalists, had made this claim, but the Nationalists had turned out to be as corrupt and exclusive as the warlords or dynasties that they replaced. The communists, by stark contrast, took concrete steps to advance literacy and education, proving that they were not only going to talk about change, but were actually working to bring it about. There was also a patriotic element in teaching the Chinese population to read their own language. After so many years – for youth, perhaps even all the years of their lives – of feeling ashamed of a China that was a plaything of empires and considered backward, learning to read had the power to restart the spark of national pride, and allowed individual Chinese to feel that they were doing something positive – by learning how to

[115] Hsueh-wen Wang, "A Study of Chinese Communist Education During the Kiangsi Period," 79.
[116] Peter J. Seybolt, "The Yan'an Revolution in Mass Education," 659.

read they were advancing China just a little. These associations between literacy and the communist party were wonderful for the communist image, and were part of the way that the communists used increasing literacy to further their own agenda.

Beyond the ideals of literacy for the advancement of people and country, the CCP also saw simplification and increased literacy as a means to advance the party, as well. It was argued that "universal literacy is necessary if the Chinese Communist[s] are to effect the national development and ideological transformation of the country. The inculcation of Communist values is dependent on a literate population that can be fully exposed to government propaganda."[117] The success of this effort would later be seen during the Cultural Revolution, when millions of Chinese were mobilized through propaganda, in particular the Little Red Book full of quotations from Chairman Mao. Posters and writings formed a great part of the propaganda efforts for all of Mao's major projects, including the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, but the usefulness of this propaganda can be traced to communist efforts to increase literacy through a vast program of education. The first experiments of communist language education took place in the Kiangsi Soviet and at the other major communist countryside base, Yan'an.

Chinese Language Education Under the CCP

The full effect of simplification upon literacy can be debated. What had a more obvious impact on literacy was the spread of CCP-sponsored education in language which inundated the country. The party was able to practice a system of mass education during the 1930's at their base in the countryside, the Kiangsi Soviet. After Liberation, they brought this system to a much wider region of China. In the Kiangsi Soviet, the communists set up 3,298 night schools to cater

[117] Susan Biele Alitto, "The Language Issue in Communist Chinese Education," 50.

to 52,292 students in 1933.[118] Other ways in which education was furthered within the Soviet included reading organizations, contests, examinations, and the publication of newspapers for those who had learned to read.[119] Many of these strategies were effective because they could educate a broad base of people, from adults to children, and because they allowed students to work at other tasks, such as agriculture, while they were learning. For the first time, education in China could be accomplished at the same time as production. Before this revolution in education, only the rich had the money and leisure to lose the labor of even one family member to the all-consuming task of education. Now, peasant labor could occur during the day, while night classes accomplished their education. "Social education" was another way that education was "designed to give part-time education to adults and to children who could not attend school full-time for economic and other reasons."[120] There were, however, many problems with the educational systems put in place at the Kiangsi Soviet. This can be attributed to the fact that the Kiangsi Soviet attempt was the first experiment in mass education by the communists, and indeed in China in general; there were bound to be problems.

After the Long March led the CCP to Yan'an, major curriculum changes were made which amounted to, as the title of Peter Seybolt's article on the subject argues, a "Revolution in Mass Education." Education became more practically focused; instead of giving classes on everything from zoology to physics to physiology, or classes meant to prepare students for nonexistent universities, the aim became to produce literate cadres with practical skills they would need in administration.[121] The system put its main attention upon "those who needed education most (because they were the furthest behind), and those who could contribute most to

[118] Hsueh-wen Wang, "A Study of Chinese Communist Education During the Kiangsi Period," 70.
[119] Hsueh-wen Wang, "A Study of Chinese Communist Education During the Kiangsi Period," 70-74.
[120] Peter J. Seybolt, "The Yan'an Revolution in Mass Education," 648.
[121] Ibid., 652 and 659.

the solution of current problems," a strategy which reached out to portions of the population which had previously had no access to education. When the communists came to power in 1949 they would employ the strategies and lessons of both the Kiangsi Soviet and Yan'an in their implementation of education throughout China. They did not achieve universal literacy, especially not within the extravagant goals the party set for itself, but the CCP program did bring millions of Chinese into the world of language and gave them the opportunity to gain an education that under the Dynastic or Nationalist governments would have remained closed to them.

Chapter III

Dueling with Dialects:

The Development of *Putonghua*

Introduction

Phonetization and the simplification of Chinese characters were both at their hearts efforts to bring the Chinese written language to the masses, breaking the stranglehold the literary elite had held for centuries. In this way both of these reforms represented a threat to China's elite, and a potential boon to its common people. There was a third facet of reform, however, that threatened the language practices of the common people, one with the potential to once again separate China's literacy landscape between elites wielding the power of language and the masses without it. In 1958, Zhou Enlai discussed the mission of the Chinese Communist Party to move forward with "popularization of the common speech (*pu tung hua [Putonghua]*)" because the vast number of dialects throughout China created "an unfavorable effect on the political, economic and cultural life" of the Chinese people.[122] *Putonghua* "is an integrate part of over-a-century continuing efforts at China's modernization," as dialects were seen as "harmful to [China's] national unity, national security, and socialist construction."[123] *Putonghua*, as defined by the CCP, came to mean "the common speech of the Han nationality based on the northern

[122] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 14.
[123] Longsheng Guo, "The Relationship Between Putonghua and Chinese Dialects," in *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China: Theory and Practice Since 1949*, ed. Minglang Zhou (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 47.

dialect, with Beijing pronunciation as the standard and model vernacular writings as the grammatical norm."[124]

As people migrated over millennia across the large landmass that is now China, vast linguistic variety developed. "The Chinese believe that they speak dialects of a single language mostly because of the political institution of the nation and a cultural heritage that they have shared," but many of these dialects are completely incomprehensible to one another.[125] Daniel Kane identifies nine dialect groups in China: Northern dialects (standard Mandarin, spoken in Beijing and other areas in the North), Wu dialects (of Shanghai, Suzhou, Ningbo), Xiang dialects (of Hunan), Gan dialects (of Jiangxi), Jin dialects (of Shanxi and Hebei), Kejia (spoken in Hakka areas), Yue dialects (Cantonese and related forms), Northern Min (of Fuzhou), and Southern Min (of Fujian and Chaoshan).[126] This is part of the challenge of ruling a country as vast as China. It contains many different dialects which are essentially their own languages. Shared characters offer a way to communicate in writing, but speaking still poses a major barrier to Chinese unity. In response to this, the communists followed a trend which had been in the offing since the late Qing Dynasty, and promoted a standard dialect and pronunciation for use by all Chinese, regardless of region and dialect. The Beijing pronunciation of Mandarin was chosen as the 'common speech' or *Putonghua,* which was then presented as the national language to the whole nation. While this reform did serve the need to more firmly unite the diverse peoples of China, it also threatened to destroy local languages and dialects. Many speakers of these dialects saw this reform as an attempt to subvert regional loyalties and culture to a more centrally focused language and culture. It highlighted how important a role language plays in the construction of

[124] Zhou Youguang, "Modernization of the Chinese Language," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 59 (1986): 8.
[125] Chaofen Sun, *Chinese: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 28.

identity, and how the CCP tried to create an entirely new identity, controlled by the party from Beijing, through the creation and spread of *Putonghua*.

Qing Dynasty Beginnings

The roots of a "common speech" were planted during China's dynastic period. There was a single pronunciation used for government business by the scholar-officials who ran the bureaucracy, called *guanhua* ("officials' speech"), which was based on the speech of "educated people in the capital," and promoted "chiefly as a common means of communication among officials with different dialect backgrounds."[127] Like other aspects of language under the dynasties, the use of *guanhua* was limited the scholar-officials and had little impact on the lives of ordinary Chinese. It did, however, foreshadow the future use of Beijing pronunciation as a national form of speech. *Guanhua* was more common among officials, but there was no government program or desire to promote it to the wider population.

Speech reform was closely related to the development of phonetic schemes, as these schemes were used as pronunciation guides, which also helped standardize pronunciation. The missionaries who worked on some of the first phonetic schemes in China often worked in the south, which contained many dialects that differed greatly from what was spoken in Beijing. This meant that many of the first schemes were written for specific dialects, and were not meant to apply to all of China, as served their purpose of teaching the local population to read the Bible. At the beginning of Chinese interest in phonetic scripts, they were therefore often employed to represent regional dialects as well. For example, Lu Ganchang created a phonetic script in 1892 to write his native Amoy dialect; he also worked to create scripts for other dialects as well.[128]

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[126] Daniel Kane, *The Chinese Language: Its History and Current Usage* (North Claredon, Vermont: Tuttle, 2006), 94.
[127] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 224.
[128] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 33.

"The situation changed after 1900. While there were phonetic schemes based on local dialects, the trend was clearly towards unification under a phonetized national speech."[129] As calamity after disaster struck China, perpetuated by foreigners whose countries and languages were far more standardized than Chinese, there was a growing awareness of both China's weakness and also of the power of language. Originally a tool to increase local literacy, phonetic scripts became a political tool to unify China through a commonly pronounced language. Nineteen hundred also marked the advance of phonetic scripts and a national pronunciation to the national stage, where "language reform's cultivated complicity with state authority would tend it toward *guoyu* (national language) more so than other concerns."[130] The Qing Dynasty had too many other concerns to actively spread a national speech. Republican China saw the first real attempt to do so.

Republican Efforts

The 1913 Conference for Unifying Pronunciation represented a major effort by the new Republican government to push forward with language reform. The view that developed during the Qing Dynasty that "linguistic diversity was retrograde and linguistic unification represented progress," had grown even stronger.[131] The 1913 conference not only resulted in the phonetic script known as *zhuyin zimu* (as described in Chapter 1), but also provided a standardized pronunciation for use with these symbols. The conference, however, was not without controversy, one which would foreshadow future schemes and concerns about the dominance of northern pronunciation over the entirety of China. The conference delegates "split into two groups. One comprised delegates from the Mandarin-speaking area under the leadership of Wang

[129] W.K. Cheng, "Enlightenment and Unity: Language Refomism in Late Qing China," *Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (May 2001): 487, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed January 28, 2011).
[130] Ibid., 488.
[131] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 225.

[Z]hao. The other consisted of representatives from the southern coastal bloc," where Mandarin was not commonly spoken.[132] The first group advocated a pronunciation based on Mandarin as it was spoken in Beijing, while the latter group argued that such a scheme would make *zhuyin zimu* incomprehensible to southern dialect speakers, especially given the problem of "southern dialect sounds not existing in Mandarin."[133] Northern dialect group leader Wang Zhao used trickery to get around southern opposition, calling a separate conference where northerners were the majority, and changing the voting system to ensure that his group would win.[134] Mandarin was victorious over its southern brothers, but even within Mandarin there were a variety of pronunciations available.

A compromise was reached within the Mandarin group, making "the standardized pronunciation designed in 1913…a man-made pronunciation that was different from the pronunciation of any of the naturally formed topolects in China."[135] Instead of basing the pronunciation on a particular dialect, which would have alienated everyone else, it was created by taking features of multiple dialects and combining them into one system of pronunciation. Known as *guoyu*, or "national language," this pronunciation was meant to be used not just by officials, as *guanhua* had been, but was also envisioned as a unifying language that would be taught in school and used in all communications.[136] An extreme faction among the Guomindang imagined "a single people inhabiting a unitary state which had as its ideal a single language spoken by all."[137] Even had this utopian vision been possible within as diverse a state as China, its conception was overshadowed by multiple wars and more pressing concerns. The promotion

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[132] John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, 57.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 58.
[135] Zhou Youguang, *The Historical Evolution of Chinese Languages and Scripts* (Columbus, Ohio: National East Asian Languages Resource Center, Ohio State University, 2003), 21.
[136] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 224.
[137] Ibid.

of *guoyu* also suffered from a lack of long term planning. For example, although *guoyu* was imagined as a common language which would be taught in schools across China, "no provision was made in the early plans for the training of teachers," there was the issue that "in some education areas dialects or some regional languages continued to be used, and teaching materials in [*guoyu*] were not suitable for classroom use;" finally, the fact that ordinary people did not care much about *guoyu*, and were given "little motivation" to actually study and learn it.[138] Thus, although the Nationalist attempt at speech reform began strong, it did not achieve many lasting results.

The main issue with *guoyu* was its artificial and unnatural nature, which "within two years of its publication…was severely criticized for its impracticality. In 1924 the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language came out in favor of making Peking [Beijing] pronunciation standard," and this recommendation was taken up in the publication of a dictionary of pronunciation based on the speech of Beijing in 1932.[139] By this time, however, other issues had become more pressing, and little was done to promote the new dictionary. Just as was the case with simplified characters, the Nationalists ceded the image of a promoter of the common speech to the communists that would replace them. The communists also differed from the GMD regarding the nature of dialects and their relationship to a unified national language.

During the rule of the Guomindang, the communists, by contrast to the ruling party, "were opposed to the linguistic assimilation of the minority peoples."[140] This mirrored the policy of Russian dictator Stalin, who after taking power supported the speaking of minority languages within the U.S.S.R. and even oversaw a program which studied minority languages and designed

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[138] Bo Yin and Richard B. Baldauf, Jr., "Language Reform of Spoken Chinese," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 11, no. 4, (1990): 281.
[139] Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 134-135.
[140] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 225.

scripts for those without a writing system. While Stalin did support the use of dialects, he saw them as subordinate to a national language. He claimed that "Marx…did recognize the necessity of a *single* national language, as the highest form, to which dialects, as lower forms, are subordinate."[141] This was published only in 1950, but the ideas existed in Russia long before that date, as shown by the Russian effort to create written systems for its minority languages, including Chinese. During the GMD period, Chinese communists were hosting many Russian communist advisors, who would have brought this idea with them. The belief regarding a common speech among the communists in the 1930s was the idea that it would be "an addition to, rather than a replacement of, other forms of speech."[142] Although they initially believed in the use of dialects, the Chinese communists eventually placed more emphasis on the use of their conception of the common speech, which they called *Putonghua*.

Putonghua

"Efforts were made by the pre-Communist governments…to promote a national language, but the language unification plans were never thoroughly carried out because of a lack of determination, as well as of funds," but the communists pursued the aim of speech unification with much more determination.[143] *Putonghua* and its promotion became one of the three prongs of the CCP language reform effort, but was not a major issue until 1955. In that year, the head of the Ministry of Education, Zhang Xiruo, gave a speech explaining CCP reasoning for announcing a standard speech based on the spoken vernacular of Beijing. He noted that dialects created

[141] Joseph Stalin, *Concerning Marxism in Linguistics*, London: Soviet News, 1950, 10.
[142] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 225.
[143] Tao-Tai Hsia, "The Language Revolution in Communist China," *Far Eastern Survey* 25, no. 10 (October 1956): 149, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed March 15, 2011).

> an obstacle to the exchange of ideas between people from two different regions. A situation such as this often creates difficulties in work and is also responsible for setbacks in work…This does not the meet the needs of socialist construction and transformation and is most harmful to the people's political, economic, and social life.[144]

This meant that dialects were interfering with CCP efforts to modernize China, and covered many elements, from use of propaganda to the general communication across province lines which was important to economic and political centralization. Zhang also claimed that a standard language already existed, based on a vernacular which had developed gradually throughout China's history and had been spread by the army and refugees during the Civil War that ended in 1949.[145] The development of the CCP idea of *Putonghua* was truly born after 1949, when

> with the creation of a strong central government…language policy regarding the regional forms of speech suddenly became fixed in a way unexpected by many on the Left. Language policy involving the ethnic minorities remained much as it had been before; schooling was based primarily on the minority languages, at least in initial schooling, but included education in Chinese, particularly at the higher levels. Policy toward the regionalects, however, became almost identical with that of the ousted Guomindang regime.[146]

Promotion of *Putonghua* by the communists manifested mostly in exactly the avenues neglected by the Guomindang. It was declared that "the chief task in popularizing *Putonghua* is to train teachers," a task the GMD woefully neglected.[147] Once teachers were trained, they were sent to

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[144] Zhang Xiruo, "Resolutely Promote the Standard Vernacular Based on Peking Pronunciation: Report to the Plenum of the National Writing Reform Conference by the Head of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 66.
[145] Ibid., 66-67.
[146] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, 226.
[147] Zhou Youguang, "Modernization of the Chinese Language," 9.

schools throughout the country to begin training the new generation in *Putonghua*. Within the educational realm, the CCP took many lessons on both effective and ineffective techniques from its earlier experiences in language education from the 1930's and 1940's in the Chinese countryside (discussed in Chapter 2). Soon, "sweeping measures were instituted for use of Mandarin in the language and literature classes in schools at all levels across the country."[148]

The Relationship of Putonghua and the Vernacular Movement

As a result of the control imposed upon language, especially in its written form, by the scholar-officials of the dynastic period, by the end of the Qing Dynasty there was a great divergence between written and spoken Chinese. "Vernacular elements were particularly evident in two types of writing: religious (especially Buddhist) texts and various genres of popular literature," but, much like simplified characters, use of the vernacular in writing was considered uncouth, shocking, and rather vulgar.[149] Its use was shunned by the scholar officials who determined the legitimacy of particular language, and thus the vernacular was used in speech and in "lower" forms of writing such as popular novels without government recognition until the May Fourth Movement of 1919 brought the vernacular to the fore.

Leaders in the Chinese cultural establishment of the 1920s, such as Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, were heavily involved in the movement to replace what they saw as the antiquated old literary style of writing with a style closer to the spoken language of ordinary people. The vernacular they succeeded in using to replace the old literary style of writing was called *baihua* and was based on the style that had developed through popular literary classics, rather than on more traditional works.[150] This was still an old style with a great deal of history, but it had the

[148] Glen Peterson, *Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-1995* (Vancouver, BC, Canada: UBC Press, 1997), 110.
[149] Jerry Norman, *Chinese*, 111.
[150] Ibid., 134.

dual advantage of keeping new Chinese literature connected in some ways to its past, yet also broke the reliance of literature on ancient conventions which no longer seemed relevant to writers in the modern age. One of the first writers to use the newly accepted vernacular style was Lu Xun, whose works were widely praised by communists and others.

The acceptance of a vernacular was in many ways the most popular aspect of language reform in China. It was brought about not by government planning or effort, but through the determination of students and literary figures. It also laid the way for further language reform efforts, as vernacularization was also a method of standardizing language. With *Putonghua*, this idea was taken from the written language and into the spoken. *Baihua* was also easily translatable into the other aspects of language reform: simplified characters and *pinyin*.

Most importantly for *Putonghua*, however, the use of *baihua* "greatly developed the Northern 'Mandarin' and added many useful elements from foreign languages, which greatly promoted the advance and spread of the standard vernacular."[151] From its beginnings in the writings of a few intellectuals, the vernacular spread to school textbooks and newspapers, which helped greatly in popularizing the new way of writing.[152] That this style was accepted and widely used showed that the official version of the Chinese language could indeed be changed, and helped crack the stranglehold which the official elite version of writing had previously held over language. Zhou Youguang, a leader in the development of *pinyin*, went so far as to call the vernacular movement and its successive literary movement "an ideological revolution that shook the very foundations of China's ancient civilization."[153] It was one of the first major breaks with

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[151] Zhang Xiruo, "Resolutely Promote the Standard Vernacular Based on Peking Pronunciation: Report to the Plenum of the National Writing Reform Conference by the Head of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 66.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Zhou Youguang, "Understanding and Misunderstanding," *Journal of Macrolingustics*, no. 1(September 1992): 59.

China's language past, and it laid the foundations for the language reforms which would go even farther in breaking with the past and introducing vast changes to the Chinese language.

Problems with Putonghua

Just as there was dissention regarding communist efforts to create a phonetic script and to simplify characters, there were also many objections to *Putonghua*. One of the major barriers to the spread of this common speech was the fact that "to learn the Standard Language is for a great number of illiterates, not merely to acquire a new set of phonetic habits, but almost to learn a new language, and this in the degree as the vocabulary and grammar of their dialect are different from the modern standard norms."[154] The introduction of a single common speech for everyone to use, much like simplified characters, was seen by some as an invasion by the state into the intimate private sphere of the people. For many Chinese, "when his language is seen in the deeper levels, his family relations, his tools, his work in the fields, daily life at home and in the village, differences in vocabulary become very striking, to the point of mutual unintelligibility from region to region."[155] Certain sayings, regional axioms, and allusions did not translate into the common speech, which made many feel that their provincial identities were being subsumed into the state by the elimination of the language characteristics which set them apart.

The Issue of Minorities and Dialects

Perhaps the greatest issue of *Putonghua* was the question of its relation to minority languages and regional dialects. In 1955, the Chinese government adopted the term *Putonghua*, or common speech, to replace *guoyu* (national language), which was common during the Nationalist period, "because at the time the government wanted to emphasize the equality among all the different ethnic groups and the equality of their different languages. The government did

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[154] Paul L.M. Serruys, *Survey of the Chinese Language Reform and the Anti-Illiteracy Movement in Communist China* (Berkley: Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1962), 115.

not want to force the Han language upon the other ethnic groups."[156] There were some issues with minority languages in competition with *Putonghua*, but these did not appear until later, and the main issue soon became the power struggle between *Putonghua* and regional dialects.

Putonghua was developed in part because of the incomprehensible nature of dialects to Chinese from other regions. Not only did this inhibit commerce and free communications between provinces, but it also caused problems for central control by the CCP as well. For example, "Communist agitators in their field work often [found] it difficult to communicate with their audiences if they [were] not thoroughly familiar with the local dialect."[157] Not only were communications between cadres and ordinary Chinese an issue, but cadres occasionally had communication problems among their own ranks, as cadres came from all areas of China and many different dialect bases. For this reason, Mao Zedong called for all cadres to learn *Putonghua* as early as 1958 to help alleviate these problems.[158] A common language solved both of these issues, as it meant that cadres would be understood wherever they traveled, and would also be communicating with each other in the same language. The use of *Putonghua* by CCP cadres mirrored the earlier use of *guanhua* by scholar-officials during the Dynastic Period.

Even before the development of *Putonghua*, the CCP began to move away from dialect policies as early as 1949, the year it won power. At this time, the party "reversed its previous policy of supporting dialect-based Romanization schemes and dialect literature and mounted a policy of strict opposition to what were now described as unacceptable manifestations of linguistic and cultural 'localism.'"[159] Once *Putonghua* was developed, it became a means to combat this "localism," and a way of uniting the country. "In 1950, Mandarin was declared a

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Zhou Youguang, *The Historical Evolution of Chinese Language*, 23.
[157] Tao-Tai Hsia, *The Language Revolution in Communist China*, 152.
[158] Bo Yin and Richard B. Baldauf, Jr, *Language Reform of Spoken Chinese*, 282.

compulsory subject at the senior level in the village spare-time schools that had been hastily set up to identify and train local activists for land reform," and cultural remediation schools (*wenhua buxi xuexiao*) also focused heavily on Mandarin.[160] By the end of the 1950's, the CCP had redefined literacy to mean skills in simplified characters and *Putonghua*, rather than in traditional characters or dialects.[161] This helped to promote the view of dialect-speakers without knowledge of *Putonghua* as backward, a status which in Mao's China was not just a cause for ridicule but occasionally for danger as well. A dialect speaker was not considered officially literate or educated if they did not have *Putonghua* skills. This recalls somewhat the elitist position of language in dynastic China. Then, reading and writing skills could provide status (although an exam degree was required to truly join the elite). By the 1950s, *Putonghua* had became one of the signs of an educated person, giving the speaker that status above mere dialect speakers. And just as an exam degree from the imperial government represented cause for even more prestige, CCP cadres were given high status.

The transition to *Putonghua* was not much resisted by cadres, whose jobs increasingly came to mean following all directives from Mao to the letter. It was part of their jobs to learn *Putonghua*. But ordinary people did not see things this way. They viewed the *Putonghua* drive as the "pursuit of national unity through imposed linguistic uniformity," the costs of which were their own individual linguistic and local identities.[162] The promotion of *Putonghua* had previously taken place in a time of relative political openness, but in 1957 the Anti-Rightist Campaign, a response to the previously open years, cracked down on all kinds of opposition, including opposition to language reform. During the Hundred Flowers Campaign, Chinese from

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[159] Glen Peterson, *Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-1995*, 107.
[160] Glen Peterson, *Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-1995*, 109.
[161] Ibid., 111.
[162] Ibid., 103.

all walks of life had been encouraged to criticize CCP policies. In response to what Mao Zedong saw as not a critical but a subversive response, the Anti-Rightist Campaign ushered in a period of persecution of anyone who spoke out against any CCP policy, including language reform. In 1958, Zhou Enlai claimed that critics of language reform were merely using the issue as a "pretext to assail the Party and the government."[163] In such an environment, criticism of *Putonghua* became suddenly dangerous to the political – and sometimes the physical – health of those who dared do so. Dialect speakers were forced to stop speaking out regarding the subversion of their linguistic identity and culture by the state.

Although the main target of *Putonghua* remained dialects spoken by the Han majority, there was also conflict between *Putonghua* and minority languages, which were considered not merely dialects but retained the status of fully different languages. In the early years of CCP power there was a general, if fairly weak, drive to increase minority literacy by creating written systems for minority languages which lacked them, and to research these languages.[164] These efforts, however, had a fairly small impact, and were eventually overshadowed by worsening political conditions. The Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 began a new era of increasing CCP control in all areas of Chinese life, and increased government determination to centralize power. Thus, in 1958, the lenient posture towards minority languages was reversed. Minorities were now

> ordered…to learn the Chinese language. This was important, it was averred, because in many nationalities areas there were no institutes of higher education and no middle schools where instruction was conducted entirely in minority languages. Even in primary

[163] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 11.
[164] Henry G. Schwarz, "Communist Language Policies for China's Ethnic Minorities: The First Decade," *The China Quarterly*, no. 12 (1962): 171-174, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed March 15, 2011).

> schools, only the first and second grades were devoted to the spoken and written minority languages. Starting with the third grade, instruction was mostly in Chinese.[165]

By the time this occurred, the government had had plenty of time to disseminate *Putonghua* to the Han majority throughout the country. It was now able to focus more of the effort of language promotion in minority areas, which had previously not been a priority. Previous support for autonomous minority language became coercion, and "where this was not possible, to create and reform minority languages just to the extent that full impact of government propaganda was assured."[166] The development of this repressive policy was not sudden, but represented the conflict between language theory and practice in the preceding years. Even while CCP policy was to research and advance minority languages, there was a general "negative attitude of Chinese cadres" towards these languages at all levels.[167] In part because of this attitude, but also because of the small number of cadres actually involved in work with minority languages, many government agencies issued most of their documents in Chinese, even in areas of heavy minority concentrations, such as Inner Mongolia.[168] Despite the stated views of the CCP prior to 1949 and those of Stalin in the 1950's, Chinese policy towards minority languages began with a conflict between theory and practice and became gradually more repressive, until minorities were simply ordered to learn Chinese, which took the form of *Putonghua*.

CCP actions towards both dialects and minority languages showed a gradual shift from leniency in 1949 to strict repression by the late 1950's. The party which had once believed in allowing dialects to be spoken began to pursue a policy that "Chinese dialects are thought to be

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[165] Ibid., 175.
[166] Henry G. Schwarz, "Communist Language Policies for China's Ethnic Minorities: The First Decade," 176.
[167] Ibid., 179.
[168] Ibid.

eventually replaced by Putonghua in every domain of language use."[169] Zhou Enlai claimed that it was not the intent of the promotion of *Putonghua* to replace dialects, but also noted that "dialects will exist for a long time."[170] This implies an acknowledgement of the difficulty of replacing dialects immediately, but by also implying that dialects will be around for a "long time" rather than forever demonstrates the general negative feelings of the CCP towards dialects and their attempt to speed the demise of both dialects and localism. This represented a broader trend of government centralization of not only power, but also individual identity in Beijing, at the expense of "localism," which went hand in hand with the more repressive measures taken by the CCP during and after the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. All of these policies were done in the name of national unity, which was increasingly a CCP policy that took precedence over other issues. During this time, China was becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of the world, including its former allies in the Soviet Union (the Sino-Soviet split would become concrete in 1960). The Korean War (1950-1953) had also helped polarize relations between China and the United States, as well as with U.S. allies. In an increasingly hostile world, the CCP saw threats abroad from the U.S. and the Soviet Union and domestically from home-grown dissenters. Its response was to stress total loyalty to the party and the state, and to promote Chinese unity in pursuit of this aim. The promotion of *Putonghua* was an important part of this process.

Putonghua as a Means of Control

"Sociologists point out that a group's sense of self-identity is greatly enhanced when it possesses its own language. By the same token, it increases this group's ability to resist another

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[169] Longsheng Guo, "The Relationship Between Putonghua and Chinese Dialects," in *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China: Theory and Practice Since 1949*, ed. Minglang Zhou (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 46.
[170] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 16.

group's encroachments upon it."[171] This was a concept the CCP worked slowly but determinedly to undermine among the peripheral groups of China who maintained identities which were separate from the unified, centralized nationalism promoted by the CCP. Everyone in China was targeted for unification, but it was from dialect speakers and minorities that the CCP saw the greatest opposition, because it was essentially subverting regional identity into a more centralized identity that was synonymous with not only China, but also with the CCP. The party wanted every Chinese citizen to think of themselves not as residents of Guangdong, or Shanghai, but as Chinese first. This would help promote nationalism and support for the CCP, which through WWII and beyond had gained a substantial propaganda victory by claiming the mantle of the party which promoted Chinese interests and nationalism (ironic, given that their main opponents, the Guomindang, are also known as the Nationalists).

Unity was also in the interests of building socialism in China. The communist program called for a great deal of work and sacrifice. For example, the Great Leap Forward asked for major sacrifices from the Chinese, from their time to whatever household metals they had lying around. There was also a huge push to complete massive public works projects, which required a truly gigantic labor force.[172] Required for this effort was first mobilization and then motivation; workers were gathered and then moved to work under the idea that they were working to better their country. *Putonghua* would have allowed the message to spread and the propaganda to be understood. It also connected all of the workers to a common identity and therefore a common goal.

Nationalism already existed in China without the introduction of *Putonghua*, as there were other factors which provided a common identity for the Chinese, including written

[171] Henry G. Schwarz, "Communist Language Policies for China's Ethnic Minorities: The First Decade," 170.

characters, culture, and a shared history. But the spoken language also presented a substantial barrier to communication and trade, while visibly promoting regionalism. Because of this, "the central state's promotion of Mandarin in Guangdong was linked to its effort to weaken the forces of Cantonese 'localism' and to nurture the loyalty of local officialdom, which Beijing regarded as riven with parochial ties."[173] This occurred in the areas and provinces where dialects were commonly spoken, and was more prevalent in southern China, where Cantonese was the spoken language. The CCP sought to rewrite notions of identity in these regions, seeking to connect them to the CCP and its seat in Beijing, rather than to local loyalties, which, if they gained enough support, might have sought to resist the centralization the state desired. The communists learned well from history, and, remembering the warlordism that followed the end of the Qing Dynasty, as well as regional uprisings such as the Taiping Rebellion, realized that regional loyalties could be powerful. These loyalties were reinforced by the presence of family ties within localities, as well as by shared customs. The CCP was already in the process of rewriting Chinese culture through their rejection of many aspects of Chinese cultural heritage, from footbinding to traditional roles for women. It attempted to complete the transformation by taking away the language ties which bound people to a dialect and region rather than to China as a whole.

In regards to minorities, the goal of forcing them to learn *Putonghua* was "to create a completely sinicised citizenry in all minority areas by using only Chinese language in primary and secondary schools."[174] Once again, the CCP was seeking to rewrite identity using language. With minorities, language was the easiest target. There was a viable reason for learning

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[172] Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962,* (New York: Walker & Co., 2010), 27-33.
[173] Glen Peterson, *Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-1995*, 110.
[174] Henry G. Schwarz, "Communist Language Policies for China's Ethnic Minorities: The First Decade," 176.

Putonghua, namely the need for communication with the rest of China. By teaching *Putonghua* in schools based on this excuse, the party was able to target minority children for assimilation. This new generation would be able to understand CCP propaganda, and would be able to communicate with people outside of their birth culture. The long term result of this policy justified the fears of minority speakers. Despite *de jure* status as equal languages, minority languages in China are given *de facto* second-citizen status, as "in practice the Chinese government appears to have limited the legal status of minority languages by functionally classifying their writings systems in the early 1950's" in negative ways.[175] This places a stigma on not only the written forms of minority languages, but on the spoken forms as well. *Putonghua* has not yet succeeded in replacing Chinese minority languages or dialects, but it has at least managed to make them second-class languages behind the official version of Mandarin.

In these ways, *Putonghua* became a catalyst for changing the cultural landscape of China, transforming identities – and, in the CCP's hope, loyalties – from a regional focus to a more united culture centered around the Chinese Communist Party. This was only part of the ongoing CCP effort to completely transform China physically, economically, culturally, and linguistically. In the grand scheme of the Chinese nation, *Putonghua* increased the ability of government, business, and individuals to communicate with each other. But it also caused considerable upheaval in dialect and minority areas, where people were essentially required to learn an entirely new language and to accept passively the cultural realignment which followed.

[175] Mingland Zhou, "Minority Language Policy in China: Equality in Theory and Practice," in *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China: Theory and Practice Since 1949*, ed. Minglang Zhou (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 81.

Conclusion

Every state constructs the identity of its citizens in some way. In the United States, the common identity of vastly disparate states is centered around the myth of its founding and its living embodiment in the American Constitution. In mainland China, the state understood that not all Chinese could identify with a national mythos based on the communist takeover, at least not without several generations of cultivation for ideological staples such as the Long March and Mao's declaration at Tiananmen that the Chinese people had stood up. Language and education provided a means of beginning the process of accelerating the construction of a new Chinese identity by introducing another piece of mortar to unite all Chinese people. Chinese characters were also a symbol of a Chinese culture which seemed prior to the embarrassments of the Unequal Treaties to have been vindicated; even China's conquerors, such as the Manchus, adopted Chinese institutions and their written and spoken language. This meant that language was one of the historically relevant means of spanning the divide between China's geographical regions and its minorities, as many Chinese thinkers believed in creating a nation "established on Confucian cultural principles that would include non-Han peoples – such as the Manchus – as long as they accepted (Chinese) cultural principles;" although the CCP rejected the Confucian aspect of this vision, they shared the idea that "the nation builds upon a conception grounded in the imperial idea of political community."[176] Language was a means of establishing this kind of inclusive political community. This did not mean that there were no other motivations behind communist language reform. Certainly matters of political and cultural identification played a

[176] Prasenjit Duara, "Deconstructing the Chinese Nation," in *Chinese Nationalism*, ed. Jonathan Unger (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 34.

major part in language reform, but so did a genuine desire to bring literacy to the vast and mostly illiterate landscape of the Chinese rural population.

In his 1958 speech on language reform, Zhou Enlai noted that "in the two years since the publication of the scheme [of] the simplified characters…the broad mass of people have found them useful and convenient. The simplification has rendered a great service, particularly to children and adults who have begun to learn the characters."[177] At the time, it was a widely accepted fact in communist and international circles that Chinese, especially its characters, was a major hindrance to mass literacy. Wu Yuzhang noted that "in our primary schools, in six years students can only learn about one thousand characters, and, in addition, they are not necessarily secure in their knowledge of them," and even college graduates still experienced difficult with reading and writing characters, despite their extensive educational background.[178] This belief in the difficulty of learning to read and write Chinese can be traced back to the large amounts of time and training required for the literacy which allowed the dynastic elite to pass the Civil Service Exams. Such a history and a belief in the difficulty of Chinese drove years of dabbling by amateurs and government officials alike in phonetic alphabets, Esperanto, and simplified characters. These reformers cultivated an almost utopian faith in the potential for language reform to drastically improve the lives of ordinary Chinese. Communist officials were also swept up by this possibility.

The CCP had some good intentions, but some of its basic assumptions about language learning may have been flawed. Other Chinese speaking areas, such as Taiwan, successfully took other paths to literacy. Based on data for the early 2000's, the literacy rate in mainland China

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[177] Zhou Enlai, "Current Tasks of Reforming the Written Chinese Language," (1958), 8.
[178] Wu Yuzhang, "Writing Must Be Reformed Under Certain Conditions," in *Language Reform in China: Documents and Commentary*, ed. Peter J. Seybolt and Gregory Kuei-Ke Chiang (Kent, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1978), 55.

was 90.9% (2000) while in Taiwan it was 96.1% (2003) and in Hong Kong it was 93.5% (2002).[179] Traditional characters, supposedly barriers to literacy, are "called *zhengti zi* (orthodox characters) in Taiwan and Hong Kong because there it is still the official standard."[180] This shows that as of the early 2000's, despite continued use of *zhengti zi*, the literacy rate in both Hong Kong and Taiwan was actually slightly higher than that in mainland China, whose simplified characters and *pinyin* were supposed to eliminate literacy challenges. The main reason for this discrepancy in literacy is not Chinese characters themselves, but economic and geographical variations between these three regions. Hong Kong and Taiwan are, and have been, smaller, richer, highly urbanized areas.

Modern Hong Kong covers only 1,054 square kilometers of land area for a population of a little more than seven million souls, and has an urbanization rate of 100%.[181] Taiwan covers 32,980 square kilometers of land area for a population of 23 million.[182] By contrast, mainland China has a land area of 9,569, 901 square kilometers, a population of over one billion, and a modern urbanization rate of only 47% even after massive attempts to modernize and increase urbanization.[183] The mainland faced a herculean task in increasing literacy not because of the difficulty of Chinese characters but because of a massive population, economic weaknesses, and the gargantuan area of geography to be covered, some of which was extremely remote. Both Hong Kong and Taiwan had the advantage of being highly urbanized and economically

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[179] TH. Brinkhoff.,"Literacy Rates of the World," *World By Map*, http://world.bymap.org/LiteracyRates.html (accessed November 1, 2011).
[180] Zhao Shouhui and Richard B. Baldauf Jr., *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution, or Revolution?*, 30.
[180] Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 92.
[181] Central Intelligence Agency, "Hong Kong," *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/hk.html (accessed November 1, 2011).
[182] Central Intelligence Agency, "Taiwan," *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tw.html (accessed November 1, 2011).
[183] Central Intelligence Agency, "China," *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html (accessed November 1, 2011).

prosperous places, even in 1949, while mainland China was struggling to overcome its natural handicaps.

The mainland chose to simplify its script and developed a phonetic script, but Taiwan and Hong Kong followed different paths to their current high literacy rates. Although the Nationalist government dabbled in character simplification in 1935, it was never able to connect simplification to its image in the way the communists did, in great part because the government was forced to retract its simplification scheme. When the Guomindang (Nationalist) government fled to Taiwan, the image of simplification it took with it was closely connected to that of the communists. Consequently, simplified characters are not used in Taiwan. In this way the GMD connected its image to the protection of Chinese culture, in high contrast to CCP policy, but this also placed the GMD as the defender of the status quo. In 1949, the status quo was not something supported by many ordinary Chinese. Today, the use of traditional characters in Taiwan and simplified characters in mainland China, is yet another barrier separating these two culturally bound but politically disparate peoples.

The path of Taiwan from the Japanese occupation to the GMD takeover represents the close relationship between language and the creation of identity – both personal and political. The Japanese acquired the island of Taiwan in the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, only part of the territory nibbled away from Chinese control by a variety of foreign powers. “Through the public education system and the island’s official media – radio and newspapers – Taiwan’s ‘national language,’ Japanese was effectively promoted” as part of the overall Japanese effort to subjugate the island.[184] In Taiwan during WWII, “speaking Japanese as well as adopting a Japanese surname were important parts of the *kominka* movement, which aimed to transform Taiwanese

into [Japanese] imperial subjects."[185] Language was closely connected to identity. Specifically, the loyalty of a person to the Japanese colonial rulers could easily be demonstrated by speaking Japanese and taking a Japanese name, transforming language choice into a political choice. After the flight of the GMD to Taiwan, and their subsequent takeover of the island, Mandarin Chinese became "the island's sole official language, promoted as the language of instruction in all schools since 1945," although this represented only about 13% of the population of the island, the rest of whom spoke a variety of local dialects.[186]

There were several waves of enthusiasm for simplifying characters in Taiwan, but politics has repeatedly kept it from occurring because of the close association between the communist party and simplification. When Luo Kialun "proposed character simplification and received significant and enthusiastic support from the population" of Taiwan in the 1950s, it was "condemned by Chiang Kaishek as being 'orchestrated by the Communists across the Strait" – and the reform was quashed."[187] In fact, simplified characters are referred to in Taiwan as *fei zi* or 'bandit characters' to solidify their connection with the CCP and to fix their negative aspects in the minds of the Taiwanese.[188] "Politically, as long as Taiwan remains apart from the Mainland, groping for a new identity, the case of simplified vs complex [characters] will remain a point of disagreement."[189] This is a perfect example of how closely language and names can be tied to issues of ideological and personal identity. Because of its desperate desire to maintain a separate identity from the CCP, Taiwan continues to use traditional characters. Despite this,

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[184] Todd L. Sandel, "Linguistic Capital in Taiwan: The KMT's Mandarin Language Policy and Its Perceived Impact on Language Practices of Bilingual Mandarin and Tai-gi Speakers," *Language in Society* 32, no. 4 (September 2003): 528-529, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 13, 2011).
[185] Todd L. Sandel, "Linguistic Capital in Taiwan: The KMT's Mandarin Language Policy and Its Perceived Impact on Language Practices of Bilingual Mandarin and Tai-gi Speakers," 529.
[186] Ibid., 526-527.
[187] Shouhui Zhao, Richard Baldauf, Jr., *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution or Revolution?*, 37-38.
[188] Ibid., 216.
[189] Ibid., 217.

however, it has achieved a modern literacy rate of 96.1% without the benefit of simplified characters or *pinyin*.

Taiwan does employ a phonetic system, but once again because of its association with the communists of the mainland, this system is not *pinyin*. Instead, the GMD government adopted the *zhuyin fuhao* phonetic system, which was developed during the early years of the Republic of China and therefore had no association with the CCP. Recent events, however, show that language policy is still a contentious issue: "in 1999, the Taiwanese government announced the adoption of *hanyu pinyin* as the official spelling system for street and place names on the island, but the law was repealed in the following year after the Democratic Progressive Party took power."[190] At this point the motivation for changing phonetic systems is not so much increased literacy but is instead related to widespread international use of *pinyin*. "In 1982, the International Standards Organization officially recognized '*Pinyin*' as the international standard for the phonetic transcription of Chinese," meaning that *pinyin* is widely used not just in mainland China, but in the rest of the world.[191] This was part of a larger trend whereby the Republic of China on Taiwan steadily lost its former ability to represent the legitimate government of China. After U.S. rapprochement with China and the communist government appropriation of the Republic of China's seat at the United Nations, there was wider international acceptance of all things related to the formally shunned CCP, including *pinyin*.

In Taiwan, the official form of Mandarin spoken is known as *guoyu* (national language), as contrasted with the mainland's *Putonghua*, but in reality the *guoyu* "standard is practically the same as *Putonghua*."[192] This is because *guoyu* was the predecessor to *Putonghua*, and while the

[190] Chaofen Sun, *Chinese: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22.
[191] Zhou Youguang, "Understanding and Misunderstanding," *Journal of Macrolingustics*, no. 1(September 1992): 60.
[192] Chaofen Sun, *Chinese: A Linguistic Introduction*, 6.

name was changed, little else was transformed. Based on how the CCP defined *Putonghua*, "proponents of *Putonghua* were conceded only the name of the new standard while the supporters of the older *guoyu* movement won on most matters of substance. Looked at today, it is indeed difficult to see any substantial differences between the goals of the promoters of *guoyu* in the 1930's" and *Putonghua*.[193] Both *guoyu* and *Putonghua* take the Beijing dialect of Northern Mandarin as their basis for pronunciation. Once again, the different names reflect the desire of both the GMD and the CCP to disassociate themselves from anything related to the other party. In this case, the differences are only skin deep, but the change was important to both sides. The names also reflect the differing ideologies of the opposing parties. *Guoyu*, as a 'national language' seemed to exclude any other languages, and at the beginning of their rule, in the 1950's, the CCP believed in allowing its national minorities to speak their own languages. As a 'common speech,' *Putonghua* sounded like less of a threat to these minority languages, as the name gave the appearance of *Putonghua* as just one in a group of languages. By contrast, the GMD kept the term *guoyu* even after their move to Taiwan precisely because it conjured images of a single nation, in keeping with their desire to be seen as the single legitimate representative of the Chinese nation and the face of China for the world.

Just as much of the substance and many of the trappings of language reform differed between Taiwan and mainland China, Hong Kong, with its different masters, took yet another path to its current rate of high literacy. Hong Kong differed from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan in several important ways. It was under the control of the British until being returned to the CCP in 1997. In terms of language, most residents of Hong Kong, a small yet highly urbanized area, were literate but spoke Cantonese. Hong Kong residents continued to use traditional characters, as the territory was not under CCP control when its simplified characters

[193] Jerry Norman, *Chinese*, 135.

were promulgated. Due to the prevalence of Cantonese in Hong Kong, "Cantonese characters are the only dialect-specific characters used in print publications in Hong Kong."[194] This reflects the legacy of missionaries and other early language reformers, who focused on writing with phonetic systems and characters in dialects. By the time the movement for a centralized national language to trump dialects had fully developed, Hong Kong was under British control, isolated from many of the language trends of the mainland.

Cantonese is spoken by 93% of the population of Hong Kong.[195] Despite this, *Putonghua* is becoming more prevalent in the territory. This reflects the 1997 return to CCP control, as well as the fact that "there is a large number of visitors, officials and recent arrivals from China, and many people in Hong Kong can see it is in their interests to have at least a nodding acquaintance with *Putonghua*."[196] This is not so much a result of government policy forcing Hong Kong residents to acquire skills in *Putonghua* as a practical response to greater interaction with government officials, businessmen, and private citizens from the mainland. In the years leading up to the return of Hong Kong to the mainland, the CCP "use[d] linguistic tolerance in an attempt to placate Hong Kong," tacitly acknowledging in the Basic Law that Cantonese will still be fully accepted in the territory; this was to win hearts and minds in Hong Kong and to distinguish the CCP from the GMD, whose language policies with regard to non-Mandarin speakers in Taiwan were occasionally quite harsh.[197] The CCP seeks to balance its mainland policies regarding dialects and *Putonghua* with the special status of Hong Kong.

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[194] Shouhui Zhao and Richard Baldauf, Jr., *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution, or Revolution?*, 213.
[195] Mary S. Erbaugh, "Chinese Dialects as a Medium for Reconciliation within Greater China," Language in Society 24, no. 1 (March 1995): 80, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 13, 2011).
[196] Daniel Kane, *The Chinese Language: It's History and Current Usage* (North Claredon, Vermont: Tuttle, 2006), 23.
[197] Mary S. Erbaugh, "Chinese Dialects as a Medium for Reconciliation within Greater China," 86-87.

One of the most important elements to emerge from an examination of the differences in language reform in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, is that while one of the main goals of the CCP in its various language reform efforts was increased literacy, while Chinese literacy did increase after language reform, literacy in Taiwan and Hong Kong is even higher than that of the mainland, despite their continued use of traditional characters. This does not invalidate the intentions of officials who genuinely believed, like many scholars both in China and internationally at the time, that traditional Chinese characters were a barrier to literacy. And even if the main goal of language reform was indeed literacy, the development of *pinyin*, simplified characters, and *Putonghua* had other aims as well.

"Linguistic nationalism is a very recent phenomenon, dating largely from the 19th century," and in the past there were many successful empires and groups which encompassed multiple languages.[198] In an era of linguistic nationalism, sovereign states such as the People's Republic of China have sought to unite their nations by employing a common language. Minority groups, or break-off groups seeking to create and maintain their individual identities (such as case of Taiwan), can also use their own language to maintain this identity. Even within a particular culture or country, different languages and different usages of language – from informal to the most formal, can be used to distinguish identity. For example, "in their struggle for a positive social identity, the people in Taiwan can manipulate language to emphasize the identity they prefer to defend in a given role relationship in a particular setting."[199] Along these lines, a conquered or subjected people can use language to show their acceptance of – or resistance to – the regime, as some Chinese in Manchuria and Taiwan did during the Japanese occupation of WWII. This occurs because language is an intensely visible component of identity.

[198] Mary S. Erbaugh, "Chinese Dialects as a Medium for Reconciliation within Greater China," 82.

Such a phenomena – the visible and intensely personal nature of language use – means that language can be an important tool in uniting a state which, like the People's Republic of China, encompass a huge territory and a variety of people. A unitary state is not necessarily a sinister goal. It allows not only tighter government control but also more exchange between various regions, both of commerce and of ideas. It encourages citizens to attach their identity to the state, instead of to a smaller unit such as the village or province. A single language can also help bring minorities into the fold, giving them a chance to enter national discourse as equals, although this can be seen as a positive or a negative result of a single language.

China as a nation exercises a great deal of control over its citizens; exactly what is controlled has changed over time, but the strong hand employed by the government has been a constant feature of life in China throughout its history and especially since the communist Liberation in 1949. Control under the communists extended to a rewrite of Chinese culture, from what the communists viewed as "feudal" culture to a CCP-fabricated "proletarian" culture. Some of these changes had undeniable positive motivations, including the liberation of women and the outlawing of foot binding, and have greatly improved the lot of many Chinese. Even the policies which formed the Great Leap Forward had positive motivations, even if they ended in disaster. Policies such as language reform have been less spectacular in their results, and this means that these results are more controversial, and more dependent on point of view to assess if they have ultimately been positive or negative.

Literacy in China has indeed increased, although this can be attributed to increasing urbanization, access to schooling, and an improving economy as much as to language, as shown by the examples of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Another aim of language reform was to unite the

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[199] M. E. van den Berg, "Language Planning and Use in Taiwan," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 59 (1986): 110.

writing and speaking language of China under one standard. This can be, depending on the point of view, seen as either a self-serving or a benevolent goal on the part of the CCP. How much of China's unity can be contributed to language reform is debatable, but it has provided a visible means of showing the unity of the country. A major advantage of greater linguistic unity has been the ability of Chinese from any province to communicate with one other. On the other hand, however, this has forced many Chinese to learn two languages – their own dialect and also *Putonghua*. It has also served to subvert dialectal identity beneath the identity offered by the centralized state.

Language reform in China has proceeded in halting steps, from the dabbling of missionaries to the schemes of the CCP, but it has survived every disruptive attempt, from bloody wars to the Cultural Revolution. Today, *Putonghua* can be heard throughout mainland China and Hong Kong. *Pinyin* has become the international standard for Romanizing Chinese. Simplified characters are used to give many Chinese children access to literacy that their ancestors could not have dreamed of. The communist vision for language reform has succeeded against all of its opponents.

This communist vision allowed the continuance of a grand Chinese state tradition – the control of the populace through language. While the dynasties controlled access to language and therefore maintained the status of the elite, and the powers of Republican China used promises to reform language to keep reformers from pursuing other changes which would more seriously disrupt the status quo, the communist scheme granted widespread access to language and then used propaganda disseminated in simplified characters and *Putonghua* to mobilize the general populace.

For the first time, however, the Chinese are beginning to take control of their language. Bloggers use homophones to get around government censorship. The Chinese language fills the internet, where petitions and articles critical of the government appear. The Democracy Wall Movement of 1979-1980 would not have reached many people if there had not existed widespread access to language. With the help of the Information Age, the Chinese are beginning to use the internet to take control of their language from the government. For example, Chinese dissidents like Wang Bo use symbolism and homophones in an attempt to register criticism that will get through the internet censors. In one case, Wang Bo used the symbolism of cracked sunflower seeds and a homophone of 艾（哎）in order to protest the arrest of Chinese dissident Ai Weiwei.[200] Throughout the rest of Chinese history, whoever controlled language, from the emperors to the premiers, controlled the people. Now, for the first time, the people have nascent control of their own language.

[200] Brook Larmer, "The Dangerous Politics of Internet Humor in China: Where an Internet Joke is Not Just a Joke," *New York Times*, October 26, 2011.

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