With One Voice: Reinventing Language and Nation in China

By

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Abstract

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Examining language and nation-building in China, this dissertation argues that language is malleable, not only in its function in society, but also in its form. Moreover, I argue that a change in form (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) can also facilitate a change in function. I show how language reformers in China sought to broaden literacy and education among the people by creating a language that was easier to learn. In detailing the course of Chinese language reform over the early decades of the twentieth century, I find existing social theory—particularly that of Bourdieu—unequal to the task of explaining the revolutionary transformation of language practices, not only in China, but also among its East Asian neighbors, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

Pierre Bourdieu's examinations of language, to be sure, do not produce a general theory of language so much as they incorporate linguistic thinking into a larger theory of symbolic power. Borrowing from structuralism's contention that symbolic systems such as language are internally structured, Bourdieu argued that this internal structuredness enables the structuring of social experience. He treats language as a form of cultural capital, one that can be transubstantiated through the education system into social and economic capital on the labor market. Capital is unequally distributed in society, and this inequality gives rise to the structure of symbolic systems: in the case of language, the hierarchical distinctions we make in types of language that differ in prestige and legitimacy. Bourdieu argued that these symbolic inequalities enable the reproduction of social inequalities.

This reading of language's role in society runs into problems when we look beyond its Western European empirical basis. In China in particular (and in East Asia in general) the abrupt break with longstanding language practices ended the social reproduction that they had long enabled. China, along with Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, had been bound for nearly two millennia by the use of Classical Chinese as a supranational lingua franca among the literate elite. This language defies the common Eurocentric understanding of writing as purely auxiliary to, dependent on, and representative of speaking—a notion today termed "phonocentrism." Primarily a written medium, Classical Chinese can, of course be read aloud. But, because it is written in characters that only partially and vaguely correspond with specific sounds, the language can be read aloud using any number of regional pronunciation systems—including those that are only notionally

based on forms of spoken Chinese, as in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam for hundreds of years. Thus, Classical Chinese as a medium of writing, to an extreme degree, stands independent from spoken language.

Under Western pressure and influence, intellectuals after China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) saw Classical Chinese as an impediment to modernization. Phonocentrism ruled the day: following the Japanese example, reformers sought to narrow the huge gap between the written and spoken languages. Mandarin was the national standard that emerged from fractious debates among intellectuals. Pieced together from existing language practices, Mandarin drew from the idea of *guanhua,* the traditional lingua franca of imperial officialdom that was strongly influenced by the speech of the imperial court that had resided starting in 1368 in Nanjing. This city's speech retained an influence on the language long after the Ming dynasty's relocation of the capital to Beijing in 1421. Beijing's own speech only really began exerting influence in the mid-nineteenth century. By the 1930s, after two decades of cantankerous debates among language reformers, the more or less final form of Mandarin was based primarily (though not exclusively) on the pronunciation of Beijingers with a "middle school education." The new language's written counterpart was modeled on the vernacular novels of the past few centuries and advocated by the leading intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement.

This new language differed from its predecessors not just in form but also in function. Unlike Classical Chinse, it was not intended just for an elite few. Instead, it was meant to be widely accessible, so as to unite a nascent and fragile post-imperial Chinese nation. It did so by hewing more closely to the everyday speech of modestly educated people. This conscious reflection of living practice by the new language was meant to make it easier to learn, thus raising literacy rates and enabling national strengthening. Thus, language standardization in China was an attempt at social leveling, contrary to the Bourdieusian contention that language standardization sustains an elite exclusivity that helps reproduce social inequality.

In this dissertation, I show how the sound system of Mandarin was designed to suit a nationalist vision of society, and how such a nationalized language represented a reimagining of how languages and peoples are linked. I also show how the materiality of language was implicated in this reform process when intellectuals sought to simplify the script by compelling equipment changes in the publishing industry. All of these changes, I then demonstrate, took place amid parallel linguistic shifts in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, whose own language practices underwent nationalizing transformations. Finally, I show how the changes in language policy in China produced the ever more stringent equating of language, ethnicity, and nation that we see in the country today.

To my mother and my father

Contents

Acknowledgements

A pandemic is not how I imagined the circumstances in which my graduate career would end. Finishing this dissertation meant that I would have been working alone most of the time anyway, but the upheavals I was writing about were eerily magnified by the enforced solitude that descended on the country. Cataclysm prompts retrospection. How did I get here? Certainly not alone. From an uncertain beginning as a fledgling graduate student, to the euphoria of being in the thick of research, and finally to a surreal, almost somnambulant ending, I have become the latest generation to be granted the privilege of accumulating a long list of scholarly debts. I will, however inadequately, attempt a just accounting.

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Introduction

In January 1923, in the midst of an illness, noted Chinese writer Hu Shih (1891–1962) penned a short essay that introduced an issue of a monthly magazine popularizing China's new national language, Mandarin. The issue for which he wrote discussed ways of reforming the Chinese script. Written Chinese was, and still is, not an alphabetic language. Instead, people must memorize several thousand characters to become literate. Many early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals saw the complexity of the writing system as a barrier keeping most people from learning how to read. For them, mass illiteracy weakened a nation under threat from colonial encroachment abroad and social collapse at home. In his essay, Hu argued that, "as a general principle, when it came to the historical development of language, the masses had always been the innovators, while the literati had always been the stubborn resisters." Therefore, in his view, "In order to promote the renovation of the language, the literati needed to understand that their job was to study trends in the language of the masses, select among their suggestions for reform, and give them official recognition" (Hu S. 1923, 1–2).

It is hard to overstate how revolutionary this statement was. For the preceding two thousand years, literacy was the exclusive province of a privileged minority. But now, Hu was telling his fellow intellectuals, it was time to listen to ordinary people, learn from their experience, and follow their example. In so arguing, Hu and other likeminded intellectuals were applying lessons from Europe's past to China's present. Chinese intellectuals saw political and cultural decay leading to social instability and material want, and so they looked to the Renaissance, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution to discern the sources of Western strength. They observed Westerners making use of standard languages derived from national vernaculars that had succeeded Latin as mediums of education, scholarship, and governance in the late Middle Ages. Based on this perception, which was perhaps an oversimplification, they concluded that mass literacy was one of the reasons why Western nations had become strong and unified. On the other hand, the lack of mass literacy in China was one of the main shortcomings in its confrontation with an increasingly hostile modern world.

For reformers, the encroachments of Western imperialism into Chinese economic, political, and social life in the nineteenth century revealed the untenability of Qing rule in particular and the imperial system in general. Particularly galling was the civil examination system, which underpinned the cultural and political legitimacy of the Qing court and had supplied personnel to imperial bureaucracies for more than a thousand years. The examinations tested candidates' knowledge of a literary and philosophical canon written in Classical Chinese, which served as the medium of elite communication not just in China itself, but also in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam for two millennia. Studying this language and its literary canon could take many years, and as a result much of the population was effectively excluded from this form of empowering literacy (Elman 2000). Mass illiteracy was hardly at issue in prior times, when ordinary people the world over were mere bystanders to political developments (Naquin 2000, 359). Literacy, however, went hand-in-hand with new forms of behavior that the post-imperial state sought to inculcate in the people, ranging from a new ethos of participatory citizenship to the mass mobilizations of the post-1949 People's Republic (Culp 2007, 1). In the last hundred years or so, China has gone from a society in which at least seventy percent of the population was illiterate to a nation-state in which the whole population, at least in principle, has been folded into a system of educational meritocracy and political participation (Elman 2013, 132; Rawski 1979, 22). How did this monumental change occur?

Language reform in early twentieth-century China was a social project. This state-led effort was arguably the largest and most extreme attempt at social engineering in history, now affecting the language practices of more than one billion people. The invention of spoken Mandarin, along with the increasing use of vernacular written Chinese, were aimed at creating a linguistic medium that was accessible to all. Widespread literacy, reformers believed, was key to national rejuvenation and global power, thus ending China's subaltern position in world affairs. Moreover, language was deliberately implicated in the sharpening of boundaries around ethnic identity in China, particularly the Han majority, thus enabling the tightening of the relationship among Mandarin, Hanness, and Chineseness, now increasingly in evidence. The Chinese case demonstrates how changes in language's form (its pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) can be intentionally made to ease the transformation of its function in society. This deliberate effort thus exposes the shortcomings of current social theory on language, which dismisses the possibility that language can be modified in such a top-down manner. In the Chinese case, the function of the state's official language was deliberately shifted from being a tool of elite distinction to one of mass communication. Language is therefore a symbolic system can be purposely changed, a possibility that leads to transformations in society.

From Obscurity to Hegemony: The Sociological Context of Chinese Language Reform

China acquired what is roughly its current territorial extent in the eighteenth century. At that time, under a succession of able emperors of the ruling Qing dynasty (1644–1911), China conquered a vast collection of lands, particularly in its far west in central Asia, along with a kaleidoscopic amalgamation of ethnic groups. It was thus a multinational empire on par with those of the Romanovs, the Ottomans, and the Hapsburgs. As nineteenth century opened, China had been the preeminent power in East Asia for nearly two thousand years, its presence disproportionate not only in territory and population, but also in cultural impact. Its language—Classical Chinese—was also the scholarly and governmental lingua franca in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The literature written in this ancient and abstruse language—one that functioned much like Latin in premodern Europe—was canonical throughout the region. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the situation had begun to change radically. Beset by foreign threats from expanding colonial powers, particularly Britain, in pursuit of trade, and by rising internal disorders, including the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), perhaps the deadliest civil war in world history, the Qing empire lost its hegemonic position in the region's culture and politics and collapsed in 1911. The end of empire plunged China into a chaotic republican interregnum that ended in a wholesale attempt at conquest by Japan. Japan's defeat in 1945 was followed in short order by a civil war that ended in a Communist victory in 1949.

China's linguistic revolution broke out amid this great social upheaval. The country's official language, Mandarin, was effectively cobbled together by a relatively small group of intellectuals, who reassembled existing language practices into a new written and spoken standard. They painted existing elite language practices in broad strokes: as an invented category, what reformers called "Classical Chinese" lumped together diverse literatures spanning more than a thousand years (Shang 2002, 2014). Reformers branded Classical Chinese a barrier to widespread literacy, and thus the cause of mass ignorance and national weakness. These intellectuals—many of whom had been educated in the West—drew on vernacular literature and speech to fashion a new language for a defunct multinational empire they reimagined as a multiethnic nation. China was not the only place in which such a national linguistic revolution occurred. Similar changes occurred in its neighbors Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, and many other examples of nation-building through language standardization can be found throughout Asia and Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What distinguishes China most is the scale on which this linguistic nation-building project was attempted. China's standard language, Mandarin, is now the world's largest language by number of speakers, and China's ethnic majority, the Han, is now the world's largest ethnic group. Neither was created ex nihilo. Mandarin's immediate antecedent bases, Beijing dialect and the imperial court language *guanhua*, had existed in recognizable form for centuries. Notions of a Han ethnic identity, moreover, had existed through dynasties spanning the previous millennium. In their modern form, however, both China's standard language and its ethnic majority are recent inventions. The very clarity of the state-defined social and symbolic boundaries that delineate language and ethnicity testifies to the modern imperatives that drove their creation in the first place: the need to conform to a world composed ever more exclusively of sovereign nation-states, each competing against the others for political and economic influence.

Language and Social Reproduction: Bourdieusian Theory

Language reform in China ultimately sought to transform the social order. Joel Andreas (2009, 2019) has explored the social leveling efforts of the People's Republic of China in Bourdieusian terms. In particular, he examined its attempts, after coming to power in 1949, to eliminate class distinctions based on economic, cultural, and political capital. He found that, although the Party was unable to succeed when it came to eliminating distinctions based on political capital, it made far more progress with the other two types, economic and cultural capital. While the Communist Party's political outlook differed greatly from that of its predecessor regime, many of the policies it enacted had roots in the republican period. In language policy, in particular, there was a striking amount of continuity after 1949.The standardization of language, one of the most fundamental efforts at social leveling in terms of cultural capital, originated during the republican period (1911–1949). Most of the republican era's language policies were carried over unchanged by the Communists. Indeed, the biggest difference between the Nationalists and the Communists was the greater ability of the latter to enact the agenda of the former. The invention of spoken Mandarin and the increasingly widespread use of vernacular written Chinese were aimed at creating a linguistic medium that was accessible to all. Mandarin speech and vernacular writing have now become the ways through which education and social advancement are attained in China.

In the study of language in China, the use of Bourdieusian concepts is particularly apposite. For Bourdieu, linguistic divisions were indicators of class divisions and power relations more broadly. Reformers in republican China sought to break the power of Classical Chinese by devaluing it as a form of cultural capital. In its place, they elevated a newly invented category of practice, a "national" speech (*guoyu*) and "vernacular" writing (*baihua*). Reformers had dethroned Classical Chinese institutionally in the last years of the Qing dynasty when they succeeded in abolishing the civil examination system in 1905. Inventing a new language that they imagined as more egalitarian was the work of the next few decades. Bourdieu's thinking is difficult to apply to the Chinese case, however, because it is largely presentist in outlook. He does refer to the historical development of standard French, but he is uninterested in delving into the transition away from the Latin-dominated elite linguistic order that the national vernaculars, French among them, replaced. His orientation thus both reflected and reinforced the prevailing sociological understanding of language, which is rooted in the phenomena of the present. Scholars of language for much of the twentieth century have argued that there is nothing inherently superior about standard languages; all languages, in their view, are "grammatical" in the sense that they are governed by internally consistent rules. Thus, they ought to be considered impartially, and discrimination based on linguistic differences (dialect, accent, or otherwise) is unscientific at best and invidious at worst (Bloomfield 1933, 22; Labov 1972, 3–10, 2006, 9; Lippi-Green 1997, 10). To most people, standard languages are tantamount to foreign languages. Rural schoolchildren in Third-Republic France struggled to learn a standard that was "artificial" and "alien to the spoken tongue" (E. Weber 1976, 336). For many sociolinguists, "standard language ideology" dictates that standard languages are "not the possession of the native speakers," because such languages must be "formally taught" in order to be mastered (Milroy 2001, 537).

The political-economic implications of linguistic differences were, in Bourdieu's view, woefully downplayed by "modern general linguistics" (Bourdieu 1991, 44), the most emblematic scholars of which, for him, were Comte, Saussure, Bloomfield, and Chomsky. He lambasted linguists for assuming a sort of "linguistic communism"; that is, seeing language as a symbolic system that formed an inexhaustible resource, one that was "universally and uniformly accessible" (Bourdieu 1991, 43). Bourdieu saw philosopher and originator of positivism Auguste Comte as an early exemplar of this "illusion" (Bourdieu 1991, 43): Comte had argued that language formed "a kind of wealth" that was inexhaustible and freely available (Comte 1875, 2:213). This assertion was later taken up by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, founder of structural linguistics, who saw language as "a treasure" possessed by all members of a community (Saussure [1916] 2011, 13, 233). For Bourdieu, this structuralist conception of language was in error for ignoring the "social and economic conditions of the appropriation of language" (Bourdieu 1991, 43), an orientation that in his eyes lived on in the linguistics of structuralist Leonard Bloomfield and generativist Noam Chomsky. In Bloomfield, linguistic communism was to be found embedded in his concept of a "speech-community," that is, a "a group of people who use the same system of speech-signals" (Bloomfield 1933, 29), which Bourdieu thought ignored "the political and institutional conditions" necessary for "intercomprehension" (Bourdieu 1991, 45). In Chomsky, linguistic communism was manifested in his assertion that the proper object of linguistic theory was "an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly" (Chomsky 1965, 3–4), an attitude Bourdieu found to be at least intellectually honest, but that, again, ignored the "economic and social conditions" under which linguistic competence was acquired (Bourdieu 1991, 43–44).

This criticism, read on its own terms, mischaracterizes linguistics. Comte, on the same page that Bourdieu cited, noted that language as a resource is vulnerable to abuse by rentiers who "set up claims to distinction in the use of it" without contributing to "the intellectual wealth of language" (Comte 1875, 2:213). Saussure, in conceptually dividing language between *langue* (language as code) and *parole* (language as practice), was simply asserting that the proper focus of linguistic study was *langue* and not *parole* (Saussure [1916] 2011, 13–14). He thus prioritized "internal linguistics"—the study of *langue*—over "external linguistics"—that is, its social, political, economic, or institutional contexts. This order of precedence, however, was not to deny that such study was "fruitful," but rather to say that understanding the internal did not necessitate examining the external (Saussure [1916] 2011, 20–22). Chomsky's reliance on standard English for his pioneering studies in generative linguistics was simply an arbitrary choosing of a socially salient version of the language—one familiar to his readers (Hasan 1999, 36); but that is not to say that this choice has gone unquestioned (Milroy 2001, 544). Bourdieu's criticism of Bloomfield is curious, given Bloomfield's stated resolve to remain agnostic on the social status of language varieties and his later influence on descriptivist denunciations of linguistic elitism (Acocella 2012; Russell 1962, 331; Wallace 2001, 45). More puzzling might be Bourdieu's casual dismissal of contemporaneous scholars, such as Basil Bernstein and William Labov, as being in thrall to structuralism and implicitly dependent on the standard language. After all, their work on the sociology of language might actually be considered more allied than not to Bourdieu's own point of view (Bourdieu 1991, 53; Burawoy 2018, 86; Hasan 1999, 43). Overall, the field of linguistics is more diverse than Bourdieu's fetishization of structuralism suggests, and the sociologically inclined among its practitioners had never accepted the structuralist emphasis on *langue,* an opposing position acknowledged by Saussure himself (Hasan 1999, 31; Saussure [1916] 2011, 21). In fact, many scholars have taken social context into account since at least the 1930s, decades before Bourdieu's own intervention (Hasan 1999, 37).

Confronting Bourdieu on his statements about language and linguistics, as we have seen, easily opens him to "withering criticism" (Hanks 2005, 68). Linguistic anthropologist William Hanks argues that a "second-order" reading is a more productive way to understand Bourdieu: that is, "Bracket what Bourdieu claims about language directly, and focus instead on what he says about other aspects of social life" (Hanks 2005, 69). To Bourdieu, the larger problem with the structuralist focus on language as a "code" at the expense of its realization as a practice within a social context was an error that carried over into structuralist thinking in the social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology (Bourdieu 1990, 30–34, 1991, 37; Thompson 1991, 3–4). As for language itself, the implication was that one could not even study a language's form without a prior understanding of the social conditions of its formation. Here, his arguments closely paralleled similar contentions made in the 1920s and 1930s by two Marxist analysts of language and politics: Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov and Antonio Gramsci. Voloshinov, writing in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, argued that "verbal interaction" was "the basic reality of language" (Voloshinov [1929] 1986, 94). Language was not "an individual creative act," as conceived by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Karl Vossler, and Benedetto Croce, or "a closed, self-contained system," as conceived by Saussure and Durkheim (Voloshinov [1929] 1986, 48). Writing in Italy at roughly the same time as Voloshinov, Grasmci argued that an intensification of the "quistione della lingua"—a reference to Renaissance debates over the proper form of the vernacular—signaled larger changes in the "governing class"; that is, a reorganization of "the cultural hegemony" (Gramsci 1991, 183–84). For him, language had no real existence apart from the conditions favorable to its diffusion and widespread use—thus the failure of top-down efforts to impose artificially designed languages on ordinary people, whether an archaic Florentine as an Italian national language or an artificially constructed Esperanto as a global auxiliary language (Gramsci 1991, 27, 172–73).

Despite his apparent confutation of structuralism and his evident disregard for Marxist viewpoints on language, Bourdieu nevertheless appropriated key elements of both schools of thought into his theory of symbolic power. First, Bourdieu drew from structuralism's insight that symbolic systems are themselves structured. Because they are structured, symbolic systems are used to structure reality. The structuring of reality, in turn, feeds back into reinforcing the original symbolic systems. Then, because symbolic systems arise from disparities of power, they reproduce and justify the same disparities from which they arise. And because symbolic systems arise from and correspond with disparities of power, these systems conceal from both their producers (e.g., intellectuals, artists, clergy) and non-producers (everyone else) the systems' own naturalization of the power disparities from which they arose, thus enabling these disparities' reproduction. Hence, echoing Gramsci's concept of hegemony, symbolic power involves the complicity of both those who exercise it and those who are subject to it (Bourdieu 1991, 164–69; Hanks 2005, 77). Thus, we might consider language an internally structured symbolic system that is used to structure the social world. Building on Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts, Bourdieu notes that the categories supplied by and enacted through language create the social and symbolic boundaries—contracts, marriages, families, rights, obligations, ethnicities, nations—that delimit our social lives. The production and maintenance of these categories in turn reinforce the symbolic system—language—that helped bring those boundaries in the first place (Bourdieu 1991, 72–76; Hanks 2005, 76; Thompson 1991, 8–9).

Bourdieu incorporated this conception of symbolic power into his theory of the state by adding the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence to Weber's famous definition of the state as the political community with a monopoly of legitimate physical force (Bourdieu 1994, 3, 2014, 4; M. Weber [1919] 2015, 136). In practice, for Bourdieu, this meant that the state was in a position to define many of the boundaries, distinctions, and categories of social life (Bourdieu 1991, 170; Loveman 2005, 1655). Thus, as we have seen, the state has often been able to define the form and boundaries of "legitimate" language: in effect, to standardize the language. Codifying a standard language is concomitant with devaluing alternate forms as *patois,* dialect, colloquial, or slang—in short, substandard. Moreover, standardization went hand-in-hand with nation-building. Relying on the case of France, Bourdieu notes that language unification began with the building of the "monarchical state" and intensified after the French Revolution. The postrevolutionary zeal for spreading standard Parisian French advantaged such members of the bourgeoisie as "priests, doctors, or teachers," whose livelihoods depended on their mastery of the standard language, as opposed to the many local dialects spoken by the illiterate lower classes (Bourdieu 1991, 46–48).

To explain how the "dominant class" perpetuated its status, Bourdieu posited that language was deployed in a "field" of power, characterized "linguistic relations of power based on the unequal distribution of linguistic capital," a form of symbolic capital. Bourdieu argued that the linguistic field operated like a market, in which elites, using the state, defined linguistic capital in terms of their own language. Unification of the linguistic field thus entailed a consolidation of measures of value of utterances, all of which were now compared with the state-defined standard. Within the linguistic field, Bourdieu saw language as a form of cultural capital, acquired through repeated exposure in school, a mechanism through which class differences were reproduced. Since schools were the gateway to the labor market, the linguistic capital they imparted could then be converted by graduates to economic and political capital. Thus, conceiving of language as operating in a field of power, in which individual actors and groups competed for distinction, the standard language was destined to become ever more out of reach of the less privileged, thus ensuring the social reproduction of the elite. Language thus reflects class divisions. It is also a symbolic system in which standards of correctness and eloquence are inculcated by schools and thus naturalized among ordinary people, thus reproducing those same class divisions (Bourdieu 1991, 57–65). Language in Bourdieu's conceptual scheme is therefore not "simply an epiphenomenon" of social distinctions (Hasan 1999, 51), but rather both their consequence and their cause in a cycle of reinforcement.

In his discussion of language, Bourdieu urges us to look beyond language's form—its pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar—and instead focus on its function—its role in constituting and reproducing power relations and boundaries in social life. Insofar as form is implicated in the functioning of language, according to Bourdieu, its features—an accent, say, or word choice or syntactical variation—mainly serve as arbitrary indexical markers of underlying social differences, such as class or ethnicity (Bourdieu 1991, 54, 109, 113). Hasan (1999, 74) has criticized this approach to language as an overemphasis on "external linguistics" that precluded the possibility of social change, particularly through education. Others have criticized Bourdieusian theory for failing to account for social change altogether (E. Hobsbawm 2016; Riley 2017), although some dispute this accusation (Gorski 2013a; Heilbron and Steinmetz 2018; Schlerka 2018).

Whether or not Bourdieu's theory accounts for social change, his conception of language as a structured symbolic system embedded in and constitutive of power relations certainly denied that the specific features of language's form could be linked to those same power relations in anything beyond an arbitrary and indexical way. Indeed, he even suggested that linguistic form, dependent as it was on being "impalpably inculcated, through a long and slow process of acquisition" (i.e., misrecognition, complicity—in short, hegemony) was resistant to intentional change (Bourdieu 1991, 50, 258n12, 258n15). Even minor changes in spelling were difficult to achieve through state decrees, often provoking popular resistance (Bourdieu 1994, 1–2). For Bourdieu, then, the national unification of language through standardization consisted in an endless "competitive struggle" of agents within the field of language to modify their linguistic practices ("pronunciation, diction, syntactic devices, etc.") using strategies "strictly dependent on their positions in the structure of the distribution of linguistic capital," which in turn was mediated by access to education, an access itself dependent on "the structure of class relations." This struggle, for Bourdieu, was sometimes inaccurately described by others as a process of "cultural diffusion" (Bourdieu 1991, 64). Thus, language is likened to a tool. Human agents make strategic use of this tool in daily life and seek to increase their skills in wielding this tool as they are able. But the form or shape of this tool, in Bourdieu's opinion, was not susceptible to any substantial change.

Implications of Chinese Language Reform for Social Theory

Bourdieu's denial of the possibility of changing linguistic form—or inventing new languages altogether—runs into problems when we consider cases beyond Western Europe, in which nation-building involved drastic, intentional changes in linguistic form made to suit new functions. Examples of such linguistic malleability abound. Ottoman Turkish, a language written (by an educated elite) in a modified Arabic alphabet, with large proportion of Arabic and Persian loanwords, became Modern Turkish. This modern language was written using a modified Latin alphabet (by ordinary people newly incorporated into a mass education system), with foreign loanwords largely replaced by those of native origin. Modern Hebrew was revived for use in the late nineteenth century, with many neologisms adapted for modern life, and became the official language of Israel. Some of the most extreme instances of linguistic change occurred in the countries of Asia that formerly employed Classical Chinese as their elite lingua franca: China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The latter three countries ended their use of the language as an educated medium and standardized vernacular forms for use in schools and everyday life. In writing, Japan vastly decreased the number of Chinese characters in common use in the first half of the twentieth century; Korea, both North and South, largely replaced Chinese characters with a native alphabet by the 1990s; and Vietnam was writing in the Latin alphabet by the middle of the twentieth century.

Curiously, however, Benedict Anderson has separated the nationalism of Japan from that of Vietnam (and French Indochina more broadly). He sees Japan as participating in the wave of nineteenth-century "official nationalisms" that built on the linguistic nationalism that emerged from the expansion of print capitalism that began during the Renaissance. The country's unity, in Anderson's view, was facilitated by a "half-Sinified ideographic reading system" that bridged regional linguistic differences (Anderson 1991, 96). Vietnam, however, Anderson characterized as part of the "last wave," that is, "twentieth-century nationalisms" that arose primarily in the wake of the First World War that drew "modularly" on "earlier models of nationalism" (Anderson 1991, 113, 135). Although temporally speaking, Japanese nationalism did coincide with the European forms that both threatened and influenced it, separating Japan from Vietnam is a mistake. The "half-Sinified" writing to which Anderson referred was actually, until the end of the nineteenth century, a fully Sinitic (if not outright Chinese) written language that spanned great expanses of space and time, uniting the literati of most of East Asia for more than a thousand years (Kornicki 2018). Thus Anderson erroneously characterized "Imperial China" as a society in which "reach of the mandarinal bureaucracy and of painted characters largely coincided," in contrast in Europe, where "no sovereign could monopolize Latin" (Anderson 1991, 40–41). Classical Chinese transcended political boundaries and, as Kornicki argues, was not seen as exclusively Chinese or, outside of China, as a "foreign language" (Kornicki 2018, 41). Nevertheless, the myth that Chinese unity was facilitated by the nonalphabetic nature of its writing system has proven hard to dispel (E. J. Hobsbawm 1990, 56; Wimmer 2018, 113–39).

China itself was also part of the nationalizing trends at the turn of the twentieth century, and it was a particularly extreme case. Having become, through conquest, many times larger than each of its neighboring countries, China had for centuries possessed the world's largest population, a diverse collection of people who numbered more than 400 million by the end of the nineteenth century. China's unity thus could not be taken for granted when its last imperial dynasty, the Qing, collapsed in 1911. Comparable in size to the whole of the European continent, China in the early twentieth century was a multiethnic and polyglot empire. Even its ostensible ethnic majority, the Han, was fragmented into many different language groups. Starting about a century ago, Chinese intellectuals and political leaders engaged in project of national unification, a key part of which was linguistic unification. American scholarship on modern Chinese language reform began in the late 1940s with the influential works of John DeFrancis (1948, 1950, 1984a), who influenced the next two generations of scholarship in linguistics (P. Chen 1999; Coblin 2000, 2007; Coblin and Barrett 1997; Norman 1988; Ramsey 1987). Starting in the 1990s, scholars of comparative literature also contributed landmark works that illuminated changes in Chinese language in the early twentieth century (Gunn 1991; L. Liu 1995; Shang 2002, 2014). Interest has surged in the past two decades, with Elisabeth Kaske's (2004, 2006, 2008) work spurring a whole slew of innovative research focusing on reforms in script and speech in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (J. Y. Chen 2019; Kuzuoglu 2018; Söderblom Saarela 2016; Tam 2020; Zhong 2019; Tsu 2010).

These works have shown how Chinese intellectuals, working within the state, essentially invented a new national spoken and written language that broke with its historical antecedents and was distinct from any living vernacular. In short, they changed the form of language to make it more easily learnable. No longer was literacy to be restricted to a privileged minority. The new national standard language was intended for everyone, and mass literacy ultimately would mean political unity and national strength. In short, the Chinese case contradicts the Bourdieusian formula, in which the form of language is resistant to change and thus the structure of society is resistant to change. Instead, Chinese reformers drastically changed the language itself in order to change the structure of society.

The notion of symbolic power, nevertheless, has proved durable among scholars, who in the last decade have built on Bourdieu to show how the state is often the site of classification struggles over ethnicity and nation (Gorski 2013b; Loveman 2014; Mora 2014). Ethnoracial boundaries themselves are often identified with linguistic boundaries. We have long known, however, that linguistic boundaries only sometimes line up with ethnic boundaries, and that ethnic boundaries only sometimes line up with national boundaries. Multiethnic and polyglot nations are the rule rather than the exception. Moreover, the content enclosed by these boundaries—the cultural signifiers such as clothing, customs, food, and beliefs—often is not symmetrical or commensurate across comparable groups (Wimmer 2013, 26). Thus the ethnic Hui—who live in many different parts of China, speaking different languages, eating different foods, and wearing different clothes—are defined solely by their Muslim religion, while the Uighurs, until recently the ethnic majority in China's far western region of Xinjiang, are defined by their common language, though the overwhelming majority are also Muslim (Gladney 2004). What makes China interesting is its explicit insistence on being a multiethnic nation-state while claiming that the world's largest ethnic group, the Han, constitutes more than 91 percent of its population, and that the world's most-spoken language, Mandarin, is the Han language. Such an alignment of language, ethnicity, and nation is a national project carried out deliberately by the state.

Defining what constitutes membership in a particular nation has often been the focus of much contestation (Duara 1995, 4, 16; Tam 2020, 8–9). We must also remember, however, that the symbols of membership and nationhood themselves—languages, ethnicities—are also subject to contestation and intentional modification. The boundaries of whiteness, for instance, have been argued over and changed over the course of American history. While adamantly excluding certain minorities, whiteness as a category has grown to include more European groups over the past two centuries (C. Fox and Guglielmo 2012). Hanness and Chineseness have also been subject to contestation and remolding. The lines drawn around the Han, in particular, gained greater clarity under state policy in the twentieth century. Having remained at more than ninety percent of the population under its modern definition, Hanness is often elided with Chineseness, especially in state policy. Hanness increasingly appears to represent a narrowing vision of what it means to be Chinese. For the past few decades, the state has unrelentingly urged people nationwide to speak Mandarin, and it has escalated its quashing of the cultural and religious particularities of ethnic minorities (Tam 2020, 13).

Put in these terms, the similarities between China and the United States highlight how similar pressures operate in each society in particular ways, in spite of their very different local contexts, and more generally how both are inseparable parts of larger global economic and political dynamics. China has been a major node in global trade for millennia, and it has felt the impact of global capital flows since the influx of New World silver during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Even before the irruption of European colonial expansion into East Asia in the nineteenth century, the eighteen-century Canton trade in the south of China tied the country to global markets, especially with respect to the movement of globally traded commodities like tea and silk (A. B. Liu 2016, 2019; Platt 2012). When we look at China as a continuous and integral part of an ever-evolving global modernity—of which capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism are but a few of the most notable features—we see the spectacle of familiar social processes playing out in very a different context. Both industrial capitalism and a national military require a literate populace. In the nation- and empire-states of Europe, this manifested itself through the spread of the spoken and written languages of the ruling classes, which had gradually emerged as educated vernaculars most noticeably during the late medieval and Renaissance periods. In China and its Asian neighbors—Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—this meant the virtual invention of new spoken and written languages in imitation of European practices that made use of local vernacular antecedents in new ways and contexts. In short, similar ideas and similar processes, but with vastly different cultural raw materials and perhaps taken to more of an extreme in the Asian cases.

Argument and Plan

In this dissertation, I examine language and nation-building in China. I argue that language, as an area of social practice, is susceptible to intentional change. The phonology (pronunciation), lexicon (vocabulary), and syntax (grammar) of a language can be invented and modified, and the role that language plays in defining divisions of class, ethnicity, and nation can also be reconfigured. The Chinese case, in which intellectuals invented a new set of practices for a rapidly changing society, is certainly not unique, but the starkness and clarity of the change that took place in China is particularly good for demonstrating how linguistic change happens.

I demonstrate the malleability of language in the first two chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the inner workings of Mandarin Chinese, showing how a relatively small group of intellectuals in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s tinkered with various schemes to create a language that would unify the highly polyglot post-imperial Chinese nation, starting with an ecumenical standard that reflected the speech patterns of several different regions, but ultimately settling on a form of Beijing dialect that was de-localized and modified to be learnable by the masses. Chapter 2 expands on this theme by addressing how this newly invented language was meant to function in society. I discuss two ways in which linguistic divisions in society have usually been seen—in terms of class and in terms of ethnicity. Building on how Bourdieu and Weber have addressed these issues, I argue that China shows how both associations between language and society are subject to change. Chinese language reform was an effort at social leveling and also nation-building.

Chapter 3 addresses a different dimension of linguistic change, focusing on the material implications of reform in China's unique script. Today, the People's Republic of China uses a simplified character script that originated in government reforms in the 1950s and 1960s, but these simplification schemes reflected earlier developments under the Nationalist government of the 1920s and 1930s, which attempted to promulgate simplified characters for use in schools in late 1935, a policy which was quickly rescinded four months later in early 1936. One of the reasons for the brevity of this policy was opposition from publishing companies, most of which were based in Shanghai, because modifications to the script would have imposed a significant cost in equipment changes for these companies.

Chapter 4 explores the broader regional context in which language reform in China took place. It focuses on China's immediate neighbors, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. In each of these places, the educated elite for two thousand years were steeped in the Chinese classics, written in Classical Chinese. It was only in the nineteenth century that this linguistic hierarchy, with Classical Chinese at the apex, broke down under pressure from Western incursions. Each country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century developed its own national vernacular, often with significant changes in the writing system, that represented a rejection of Chinese cultural hegemony and the adoption of Western nationalist norms.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines the implications for ethnicity in Chinese language reform. At the beginning of the twentieth century, China was a multiethnic, polyglot empire ruled by an ethnic minority that had originated in its northeastern frontier. By the end of the twentieth century, China had become a national state with both the world's largest language, Mandarin, and the world's largest ethnic group, the Han. I argue that both these changes were linked—that the Han is a linguistically defined group, but also one whose common language was invented after the fact.

Each chapter draws from research that was conducted over the course of two years in libraries and archives in the United States, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China. I use sources that include diaries, personal and official letters, bureaucratic records, as well as periodicals and other publications drawn from the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford; Academia Historica in Taipei; the library collections at the Chinese University of Hong Kong; the Shanghai Library; the Shanghai Municipal Archives; and the Second Historical Archives of China in Nanjing. With the materials I gathered, I both reconstruct and reinterpret events in early twentieth-century China to give us a fresh view of issues of perennial concern to sociologists, with language at the center: how social change and social reproduction take place; how race and ethnicity, as well as class and cultural capital, evolve; and how nations are made through cultural reinvention. Language is the medium through which we conduct virtually all of our social life. It brings people together while at the same time distinguishing one group from another. It largely goes unnoticed, except when we find ourselves on unfamiliar ground and in unfamiliar times.

1

What is Mandarin? The Social Project of Language Standardization in Early Republican China

The artificiality of China's standard language is no secret. Nonetheless, much of social and sociolinguistic theory until now has been devoted to unmasking the artificiality and arbitrariness of standard languages. But the arbitrariness of the Chinese standard was never hidden from public view. This language, which this chapter will refer to simply as "Mandarin," was deliberately designed in the early twentieth century to be distinct from any existing spoken vernacular. This new language, though based on the speech of Beijing, was different from it and every other regional or local speech in China, and it was designed to be the standard for the entire polyglot Chinese nation. Whereas Beijing speech was a language of a particular place spoken by a particular group of people, Mandarin was intended to be, within China, the language of all places and no particular place. Thus universalized, Mandarin could facilitate nationwide communication that previously had been stymied by the nation's extensive multilinguality.

The creation of a Chinese standard language, therefore, was a state-led nation-building project, meant to mold a motley collection of peoples into a unified national society. But what was to be the nature of this new society? One of the main goals of language reform in China was to create a standard language that was easier to learn and thus more widely accessible. This desire for a more accessible standard language represented a substantial departure from the previous language situation, in which the official language—Classical Chinese—was so difficult to learn that access was restricted to a small segment of society. The promulgation of a national standard language in the early twentieth century therefore represented an attempt to extend educational meritocracy from small segment of elites to all of society. I argue that the creation of a new language was intimately connected to the goal of a new social order.

In so arguing, I diverge from the approaches taken in a small but growing body of scholarship in addressing the question of Chinese language reform. Historians in the past few years have been particularly active in this area, reflecting a resurgence of interest in language in China that began in the United States with the landmark works of the linguist and sinologist John DeFrancis (1950, 1984a, 1989). David Moser (2016) has offered a fresh overview of how Mandarin came to be China's national language. Recent studies have also addressed the social history of the origins and growth of Mandarin, documenting the experiences of everyday people in their encounter with the new national language in sound, on the screen, and in print (J. Y. Chen 2015, 2013b; Culp 2008). Other historians have discussed the intellectual history behind the vernacular language movement and the promulgation of Mandarin in China before and after 1949 (Tam 2016a; J. Liu 2016; Kaske 2008; Tam 2016b, 2016b). Among linguists, the study of Mandarin phonology has driven theory-building in generative linguistics (Duanmu 2007), while work by sociolinguists has illuminated popular attitudes about language practices in China (Peng 2016; C. W.-C. Li 2004, 2014). And one cannot overlook the rapid expansion of Sinophone studies and other significant work in comparative literature in the past three decades (L. Liu 1995, 2004; Shih 2011; Tsu 2010; Gunn 1991; G. Zhou 2011).

In contrast, my intervention into the study of language and China specifically addresses, from a sociological point of view, one of the underlying themes in sociolinguistics and the sociology of language: the drive to unmask the arbitrariness of standard languages, as opposed to their purported correctness and superiority. This drive is often rooted in a desire to show how standard languages are effectively tools of elite oppression, deliberately designed to be obscure so as to restrict access to cultural capital through education, and ultimately access to the labor market. While Pierre Bourdieu (1991) may be the most famous exponent of this point of view, he has not been alone: since the first of the essays collected in *Language and Symbolic Power* was written in the 1970s, much of the empirical and theoretical work on language and society—done by linguists, sociolinguists, linguistic anthropologists, and sociologists—on numerous cases from around the world contain elements of this line of thinking, whether independent of or in dialogue with Bourdieu (Hasan 1999; Lippi-Green 1997; Milroy 2012; Haeri 1997b; Labov 1966, 1972; Fishman 1972).

What I seek to show with the Chinese case, however, is that, intentionality matters when it comes to standard languages. A vision of a standard language presupposes a vision of society. The creation of Mandarin, therefore, represents a new way of thinking about language: what it is for, what it does, and what kind of society it is supposed to serve. In this chapter, I show how the design of a new standard language was a reflection of a desire for a new kind of national community, one unified in part by a standard language that was more accessible by design. I first clarify the term "Mandarin" in the context of the English-language terminology deployed to describe the highly complex language situation of China. I then survey the social-ideological underpinnings of the existing linguistic historiography of Mandarin, particularly from the May Fourth point of view, and then detail the eclectic splicing of existing language practices in which language reformers engaged to create a new standard. Finally, I sketch the incipient efforts of the consolidated Nationalist (Guomindang, or GMD) state to spread Mandarin among the Chinese people. I demonstrate how Mandarin, more than just a new language, was a new *kind* of language, meant to serve a new kind of society.

Defining Mandarin

What is Mandarin? In this section, I untangle the many referents of this ambiguous English-language term, one that historian Janet Chen (2013a) has argued "obscures" more than it reveals, thus requiring temporal and conceptual disaggregation. I argue that Mandarin, as a national standard, is both diachronically and synchronically discontinuous from other linguistic forms. That is, it is historically distinct from the antecedents from which it was drawn, and it is formally distinct from the other contemporaneous language practices in China at the time of its creation. These distinctions, as I will argue later on in this chapter, were deliberately aimed at creating a new language for a new type of society, national in scope and more widely meritocratic in nature.

The English word "Mandarin" originated in the sixteenth century as a borrowing from the Portuguese *mandarim.* This Portuguese word claims two influences: the Sanskrit term *mantrī,* or "official," and the Portuguese verb *mandar,* "to command" (Oxford English Dictionary 2000; Mair 1991, 11–12). These references to officialdom and commanding are apt: for the Portuguese of the sixteenth century, the word referred to the spoken language that imperial officials used to communicate with one another during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, known as *guanhua,* or "language of the officials."

Over time, however, the English word Mandarin has taken on a greater variety of meanings. Linguist and sinologist Robert Sanders (1987), in a plea for terminological specificity, has argued that it has in fact four main referents: (1) “Idealized Mandarin,” by which he meant the national standard language; (2) “Imperial Mandarin,” by which he meant *guanhua*; (3) “Geographical Mandarin,” by which he meant a family of interrelated dialects spanning China from the northeast to the southwest, which he took to be an analytical construct of linguists; and (4) “Local Mandarin,” by which he meant varieties of the language inflected by local usage. By far the most frequently used of these four possibilities is the first: in common usage, “Mandarin” or “Mandarin Chinese” usually refers to China’s standard spoken language. In fact, I would argue that this is the predominant meaning of the word, since the other three concepts seem to be subsidiary to the first. That is to say, Imperial Mandarin, Geographical Mandarin, and Local Mandarin are distinct entities insofar as they are *not* Idealized Mandarin.

Even for this most common usage of Mandarin, the equivalent Chinese terms are too numerous to discuss in their entirety in this chapter, and they have received sufficient attention elsewhere (Mair 1991, 10–12; Norman 1988, 135–38). For reasons of brevity, I will only highlight some of the more common Chinese equivalents here. In general, the Chinese terms are more restrictive in their meaning than the English term. *Guoyu,* or “national language,” is now the equivalent to “Mandarin” most used in Taiwan, but during the Qing dynasty it referred to the Manchu language (Elliott 2006, 37–38, 2001, 291); in the early twentieth century, the term was repurposed in China to mean a Beijing-based spoken vernacular, a new usage whose model was probably the Japanese neologism *kokugo* (Kaske 2008, 135; Ramsey 1991, 37, 44). *Putonghua,* or “common speech,” is a term that also originated under Japanese influence in the early 1900s and came into official use in the People’s Republic of China in the mid-1950s to describe the standard Chinese spoken language (Kaske 2008, 213–14). *Huayu,* or “Chinese (in the cultural sense) language” is a term used mainly in Singapore to refer to Mandarin (Duanmu 2007, 4; Norman 1988, 136–38). In any case, *guoyu, putonghua,* or *huayu* all point to the national standard language that was created between the 1910s and the 1930s to serve a new national society.

The creation of a national standard language was inseparable from the conceptualization of regional forms of speech as “dialects”: nonstandard and less prestigious (Tam 2016a). One could easily classify Chinese as a family of related but separate languages, since many of the “dialects” of China are so different from one another as to be mutually unintelligible—mutual intelligibility being the usual criterion for a language. Nonetheless, the terminology of language and dialect continues to be in use, as linguist and sinologist Jerry Norman (1988, 1–3) has written, because of longstanding cultural habit, a position also articulated by S. Robert Ramsey (1987, 16–18). Such a habit highlights how the distinction between a language and a dialect is largely based on political considerations. A unitary classificatory scheme such as the one used for China—in which there is but one Chinese language, albeit with many dialects—is an assertion of national and cultural unity (Norman 1988, 1–3; Moser 2016, secs. 64–65). Statements to the contrary, therefore, have sensitive political implications about China as a cultural and political whole.

Alert to these political sensitivities, linguist and sinologist Victor Mair has argued that English-speaking scholars should more neutrally represent the way the Chinese themselves describe their own language situation. Objecting to the term “dialect,” he has created an equivalent for the Chinese word *fangyan* by coining the Greek-derived neologism “topolect,” or “speech of a place,” which he finds more felicitous than John DeFrancis’s etymologically mixed coinage “regionalect” (Mair 1991, 7; DeFrancis 1984a, 57). What is clear to Mair and others is that, regardless whether “*fangyan*” or “topolect” is used to describe regional speech varieties in

China, such a concept nowadays is almost always used to contrast them with China's standard language. Mair calls the standard "Modern Standard Mandarin," objecting to the lack of specificity in the term "Chinese." However, his terminological precision seems not yet to have caught on, at least in the literature on China: two recent linguistics publications still use the terms "Standard Chinese" (Duanmu 2007) and "Modern Standard Chinese" (P. Chen 1999) to refer to China's standard language.

W. South Coblin (2000, 549) has argued that modern standard Mandarin is a "direct descendent" of the late nineteenth-century *guanhua,* the name of the transregional language used by officials and other educated people during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Some people have also equated *guanhua* with Beijing dialect, given that Beijing has been China's capital, with only brief interruptions, ever since the Yongle Emperor established that city as the capital in 1421. Susan Naquin (2000, 359), in her magisterial work on imperial Beijing, has said that the city's "local language" became *guanhua,* the imperial "administrative vernacular" starting in the fifteenth century, and that this language became the "national language" in the twentieth century. Benjamin Elman's (2000, 373–74) monumental work on the civil examination system asserts that "Peking alone" was the source of the language of officials in the Qing dynasty, an assertion he repeats in more recent work: "Beijing during the Qing dynasty provided the standard language for officials" (Elman 2013, 48). Coblin (2000, 549), as well as historian Elisabeth Kaske (2008, 41), have criticized this view, pointing out that *guanhua* was in fact more of a supraregional koiné than a strictly codified language of a people or a place.[1] Moreover, until the mid-nineteenth century, *guanhua* was more strongly influenced by the dialect of Nanjing than by that of Beijing, the latter of which remained relatively unprestigious until the late nineteenth century (Coblin 2007, 2000, 537–43; Yang 1989, 232; Wilkinson 2015, 25; P. Chen 1999, 11; Hirata 2000, 537–38; Chao 1976b, 2; Kaske 2008, 66–74).

While today's Mandarin is of course related in a significant way to these historical antecedents, it is a mistake simply to think of the modern national standard language as simply "descended" from them. Rather, Mandarin represents a conscious break with prior practice. The *guanhua* of the Ming and Qing dynasties was not only phonologically different from the modern language, it was also not codified and not used in the same way. *Guanhua,* though closely related to the written language of a substantial body of popular literature (Shang 2002, 4), was not an official form of writing—Classical Chinese served that purpose—and the modern language demanded a new level of phonological specificity, codified for the first time in phonetic scripts and audio recordings.

In sum the creation of Mandarin represented a break with both the past and the present, not simply because of differences in linguistic content from its historical antecedents and other contemporaneous speech forms, but also especially because of the vastly different attitudes and practices associated with it. Sociologically speaking, the *guanhua* of the Ming and Qing dynasties was a language of convenience for a very narrow class of people needing to communicate across regional boundaries; the local speech of Beijing—which varied by neighborhood and social class—was the vernacular of a particular place. In contrast, Mandarin, as the newly codified standard spoken language of a newly constituted Chinese nation-state, was

[1] *Koiné* is a Greek word meaning "common" or "vulgar" and is a reference to the Greek term *he koinè diálektos,* or "the common language," one that combined elements of the speech of several different Greek regions and saw use as a lingua franca in the Hellenistic and Roman world. The word is now used to describe analogous language practices in other times and places.

a uniform standard meant for all social classes and for all places in the nation. The creation of Mandarin, therefore, was predicated on the hope of creating a new kind of society.

Inventing a New Kind of Language

The Legacy of May Fourth

The dominant paradigm of language change in republican China is rooted in the narratives produced by intellectuals associated with the May Fourth movement, a set of intersecting ideological trends in which many of China's new intelligentsia were caught up in the 1920s and 30s. In recent years these narratives have come under renewed scrutiny. Considerable criticism has been leveled at May Fourth intellectuals for how they legitimized their ideological positions regarding language. To be sure, these intellectuals' scholarly shortcomings are numerous, but those shortcomings do not detract from the innovations that the May Fourth movement introduced in its approach to language. In short, in this section I argue that May Fourth claims about language reform are more productively read as prescription—normative statements about language—rather than description.

The May Fourth movement was named for the protests that took place in Beijing on and around May 4, 1919, against what people perceived to be the government's failure to uphold Chinese sovereignty at the Versailles treaty talks at the end of World War I. In venues such as the influential journal *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), intellectuals associated with the movement advocated a shift from Classical Chinese to the vernacular, from a "dead" language to a "living" one, and from a language that was divorced from the speech and everyday lives of ordinary people to one that actually reflected their experiences. The "vernacular" in this narrative is usually cast as the "natural" language of the people, the written form that most closely resembles ordinary speech, and one that is easier to learn and thus helps spread literacy. Hu Shi, one of the foremost proponents of language reform, repeatedly argued that the vernacular was the "living" language of the people. In perhaps his most famous essay, published in 1917 in *New Youth* and entitled "Wenxue gailiang chuyi" (Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature), he argued for a "living literature" (*huo wenxue*) to replace the "dead literature" (*si wenxue*) that followed classical models, arguing that China's language situation needed to undergo the revitalization that the Renaissance provided for European vernaculars (Hu S. 1917, 35). More than three decades later, he continued to stand fast by the vernacular he had spent his life so vigorously promoting, arguing for the indispensability of "the living spoken language written in characters" (S. Hu 1951, 898).

This tripartite formulation—"living," "spoken," and "written in characters"—neatly sums up Hu's position in the complex debates about language and literature in China in the first half of the twentieth century. The "living" language meant *baihua,* which he and other May Fourth intellectuals defined as the language of vernacular narrative fiction, such as the fourteenth-century novel *The Water Margin* and the mid-eighteenth-century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber,* which Hu and his colleagues canonized and equated with the vernacular literature of Europe (Hu S. 1917, 35). In addition to written *baihua,* Hu's description of it as "spoken" echoed the phonocentric perspective prevalent in Euro-American linguistics, in which the true substance of a language lay primarily in its sounds; writing was merely the visual representation of those sounds. While such an analytical perspective seems to be a description of language, in its transmission to Asia it became a *prescription* for language: that sound *should* be congruent with script, unlike Classical Chinese, a written language vastly different from everyday speech. Finally, in saying "written in characters," Hu was taking a relatively conservative position in the multifaceted debates on Chinese script reform, in which there were numerous proposals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to replace characters with easier-to-learn phonetic scripts (Tsu 2010, 21–32; Cheng 2001; Kaske 2008, 93).

In the last decade or so, much ink has been spilled in critiquing the factitiousness of May Fourth claims about history, language, and literature. The discussion of these claims has largely built on the consensus in the literature on nationalism that all assertions of "peoplehood" or "nationhood" are constructed from selective renderings of an imagined common history and of an invented national culture (Chow et al. 2008). For instance, historian Elisabeth Kaske, in her learned work *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919*, traces the origins of the "literary revolution" (*wenxue geming*) of Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, and she argues that the May Fourth perspective still adheres to the notion of a series of intersecting "movements"—a "national language movement" (*guoyu yundong*) and a "vernacular literature movement" (*baihua yundong*)—that are too teleological. Instead, following the periodization of Li Jinxi (1934, Part 1, 10), she begins her account with China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and argues that the broad outlines of language change in China follow the Latin-to-vernacular shift in Europe—a decline of diglossic language practices that is also integral to Hu Shi's reading of China's situation (Kaske 2008, xii). Literary scholar Shang Wei (2014, 2002) has critiqued the factual basis of May Fourth intellectuals' historical and linguistic justifications for their reformist advocacy regarding China's language practices. After all, the Renaissance saw not only an increase in vernacular publications, but also a classicist return to Ciceronian standards of Latin composition and the rebirth of scholarship in Greek (Leonhardt 2013, 184–97). Finding the arguments of May Fourth intellectuals both simplistic and highly selective, Shang argues that they greatly exaggerated the dichotomy of *baihua* and *wenyan*; the two forms of written Chinese had coexisted for many centuries, and their use had never been quite as separate as the May Fourth ideologists claimed. Shang argues that, in fact, May Fourth language and literary reformers were simply replacing one form of elite language with another (Shang 2014, 257, 2002, 5).

These and other flaws of the various May Fourth justifications for their advocacy are quite real. But I argue that what also deserves scrutiny is the May Fourth vision for what Chinese language practices *should be.* Language reformers, of which May Fourth intellectuals formed a large part, wanted a stronger China, and they saw widespread literacy and education as a critical source of strength. In his 1934 history of language reform, Li Jinxi noted the widespread belief among Chinese intellectuals, in the aftermath of defeat in 1895, that Japanese strength emanated from its literate populace, that the "early opening up of its people's intellectual abilities" (*min zhi zao kai*) was the result of "widespread literacy" (*renren neng dushu shizi*) (J. Li 1934, Part 1, 10). Chief among the concerns of modernizing intellectuals was the spread (*puji*) of education among the people. Qian Xuantong argued that education could not be spread without a "revolution" in characters, by which he meant alphabetization (*hanzi bu geming, ze jiaoyu jue bu neng puji*) (Qian 1923, 7). Countless government documents cited the spread of education as a crucial goal. The National Association for Education's (*Quanguo Jiaoyu Hui*) 1917 resolution for the use of *zhuyin fuhao,* a phonetic notation for the pronunciation of Chinese characters, cited a "desire to spread education" (*yu mou jiaoyu puji*) (Zhongguo Di-er Lishi Dang'anguan 2010b, 16:769). In a 1922 report on the status of language education, the Ministry of Education cited the difficulty of learning Chinese characters as an impediment to "spreading education" (*puji jiaoyu*) (Zhongguo

Di-er Lishi Dang'anguan 2010a, 332). The language of literature, education, and the state, therefore, needed to become a tool for educating all people rather than just for a literate elite. This vision for what language could and should be was justified by appeals to historical continuity and plebeian authenticity, but in reality, as Shang (2014, 261) has argued, May Fourth language reformers "did not exactly do what they said they were doing or were expected to do." That is, the language they held up as a new standard was not the "people's" language, because the "vernacular" (*guoyu* and *baihua*) was in fact the language of an educated and cosmopolitan minority. Furthermore, the May Fourth excision of the vernacular from *wenyan,* their catch-all term for Classical Chinese, was more a rhetorical device and political posture than an argument rooted in historical fact.

As historical description, therefore, the May Fourth arguments about language crumble under scholarly reexamination. What I wish to point out, however, is that May Fourth claims about language can be read in an equally interesting way as *prescription*. That the actions of language reformers were new and historically discontinuous is in itself noteworthy. Language reformers sought to create a unified national language. In order to do so, they leaned heavily on the "raw materials" of existing language practices: a newly designated canon of vernacular literature; the northern Chinese dialects, particularly the form of *guanhua* based on Beijing dialect; and the stock of Chinese characters commonly used to write that literature and to notate those northern dialects. What emerged from their efforts was not in itself altogether new, but the slight modifications to existing language practices and the intensive efforts to disseminate those new practices constituted a novel *orientation* to language: a belief that language must be forged into a standardized totality and then wielded by the state as a tool to unite the people of a nation.

Mandarin, therefore, represents not merely a new language, but a new *kind* of language altogether. Classical Chinese was resolutely not a language of the people, for it functioned in a society in which popular literacy was not seen as an imperative. Language reformers in China, in contrast, sought a nationalized society in which literacy was universal, and using the "language of the people" was one of the practical ways to bring that about.

Sources of the New National Standard

The impact of the May Fourth movement on the state's orientation to language is evident even today. In 1956, only a few years after the Chinese Communist Party firmly established itself on the Chinese mainland, Zhou Enlai issued a now oft-cited statement on behalf of the State Council defining what the basis of the national language was to be:

> 汉语统一的基础已经存在了，这就是以北京语音为标准音、以北方话为基础方言、以典范的现代白话文著作为语法规范的普通话。
>
> The basis for unifying Chinese (*hanyu*) already exists; that is, taking the pronunciation (*yuyin*) of Beijing as the standard pronunciation; taking the northern dialects as the base dialect; and taking the classics of modern vernacular (*baihuawen*) literature as the grammatical norm of the common language (*putonghua*). (Zhou E. 1956)

Apart from the use of *putonghua* instead of *guoyu* as the name of the national standard language, there is nothing in this definition that Hu Shi—no supporter of the Communist Party himself—would have found objectionable. The *putonghua* of mainland China today mainly differs in minor respects from the *guoyu* of Taiwan: some character readings have been adjusted to reflect even more closely Beijing pronunciation, and the vocabulary used in each region has diverged somewhat in the years since the GMD retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Indeed, this mainland Chinese description of the basis for a national language is all the more surprising given that it represents a position that many Chinese leftists would have rejected through most of the republican period. For them, such a single national language would not have been close enough to the diverse forms of the everyday speech of the masses. Noted linguist and sinologist John DeFrancis (1950, 211–20) echoed the leftist position in his earlier writings, advocating that people be allowed to write their own local dialects in phonetic scripts, a situation he called linguistic "federalism," as opposed to linguistic "integralism," a much more centralized approach to state language policy that he accused the GMD of espousing. DeFrancis's position on language and nationalism was a bold one to take for an American academic amid the fearful anti-Communism of the 1950s, and his arguments provoked at least two liberal émigrés to criticize his views not only for aligning with the Communists, but also for being highly impracticable (S. Hu 1951; Michael 1951). Nevertheless, DeFrancis held to this position for the next few decades, excoriating the Communist regime for reversing its original position and adopting essentially its predecessor's linguistic integralism (DeFrancis 1984a, 257–87).

These republican-era policies were explicitly aimed at national integration, and they represented an intensification of the state's efforts at regulating the language practices of the people it ruled. Explicit attempts at linguistic regulation go at least as far back as the Yongzheng reign (1722–1735), when the emperor, exasperated by the unintelligible speech of officials from Fujian and Guangdong, ordered that they and their successors learn *guanhua* at specially created institutions (Paderni 1988, 258). Efforts to spread knowledge of *guanhua* also were found in late Qing educational reforms, although the dynasty collapsed before these came to fruition. It was mainly after the beginning of the republican period in 1911 that language reform really took off. While the course of reform was charted by a few intellectuals at the political center of the nascent and unstable Chinese republic, the spread of these reforms was repeatedly stymied by the political fragmentation of the period and then by renewed Japanese aggression beginning in 1937. Nonetheless, the shape that language reform policies took in this politically unstable yet socially innovative period in Chinese history eventually formed the basis of the hegemonic language practices we can observe in contemporary China. These policies centered on the design of a new language that could be used in common by all citizens of the Chinese nation, regardless of social class—a state of affairs that represented a stark departure from the highly stratified language situation in imperial times. As I will show, the design of the sounds of Mandarin wended a tortuous path through the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, but the process nonetheless reflected the purpose of the language's designers: to create a new language for a new society in which the official language was more accessible than before.

One of the most familiar and recognizable features of Mandarin today is its reliance on the phonology (or pronunciation) of Beijing dialect. Nothing might seem more natural than to base the language of a nation on the speech of its capital. Indeed, as one of the principal developers of *pinyin*, Zhou Youguang (1906–2017), has written, "Taking Beijing pronunciation as the standard for Putonghua is the historical result of the more than 1000 years that Beijing has been the capital of the Liao, Jin, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties and the following regimes" (Y. Zhou 1986, 8). As a broad generalization about Chinese capital cities, Zhou's statement is mostly true, but it does ignore the times in which Beijing's status as capital was interrupted, most notably at the beginning of the Ming dynasty between the years 1368 and 1421, and also during the middle of the republican period, when the GMD moved the nation's capital to Nanjing for the decade between 1928 and 1937. What is more problematic about this statement, however, is that the connection between Beijing's longstanding historical status as China's capital and the use of its dialect as the basis of the national language is a *post hoc* justification of nationalist language policies. In fact, at the start of the republican period, the pronunciation of the national language underwent considerable debate, with many factions opposing the use of Beijing dialect as a phonological basis. Such opposition was rooted in a variety of factors. To begin with, the study of Chinese phonology traditionally did not depend on the pronunciation associated with any one particular location. For centuries, the phonological information supplied in lexicons and rhyming dictionaries did not dictate exactly the way a character was supposed to sound, but rather the degrees of similarity between abstract categories of character rhymes. These categories might not have reflected the rhymes in any particular living dialect in China, but they were nonetheless important in the composition of rhyming poetry. The exact readings or vocalizations of characters were not considered important, at least for the composition of Classical Chinese texts, whose vocal realizations were ancillary to their use as written documents (P. Chen 1999, 12).

Because of this orientation to phonology, the earliest documentation of how any particular dialect was pronounced comes from sources foreign to China (Coblin 2007). In the fifteenth century, we find *han'gŭl* guides to the pronunciation of *guanhua* compiled for use by Korean diplomats to the Ming court. In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, Catholic missionaries to China compiled more guides to *guanhua.* And in the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries began documenting the various dialects of the regions in which they proselytized. It was also in the nineteenth century that the European diplomatic presence in China required language pedagogy for communication with the Chinese imperial court, and it was then that we find such landmark works as British diplomat Thomas Francis Wade's (1818–1895) lexicon of Beijing dialect appeared. Published in 1859, Wade's work introduced the earliest version of what was to become the Wade-Giles transcription system (Wade 1859).

Based on the alphabetical transcriptions in these foreign sources, it is possible to deduce the evolution of the phonology of *guanhua,* one of the main linguistic sources for today's Mandarin. From the Ming dynasty until the middle of the nineteenth century, the sources display a heavy bias towards Nanjing pronunciation, which presumably was due to Nanjing's status as the Ming dynasty's initial capital and, even after the court's removal to Beijing, the city's status as a major cultural center in China. Additionally, Nanjing pronunciation (as well as southern *guanhua* and southern dialects in general) was phonologically richer than its northern counterparts, and thus it conformed more closely with the abstract rhyming standards found in the rhyming dictionaries of the period, which documented the phonologically richer speech patterns of the past. In fact, Wade's mid-nineteenth-century lexicon was initially criticized by other linguists because of its reliance on Beijing dialect to provide readings for Chinese characters. The pronunciation of Nanjing only began to lose ground in the second half of the nineteenth century, probably because of the gradually increasing cultural clout of Beijing. The Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), a major sectarian civil war that threatened Qing rule and contributed to the destruction and depopulation of Nanjing, the rebel capital, certainly did not help (Coblin 2000, 541; Coblin and Barrett 1997, 536).

In spite of these developments, Beijing's place in China's array of linguistic practices was still not secure even into the 1910s and 1920s, when the standardization of phonology by the new republican Ministry of Education was just beginning. Many anti-Qing nationalists associated Beijing-based *guanhua* with the Qing regime that had collapsed in 1911, and thus opposed any standard based on it (Kaske 2008, 336, 367). Moreover, language reformers, steeped in classical Chinese phonology, mostly felt Beijing dialect to be a poor reservoir of sounds from which to draw, because it was among the most phonologically impoverished of China's regional dialects, and thus not very euphonious in the poetic sense. Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982), the famed Chinese linguist, composer, musician, and all-around polymath, recalled later in life that the speech of Beijing did not hold any special part in his early education, and that his family's Changzhou dialect was more useful in learning traditional Chinese phonology (Chao 1976b, 6). But what the national standard language should sound like remained a difficult question to resolve. The difficulty stemmed from the political conundrums that surfaced in the aftermath of the Qing collapse in 1911, when proponents of a new form of political association and organization—nationalist in ideology and republican in aspiration—sought to replace the Qing institutions that had grown over the centuries to oversee a vast multiethnic empire. These imperial institutions exercised varying forms of governance, and which one of those forms depended on the many constituencies that the Qing emperorship had to address. How to replace this segmented imperial polity with a unitary nation-state, one which now occupies essentially the same territory and which rules over an equally heterogeneous population, is one of the foundational political dilemmas that all of the Qing dynasty's successor regimes have had to face (Crossley 2000, 341, 361).

Language reformers in China had to take into account this heterogeneity, which was considerable even within the majority Han population.[2] They did this in two main stages. In the first stage, language reformers attempted in the 1910s to create an ecumenical standard, one that incorporated the features of several different major dialects. This process was contentious, and in the beginning it was not at all settled what the new national language would sound like. Some intellectuals, such as the onetime anarchist and later staunch GMD member Wu Zhihui (1865–1953), were Esperanto enthusiasts who envisioned a modernized China in which the Chinese language, which they viewed as archaic and cumbersome, would be replaced with Esperanto (Tsu 2010, 63; Ramsey 1987, 3). In the end, however, holders of such radical ideas were unable to gain enough leverage to legitimize and implement their views (Kaske 2008, 207).

The initial standard of the 1910s originated with the Committee for the Unification of Reading Pronunciations (*Duyin Tongyi Hui*), which met in Beijing under the auspices of the Ministry of Education under the republican government in Beijing at the time.[3] About eighty delegates were invited, two from each Chinese province, and one additional representative each for the Mongolian and Tibetan ethnicities, as well as one representative for overseas Chinese. Forty-four of these delegates met in Beijing in February 1913, and their principal aim was to standardize the pronunciations of Chinese characters. Relying on a Qing-era rhyming dictionary, the *Yinyun Chanwei* (Subtleties of Phonology) of Li Guangdi (1642–1718), the delegates produced standardized pronunciations for 6,500 characters. These pronunciations were notated in a new phonetic script, principally developed by Wu Zhihui, called *zhuyin zimu* (sound-annotation characters). This script consisted of 39 alphabetic symbols, essentially simplified portions of

[2] Curiously, other non-Han languages were not considered.

[3] The term "reading pronunciation" refers to the fact that, until the first two decades of the twentieth century, literary pronunciations of Chinese characters, which represented an elevated register, were distinguished from ordinary pronunciations in everyday speech. The characters with reading pronunciations that differed from ordinary pronunciations, however, constituted only a small fraction of the lexicon (Børdahl 1992, 31–32; Shang 2014, 279, 289–90).

Chinese characters, and it followed traditional Chinese phonology by dividing each character's pronunciation into three possible parts: an initial, a medial, and a final.

About 90 percent of the character pronunciations at this conference were derived from Beijing *guanhua,* while elements of other dialects were also included, particularly the Wu family of dialects of the eastern provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, where many of the delegates were from. For example, to Beijing's four tones the standard added an additional fifth tone, the *rusheng* or "entering tone," which was present in some southern dialects in the form of syllables ending in *–p, –t,* and *–k*. This fifth tone was conceived for the national language as a sort of glottal stop, though its precise phonological realization was never fully explained, and it was ultimately eliminated in the early 1930s. The results of this initial standardization, an "abstract conglomeration of elements from phonologies across the country" meant to represent the whole of the Chinese nation (Tam 2016b, 78), were published in the *Guoyin Zidian* (Dictionary of National Pronunciation) in 1919 (P. Chen 1999, 16–19; Kaske 2008, 406–15; Li J. 1934, 50–66; Ramsey 1987, 3–18; Zhang S. 1938, 336).

While hardly a complete language reform, the steps taken by the members of the *Duyin tongyi hui* represented a major step towards the standardization of Chinese phonology. They attempted to bridge the gap in practices among northern and southern Mandarin speakers by creating a standard that would be acceptable and somewhat familiar to as many people as possible. For instance, sometime in the 1920s, *Duyin Tongyi Hui* member Qian Xuantong wrote to his committee colleague Wu Zhihui debating the merits of keeping the *–ong* and *–eng* rhyming classes of character rhymes separate, as was usual in northern Chinese practice, as opposed to Wu's original proposal that they be merged, as southerners were used to doing (thus causing characters like 東 *dong* and 夢 *meng* to rhyme). Qian argued that the rhyming classes, which were merged in the *Dictionary of National Pronunciation,* should be separated as they were in northern dialects. In his letter, Qian indicated these rhymes using *zhuyin zimu,* to illustrate his point:

> 然先生去年之底、曾說過、南人不善讀國音之ㄥ、所以還是留下ㄅㄨㄥ等、負得他們讀『篷、蒙』為『朋、孟』。此南音之朋孟 然玄同以為此法似無用處。因國音中之音、南音不習慣者不止此一處。
>
> ……
>
> 我因聽明北方之庚 東 確是一開一合、所以衛定庚確是ㄥ、東確是ㄥ+ㄨ介音而為ㄨㄥ。為此辦法、與北音實毫無牽強之處。所以主持將國音字典上注ㄅㄨㄥ ㄆㄨㄥ ㄇㄨㄥ ㄈㄨㄥ之字、全改注為ㄅㄥ ㄆㄥ ㄇㄥ ㄈㄥ。
>
> As you said at the end of last year, southerners are not good at the *eng* in National Pronunciation, so it would be best to keep [rhymes like] *bong,* etc. allowing them to read "篷 [péng],蒙 [měng]" [in the same way] as "朋 [péng,] 孟 [mèng]." This is because in the national pronunciation, the things that not found in southern pronunciation are not limited to this point.
>
> ……
>
> Because I clearly hear the northern [pronunciations of] 庚 [*gēng*] [and] 東 [*dōng*] as open and closed [respectively], therefore it is clear that [the rhyme of] 庚 is *eng,* and 東 is *eng* + the medial vowel *u,* yielding *ong.* According to this analysis, the connection with

> northern pronunciation is hardly implausible. Therefore I suggest, for the *Dictionary of National Pronunciation,* that the characters glossed as *bong, pong, mong, fong* be re-glossed as *beng, peng, meng, feng* (Qian February 22).[4]

Ultimately, Qian's view was the one that prevailed, and in today's Mandarin, the *–ong* final cannot appear after the initials *b, p,* or *m*; these initials can only be followed by the *–eng* final. Another instance of language reformers' attempts to reflect multiple regional pronunciations in the standard language was recorded in the diary of Yuen Ren Chao. On Saturday, September 18, 1920, Chao wrote—in English—about a meeting with other members of the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language (*Guoyu Tongyi Choubei Weiyuanhui*):

> Riksha to Board of Education & went to 國語統一籌備會 [*Guoyu Tongyi Choubei Hui*] with 3 rooms. Few arrived. Then came 黎 [*Li,* i.e., the linguist Li Jinxi 黎錦熙, 1890–1978] & 汪 [*Wang,* the linguist Wang Yi 汪怡, 1875–1960]. I spent most of morning discussing International English German French experiment etc. equivalents & other questions with 汪. 錢玄同 [Qian Xuantong] came later. Lunched there with 汪 etc. Continued discussion till late 6. Worked practically a continuously whole day with satisfactory results. We decided to make 万 unaspirated v but recommend w so that 万 will
> 衣 烏 迂
> become obsolete.[5] We decided to use i u y both as vowels & as initials y w & French hu (comme en huit). We decided to use au for 幺 [*ao*] & not ɔu. This was mostly my motion. Use ou for 歐, 後, 狗, [*ōu, hòu, gǒu*] etc. instead of eu or əu. ~~We argue~~ I explained my principle of time-pitch curves to describe tones. But ~~they did no~~ I had no opinion of my own which of the kinds of actual tones we should use for the 3 or 4 tones. After long discussions, we decided tentatively to write out 3 standards, 北京, 南京, & 四川 [Beijing, Nanjing, & Sichuan]. I was delegated to write on the description of the actual tones. Most of the regular workers in the 教育部 [*Jiaoyu bu,* Ministry of Education] went home, but we non-salary drawers talked & talked till after 6. (Chao 1920)

In this entry, we can see how the committee members attempted to account for dialectal differences in their discussions about standardization—Chao notes that they were going to work out the pronunciations of three regions that spoke related and somewhat mutually intelligible dialects: Beijing, Nanjing, and Sichuan.

This attempt at creating an ecumenical standard ultimately failed, however. In the later 1920s, Chao and his colleagues, including Liu Fu (later courtesy name Liu Bannong, 1891–1934), Lin Yutang (1895–1976), Wang Yi, and Qian Xuantong, gradually coalesced into a subgroup of the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language. They

[4] All translations are my own.

[5] The symbol 万 was one of the original *zhuyin zimu* that was used to represent the voiced initial *v,* which is present in the Wu family of dialects of eastern China, which for instance includes Shanghainese. It was in the reading of such characters as 微, read as *vei* in the initial standard, but now read as *wei* (Jiaoyubu duyin tongyi hui 1920, 90). It indeed became obsolete by the late 1920s.

nicknamed themselves the *Shuren Hui*, or "Society of a Few Men,"[6] and in the course of their discussions they decided that the artificial standard, which became known as "Old National Pronunciation" (*lao guoyin*), was too difficult to disseminate, since no skilled speakers existed to teach this artificially constructed language, possibly only with the exception of Chao himself. In the end, these men decided to try to bring the national pronunciation fully into line with "the natural speech of Peking city" (Chao et al. 1977, 78). Such an effort, however, encountered stiff opposition at first. All through the 1910s and 1920s, debates among language reformers raged between those who supported the initial 1913 standard (which they called *guoyin,* or the "national pronunciation") and those who supported Beijing pronunciation (known as *jingyin*). For instance, in 1921, a representative of the Jiangsu Association for National Language Research (*Jiangsu guoyu yanjiu hui*) sent a letter to Wu Zhihui expressing how "baffled and flabbergasted" (*qiguai chayi*) he was at a proposal put forward at the seventh annual meeting of the National Federation of Education Associations (*Quanguo jiaoyu hui lianhe hui*). The proposal in question moved to adopt the pronunciation of Beijing as the national standard. To the perplexed writer, the question of a phonological standard had already been settled in favor of "national pronunciation" at an earlier meeting in May of the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language, at which many experts in phonology had been consulted (Jiangsu Guoyu Yanjiuhui 1921).

In spite of the opposition, by the late 1920s, the debate had died down and settled on the Beijing position (Moser 2016, secs. 291–304; Simmons 2017, 79–82). In 1932, the Ministry published the first pronouncing glossary of characters in this revised pronunciation, the *Guoyin Changyong Zihui* (Glossary of Commonly Used Characters in the National Pronunciation), thus indicating that the "national pronunciation" (*guoyin*) had shifted decisively in favor of Beijing pronunciation. This phonological standard subsequently became known as "new national pronunciation" (*xin guoyin*), and in this dictionary, pronunciations were indicated in the original *zhuyin zimu,* which were renamed *zhuyin fuhao,* or "sound-annotating symbols" to emphasize that they could not stand alone, thus reassuring those who supported the continued use of Chinese characters that they would not be abolished in favor of an alphabetic script.[7] Pronunciations were also notated in the National Romanization system (*Guoyu Luomazi*), in which tones on the same syllables were "spelled out" using different spellings, that Chao himself invented. Thus at a stroke, as Chao claims, a million native-speaking teachers were created, since the standard reflected the speech of educated natives of Beijing (Chao et al. 1977, 77–78). Chao may have oversimplified, however: even the prefatory material for this dictionary noted that not all the sounds of Beijing dialect were accepted into the new standard. As Wu Zhihui wrote in one of the prefatory chapters:

> 其於第一原則，則指定<u>北平</u>地方為國音之標準；所謂標準，乃取其現代之音系，而非字字必遵其土音；南北習慣，宜有通融，仍加斟酌，俾無窒礙。
>
> The first principle [in this glossary] is, to set the area of Beiping [Beijing] as the standard for the national pronunciation; by what is called standard, I mean its modern phonology (*yinxi*), but this does not mean that every character necessarily follows the local

[6] The name *Shuren Hui* was a reference to the *Qieyun,* a rhyming dictionary compiled by Lu Fayan in 601 AD, whose preface said, "We few men decide, and it is decided" (*wo bei shu ren, ding ze ding yi*) (Chao et al. 1977, 78).
[7] The *zhuyin fuhao* (also known as *bopomofo*) are still used in primary schools in Taiwan today in Mandarin-language pedagogy.

pronunciation (*tuyin*); in the custom of North and South, it is proper that there should be flexibility among the two, and thus in considering this we have sought to remove hindrances [in communication]. (Wu J. 1933, iii)

So even in the move towards bringing the standard in line with Beijing pronunciations, the people involved—Chao, Wu, and others—sought to distinguish standard Mandarin from Beijing dialect in order to bridge regional differences. In essence, language reformers from the 1910s to the 1930s were attempting to create a language that reflected the actual practice of a variety of regions of the newly conceived Chinese nation-state. Of course, this nation-state was more imagined than real in this time period, as successive, putatively central governments in Beijing and then Nanjing attempted to exert control over regions of the country that had fallen under warlord rule. Ultimately, these reformers moved to a more regionally specific standard with their adoption of most of Beijing pronunciation in Mandarin, but they still sought to keep the standard separate from any dialect.

A New Language for a New Kind of Society

Thus far, I have discussed Mandarin largely as an idealized code designed by a few dedicated intellectuals. But *for whom* was this code designed, and *by whom* was this new language meant to be learned? Mandarin, an "invention" meant "to capture that which united all of China's people" (Tam 2016b, 282), was motivated by nationalistic aims—a unified language for a modern Chinese nation, just as other modern nations of the world were seen by Chinese intellectuals to have unified national standard languages. While language reform made headway primarily in the creation of the standard amid the political turmoil of the 1910s and 1920s, the spread of this standard was made easier after the relative consolidation of power under the Nationalist regime during the Nanjing Decade (1928–1937), when Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) designated Nanjing as the national capital. One publication by the Chinese National Language Educational Association (*Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui*), the *Guoyu Yuebao* (National Language Monthly), from 1927 illustrates the nationalist aims of the promoters of Mandarin:

> 統一的國家，應該有統一的精神。統一的精神， 從那[*sic*]裡來呢？在於人民思想、感情的溝通和團結。全國人民的思想感情，怎麼會溝通和團結呢？在於由統一的語言和言文一致的文字。
>
> A unified (*tongyi*) country should have a unified (*tongyi*) spirit. Where, then, does a unified spirit exist? It exists in the connections and unity (*tuanjie*) among the thinking and feelings of the people. How do the thinking and feelings of the people of the whole country become connected and united (*tuanjie*)? The solution lies in a unified speech (*yuyan*) and a script (*wenzi*) that reflects speech (*yanwen yizhi*) (Guoyu Yuebao 1927, 5).

This and other such publications shows how the Chinese state intended to create a unified speech community out of the linguistically disparate parts of a Chinese nation. The members of this newly constituted nation, "Our Republic of China," consisted of the five main ethnic groups recognized in republican times: "the Han, Manchu, Mongolians, Hui, and Tibetans," although Mandarin itself was essentially a Han language; the languages of the other ethnicities, it seems, received hardly any attention (Guoyu Yuebao 1927, 5)

The education ministry's efforts were not limited to such propaganda. Indeed, it heavily intervened in the textbook publishing industry, indicating its approval of various textbooks all through the republican period—approval that had a crucial effect on the ability of such publishers as the Commercial Press to sell textbooks to schools (Culp 2008; Reed 2004, 205–11). Additionally, in conjunction with local municipal education bureaus (*jiaoyu ju*), the ministry also held mobile schools (*liudong xuexiao*) and fairs to promote the use of Mandarin, at least among schoolteachers. The Wu Zhihui Papers at Stanford contain the record of at least four such fairs in the Jiangnan region in 1930: two in Shanghai and two in Nanjing, at which Mandarin educational publications were exhibited and primary and secondary school teachers were tested and graded in their language ability (Guoyu Yuebao 1927; Quanguo Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui 1930a, 1930b, 1930c, 1930d).

The publication of Mandarin magazines, the holding of Mandarin fairs and educational events, along with government intervention in textbook publishing to create Mandarin textbooks—these efforts coincided with the gradual spread of Mandarin-language media into everyday life. In recent presentations on work in progress, historian Janet Y. Chen (2015, 2013b) has painted a picture of a world in the 1920s and 1930s in which the new technologies of visual and aural recordings and broadcast media began to penetrate into the lives of ordinary people, who often encountered Mandarin as almost a foreign and alien language. That ordinary people were now considered a necessary constituency of a state-sponsored official language was a significant break with the past, when only a select group of literate elites were involved with the official language.

All these developments indicate that the national language, because it was new and unknown to most of the population, represented an as yet unmet obligation: the people who *should* learn Mandarin were members of the Chinese nation, however one might construe or imagine such a nation. The effort, then, to create a speech community that was congruent with the intended political-territorial community was an integral part of language reform, and it has continued to create tensions over those who contest the state's unitary vision of what it means to be a member of the nation: recent tensions over such issues as Mandarin education in Xinjiang and Mandarin broadcasting in Guangdong highlight the conflictual nature of the practical efforts to linguistically constitute a Chinese nation (Jacobs 2014; Apple Daily 2010; Tam 2016b, 276–91).

Conclusion

In many ways the creation, dissemination, and current ascendancy of Mandarin as a language of all Chinese people is a reflection of a new ideal for organizing society: a unified national speech community in the which the standard language is accessible to all and mastery of which is based on individual ability rather than class background. Before language reform, the official language was restricted to a narrow stratum of classically educated literati; perhaps only 10 percent of the population in Ming and Qing times had access to the Classical Chinese literacy that would have allowed access to the civil examination system, the main path to social advancement. Meritocracy—the advancement of individuals based on native ability and personal effort—was largely restricted to the "fully classically literate gentry-merchant elites" (Elman 2013, 132–33).[8]

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[8] The term "meritocracy"—meaning intelligence-plus-effort—was coined (as a pejorative) by British Labor Party activist Michael Young. The word first appeared in a novel of his published in 1958, *The Rise of the Meritocracy,* which was a satire, in the vein of *Brave New World,* that portrayed a stark future in which meritocracy led to ever-

Afterwards, however, the whole nation was supposed to be held to the same linguistic standard, with more opportunity for advancement. Of course, this was the intention and the ideology, but whether such a meritocratic ideal has worked out in practice in any country is, I concede, very much open to question.

The expansion of such meritocratic thinking and practice in the realm of language practices is a reflection of a nationalist modernity in which linguistic universalism transcended localities but stopped at the nation's borders. In such a world, it becomes possible to view language standards as tools of bourgeois hegemony and oppression rather than as a means to liberation, a common mindset in social theory and sociolinguistics in the past few decades. That is, such a hegemony occurs (in the Gramscian sense) when people, even those whose ability to use the standard is limited, subscribe to "standard language ideology" (Milroy 2001): they become complicit in their own oppression. Hence the putative dispute between prescriptive and descriptive linguistics, which is almost always resolved in favor of the latter. In a linguistically modern world, in which all members of a society are held to an explicitly defined set of rules for a standard language, all people in theory then have an opportunity to participate in educational and economic meritocracy. Linguistic descriptivism, as it has often been used in sociolinguistics, can only take place in a world in which standard language ideology is largely taken for granted, and in which the standard language has already heavily influenced most people's language practices and perceptions. That is, one cannot decry the punctiliousness of prescriptivism in a world in which there are no standard languages in the modern (often nationalist) sense. In premodern times, official languages were unavailable to the bulk of humanity, when supraregional classical languages were used by a small class of elites in many parts of the world. Now, standard languages are supposed to be available to everyone, a state of affairs dismissed as "the illusion of linguistic communism" (Bourdieu 1991, 43).

In this chapter, I have sought to historicize an instance of linguistic modernity by charting the rise of a national standard language in China. In so doing, I seek in part to counter the simplistic opposition to standard languages as tools of oppression that is sometimes found within the descriptivist literature. I am not attempting to dispute the role of standard languages and standard language ideology in perpetuating class privilege and existing forms of social stratification. Many sociolinguistic studies have demonstrated such a phenomenon. Nevertheless, I seek to remind readers that there was a time before nationalist language standardization, in which opportunity for advancement through education was limited to a far narrower subset of the human population. When compared with such a world, the national unification of languages, even with all its attendant problems and oppressions, represents a significant advance.

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increasing inequality and a sense of entitlement among the meritocratically privileged (Young 1958). Of course, defining what constitutes "merit" has always been contentious and often reflects the values of those in power (Karabel 2005, 5; Subramanian 2015).

2

Uneasy Companions: Language and Human Collectivities in the Remaking of Chinese Society in the Early Twentieth Century

On December 21, 2010, the BBC reported that China's General Administration of Press and Publication, seeking to avoid further "sullying the purity of the Chinese language," had banned the use of English words in the print and broadcast media (BBC 2010). The regulation that the BBC was reporting on, the "Notice Regarding the Better Regulation of the Language Used in Publications," actually did a fair bit less. In seeking to stem the tide of irregular usages, the government sought to impose what amounted to a "house style" on the media nationwide. It banned the use of foreign acronyms, foreign words appearing without explanation, and Chinese-coined neologisms that mixed Chinese with English (i.e., "Chinglish") that had no clear definition (Xinwen Chuban Zongshu 2010). A few days later, the Communist Party–run newspaper the *Global Times* published opinion pieces by Wang Di in both English and Chinese defending the policy. In Wang's view, the problem was not with people online using casual language interspersed with English, but rather with formal publications' irregular usages. The casual employment of nonstandard usages, both in Chinese and English, was detrimental, Wang argued, to the cognitive abilities of the Chinese public, and reflected a lack of national self-confidence. Though all languages have always had foreign influences, Wang wrote, the present relationship between English and Chinese was highly unequal and, in effect, represented an "invasion" of the latter by the former (Johnson 2010; Wang D. 2010). Since then, flare-ups over language purity in the Chinese media have occasionally reappeared (Economist 2014).

The English-language media are often bemused at such attempts to defend a language against the onslaught of English. French-speakers are probably their most frequent object of derision, particularly attempts by the state in France and Quebec to regulate the usage of ordinary French speakers. Often part of an effort to stem the Anglophone tide, purist coinages that fail to take hold, like *texto pornographique* for "sexting," do make for good newspaper copy (Mikanowski 2018). But making jabs at the inability of a language regulatory body to influence something so seemingly democratic as language is to miss the forest for the trees. That the entire territory of China now encompasses ever-increasing numbers of Mandarin speakers (and France, French speakers) is in itself a remarkable change from just a century earlier, when China, France, and the rest of the world were a patchwork of many regional languages. How, then, have national lingua francas arisen?

How one answers this question depends on how one conceptualizes the relationship between language and human collectivities. Is language a form of cultural capital, or is it a basis for groupness in itself? If, as in Pierre Bourdieu's thinking, one prioritizes language's nature as a form of capital, then one is primed to notice the ways in which it is unequally distributed in society, reflected in such vertical distinctions as class and status (Bourdieu 1991; Gramsci 1991, 183–84; Hanks 2005). A national standard language would, in this model, be most easily explained as the result of a shift in class relations and the imposition of the language of the new bourgeois elite as the language of a nationalizing society. If, on the other hand, one prioritizes language's ability to facilitate the formation of social relationships, as in Max Weber's thinking, then one is more likely to notice how language can be deployed to create symbolic and social boundaries among horizontally-distinguished units of peoplehood, such as ethnic, religious, and national groups (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Muehlmann 2014; Tada 2018; M. Weber 1978, 42–43). In this model, the choice of official language is not necessarily reflective of any particular class, even though rulers are usually in charge of such decisions. This chapter interrogates these two contrasting conceptualizations of language—Bourdieusian and Weberian—and finds both fall short in explaining the nature of national standard languages in cases that differ greatly from their European base.

These shortcomings stem from the nineteenth-century European origins of modern social theory, which largely takes Western cases as normative, especially when it comes to language. Changes in post-medieval European language practices, at least among the literate elite, consisted in a gradual shift from Latin to the national vernaculars. As a result, language change is usually studied from the perspective of the slow evolution of language practices amid the rise of the bourgeoisie and market capitalism. The state played a significant role in spreading national standard languages to the masses in Europe, and language was a critical, if imperfect, way nations were distinguished from one another in theory and practice. For rulers, who often were foreigners in their own lands, it was increasingly important to be less culturally different from the people they ruled, and language rose to prominence as a marker of national identity (Anderson 1991, 76–77; Gellner 1983, 35–38; Lie 2004, 126).

In contrast, changes in language practices outside of Europe, such as those that occurred throughout East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century, occurred much more abruptly, usually in reaction to Western expansionism. As a result, these places outside Europe tend to be studied separately as cases of postcolonial modernization and development, in which countries seek to "catch up" to the West (Fishman, Ferguson, and Dasgupta 1968). The "language planning" literature that covers these non-Western cases, often utopian in outlook, has not been very active since the 1980s, after it found its optimism misplaced. Sociology itself has for decades been largely mute on the subject of language, and language studies are now mostly done in linguistics, sociolinguistics, or linguistic anthropology. Language, however, is an eminently sociological subject of study, since it is the basis of virtually all social interaction. Linguistic anthropologist William Hanks has articulated the "conviction that language is basic to human sociality" (Hanks 1996, xiv). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any social interaction occurring without language. Politics, much less political protest or social movements, cannot occur in the absence of linguistic exchanges. Even violence does not necessarily surprise or puzzle us unless it is "senseless" or "meaningless." Linguistic exchange is the medium *par excellence* of conveying meaning, and even, as some scholars have argued, a means of constituting social reality. Language, in other words, is foundational to social life (Austin 1962; Berger and Luckmann 1967, 34–41; Searle 1995).

This chapter shows that, though the more familiar Western cases may suggest it, a national standard language is not always or necessarily the language "of" the ruling class. Such may often be the case, but the connections between language and class—or any other human collectivity, for that matter—are not so straightforward as the word "of" may suggest. Neither is a national standard language simply the political reorganization of a preexisting language community as a nation-state (Tada 2018, 455). In this chapter, I examine the Chinese state's nation-building efforts, a key part of which was to codify and elevate a new national language. Integral to this project was the transition away from Literary (or Classical) Chinese to Modern Standard Chinese, or Mandarin. The key formative period for this change spanned the 1910s and 1930s, a revolutionary era during which the imperial state collapsed and a succession of regimes attempted to take its place. During these three decades, the national spoken and written languages were created and made official by the Ministry of Education. Mandarin increasingly became the language of education in an emerging state-run school system, and it grew as a medium of communication in print, broadcast, film, and music. In effect, the Chinese state accomplished in three decades what had occurred in Europe over the course of several centuries: a transition from a supranational classical language to a national vernacular. Because of this compressed timeframe, the Chinese case provides a concentrated view of the state's efforts to create and propagate a national standard language, a perspective that the Western cases—far more gradual and thus more seemingly "natural"—do not provide. China, long the world's most populous country, is effectively the single largest national language development project in human history, and the inability of existing theory to account for this case and other similar non-Western cases is cause enough for serious concern—and thus fertile ground for further inquiry.

The Chinese case is especially theoretically generative because it clarifies the relationship between competing models of language in a way that the more familiar Western cases do not. France is often cited as exceptionally centralized and top-down in its national language policy, but the less-familiar Chinese case is even more extreme: at the time of the state's creation of the standard language, it represented the living practice of virtually no one. Mandarin is a historically discontinuous form deliberately designed to be different from any living Chinese vernacular. While Mandarin is usually associated with Beijing dialect or the speech of the imperial court, its pronunciation system and vocabulary are explicitly distinct from either of these linguistic antecedents.

As such, Mandarin represents a degree of linguistic artificiality that exceeds its Western counterparts. As an intensively cultivated artificial language, Mandarin reveals how language standardization really is an attempt at technocratic social engineering. Among the most pressing goals of social policy in early twentieth-century China was the spread of literacy. The difficulty of the existing written standard, Literary Chinese—a supranational lingua franca comparable to Latin—was thought to inhibit widespread literacy. Hence language reform: creating a standard language more accessible to ordinary people, thus making it easier to learn to read, thereby furthering national integration and, in the eyes of reformers, national strength. Mandarin, as a national standard language that was more accessible than its predecessor, represented an extension of an official language from a narrow imperial elite to the entirety of a national society. As an extreme case of linguistic engineering and inclusive (even oppressive) language policies, the Chinese case contributes significantly to our understanding of the malleability of the relationship between language and human collectivities. I argue that both the Bourdieusian and Weberian approaches fall short in their explanatory power because they ignore the important role of human intentionality in shaping not only the *function* of a language—the link between a standard language and its intended community—but also the *form* of the language—its sound and spelling, and even grammar, which can be made to be more or less accessible to learners.

While in this chapter I highlight human agency, I do not seek to argue that the problem with the Weberian and Bourdieusian approaches is an overemphasis on structure and an elision of agency—a tired dichotomy as there ever was. Rather, the issue is that each theorist has treated language itself as autonomous—that is, they assume that broader changes in the internal workings of a language (in particular, its pronunciation and grammar) are beyond individual human manipulation. The autonomy of language is an assumption that forms the basis of much of American linguistics, but it is one that has long been resisted by scholars outside of that field

(Newmeyer 1986).[9] Nevertheless, linguistic autonomy—the essentially democratic nature of language, impervious to top-down manipulations of its internal workings—is an assumption that is more widely held than one might think: jokes about the French Academy's ham-handed attempts to regulate language, along with snarky asides about wholly-invented languages like Esperanto, would not be funny if we did not believe language to be beyond the control—much less invention—of mere individuals. But the Chinese state made use of existing linguistic raw materials to create something entirely new: a language oriented towards a vision of a society in which the official language was widely accessible to all.

Building on the strengths of Weber and Bourdieu, I present an alternative theoretical approach, leaning on the notion of "unanticipated consequences" (Merton 1936). I argue that a language itself can be designed to suit a particular social purpose, and that the relationship between such a language and a particular group of people is not a given, but rather can be intentionally made. However, the consequences of these intentional moves can be contrary to the intentions of the movers. My alternative approach decenters the linguistic autonomy implicit in the conceptualizations of Weber and Bourdieu that lead to each theorist's conclusions about language, society and the rise of national standard languages. Doing so allows us to account for such extremes of language planning as the Chinese case, in which the language was deliberately plebeianized to further nation-building and thus constitute a new feeling of belonging among a previously disparate population—a possibility not really considered by Weber. And yet, in spite of this intended democratization of language, language-proficiency-based hierarchies of class have still arisen in China (C. W.-C. Li 2004, 2014). However, under my alternative theoretical approach, instead of being built into the system from the outset, as Bourdieu posits, this emergence of linguistic inequality becomes more easily explained as an unanticipated consequence of language standardization.

In the ensuing sections, I first discuss in more depth the theoretical approaches taken by Weber and Bourdieu in explaining the relationship between languages and groups of people.[10] I then show, through a historical narration of the Chinese case of language standardization, how these theories fail to explain the radical linguistic reconfiguration of Chinese society that occurred in the twentieth century. I then present my alternative theoretical approach, showing how it more easily accounts for these changes and avoids the difficulties that Weber and Bourdieu run into when used to explain the sort of linguistic changes that I detail.

Existing Explanations: Weber and Bourdieu

Germany's sometimes troubled association with linguistic and ethnic nationalism is familiar. Thus, it might be surprising to discover that Max Weber argued that commonality of language was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a set of humans to believe themselves to belong together. Such at least was certainly the case at least in the sense of a collectivity whose primary bond was the sort of social relationship Weber called "communitization"

[9] My use of "autonomy" here points to assumptions about language's democratic nature, owing to its apparent imperviousness to consciously made "internal" modifications (i.e., to its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation), as opposed to "external" modifications (changing a language's role in society—e.g., designating a language as the official language). This is distinct from Bourdieu's usage, which addresses the autonomy of fields of power.

[10] In this chapter, I loosely use "groups of people," "human collectivities," and "social aggregates" as equivalents for social groupings that might be rooted in any number of intersecting symbolic and social boundaries, such as class, nationality, and ethnicity.

(*Vergemeinschaftung*),[11] which for him was based "on a subjectively **felt** (affectual or traditional) **mutual sense of belonging** among those involved" (M. Weber 2019, 120).[12] For Weber, this subjective feeling of belonging was a key component to his conception of ethnic groups, which he defined as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both…" (M. Weber 1978, 389). And the concept of nationality, in Weber's view, included a "vague connotation that whatever is felt to be distinctively common must derive from common descent" (M. Weber 1978, 395).

Although, in Weber's time, as well as in our own, "a shared common language is pre-eminently considered the normal basis of nationality," Weber nevertheless pointed out that many nation-states comprise speakers of more than one language (such as Canada and Switzerland). Conversely, speakers of the same language in many cases belong to several different nations (such as English and German). Moreover, merely speaking the same language was "insufficient in sustaining a sense of national identity (*Nationalgefühl*)" (M. Weber 1978, 395–96). Indeed, a community defined by speech—what famed linguists such as Leonard Bloomfield (1933, 42–56) and John Gumperz (1962) would call a "speech community"—was for Weber similar to one defined by ethnicity: a concept whose components—language and belonging—did not hang together easily. Mitsuhiro Tada (2018, 442) has gone so far as to argue that such a concept would "disappear" if the concept were fully fleshed out, though others have pointed out that Weber did, at least initially, include the notion of a "language community" (*Sprachgemeinschaft*) in his conceptualization of a communitization based on consensus (*Einverständnis-Vergemeinschaftung*), since in this early conceptual scheme, Weber posited that speakers behaved "as if" the rules of language had been arrived at by prior agreement (though they actually had not been) (M. Weber [1913] 2012, 290–91; Lichtblau 2011, 460). These rules, of course, could later be made explicit, as in the establishment of a language academy, such as the Accademia della Crusca in Italy, thereby transitioning to a different kind of social relationship, the "rational ideal type of societization" (*Vergesellschaftung*) (M. Weber [1913] 2012, 291, 293).

In his later writing, Weber modified his ideal-typical conceptualizations of social relationships by pairing "communitization" (*Vergemeinschaftung*) with a revised notion of its complement, "societization" (*Vergesellschaftung*).[13] He had originally defined societization as a social relationship based on explicit agreement, but in his revised scheme, societization now pointed to one based on "a **balance** of rationally motivated interests (whether value rational or purposively rational), or to the **connection** of interests motivated in the same way"—that is, mutual interest alone, not necessarily with any explicit agreement (Lichtblau 2011, 463; M. Weber 2019, 120). In this revised scheme, language was no longer conceived of as being able to serve as the basis for communitization—a subjective feeling of belonging together; it was, however, helpful in (though not in itself sufficient for) facilitating societization—action based on mutual interest, which requires a mutual understanding greatly aided by having a language in common (M. Weber 2019, 122).

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[11] There are a number of English translations of *Vergemeinschaftung,* including "communal social relationship" (M. Weber 1978) and "communalization" (Scaff 2011; M. Weber 2019). Here, I follow Bruun and Whimster (M. Weber [1913] 2012), whose usage to me seems least forced.
[12] Keith Tribe, in his translation of *Economy and Society,* uses boldface to indicate emphasis marked in Weber's original text, avoiding the confusion that italics might create, given that italics are also conventionally used for words in the source language (German) (M. Weber 2019, x).
[13] *Vergesellschaftung* has also been translated in several different ways, among them, "associative social relationship" (M. Weber 1978), and "sociation" (Scaff 2011; M. Weber 2019). Again, I follow Bruun and Whimster (M. Weber [1913] 2012).

As linguistic anthropologist Shaylih Muehlmann (2014) has pointed out, difficulties with the concept of "speech community," which assumes a consensus and homogeneity among speakers that are almost never encountered in the real world, have prompted many scholars to move on to other, seemingly more workable concepts, such as nationality, ethnicity, minority, or various conceptualizations of the public sphere and its constituent "publics," originated by Jürgen Habermas (1991). Ethnic or national community and its inherent constructedness are perhaps most familiar to contemporary scholars in the form of Benedict Anderson's (1991) *Imagined Communities,* which itself was situated within a larger body of constructivist literature on nationalism, arguing that nationality existed first in the minds of people—strangers—who were bound across space and time by languages—national vernaculars—spread by print capitalism. In a similar vein, Weber notes that, "Today, the interests of writers and publishers lead as a matter of course to greater uniformity of language (*Sprachpropaganda*), as contrasted to private languages formerly closed by social rank, or privy to particular persons" (M. Weber 2019, 125). These national vernacular languages, bolstered by a market in print, were then co-opted by emerging national governments in a nation-building wave that first crested in Europe, and then later (derivatively) in other parts of the world.

In a sense, then, we can consider Weber to be a major progenitor of an inclusive model of language, in which the use of language as a constitutive criterion of group membership is an exercise in creative ascription done by a national state. Indeed, the potential for inclusivity of Weber's conceptualization of language is evident in his argument that members of a language group "normally have no interest in excluding other persons," though they might want to keep certain conversations private. Of course, language still had the potential to exclude: in his view, "a language (which is sacred, status-specific, or secret) or a market can be monopolistically 'closed' through consensus and association." But the openness or closedness of the relationships whose basis was having a language in common was, for Weber, not a given (M. Weber [1913] 2012, 295).

Bourdieu, on the other hand, took a quite different approach in his examination of language's role in shaping society. His arguments largely parallel parts of the Marxian linguist Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov ([1929] 1986), who criticized the structuralist approach in linguistics by arguing that the study of language cannot be divorced from its social context. Bourdieu also echoed Antonio Gramsci, who had himself studied linguistics: Gramsci argued that language standardization was a "political act," and that changes in language practices reflected larger realignments among social classes (Gramsci 1966, 202–5). In *Language and Symbolic Power,* and to a lesser extent in *The State Nobility,* Bourdieu's point of entry was a critique of structuralism, which in his view treated language as an idealized symbolic system to which all speakers had unfettered access. Deriding this structuralist conceptualization as "linguistic communism," Bourdieu argued such an approach was untenable because of the manifestly unequal distribution of linguistic and cultural capital in society, promoted most heavily since the French Revolution by an educated bourgeoisie, who had "everything to gain" from the privileged position that "their" language increasingly occupied (Bourdieu 1991, 47). Even before the French Revolution, however, the Parisian French language of the social elite had already been advancing "hand in hand" with the construction of the monarchical state (Bourdieu 1991, 46–47). Bourdieu's insight was to introduce notions of "class relations of labor and production"—i.e., political economy—into the structuralist framework, which had shown that language, a symbolic system, is structured by its own internal logic—i.e., autonomous—and that language is then used to construct the social world of its speakers, organizing people's experiences and reinforced by practice (Hanks 2005, 77). In Bourdieu's view, access to an official or standard language was limited by society's elites, who sought to legitimize their status by controlling access to the mass education system. Elites, Bourdieu argued, allowed a small amount of social mobility through the schools to preserve the appearance of meritocratic fairness (Bourdieu 1996; Wacquant 1993). Bourdieu's approach, then, might be characterized as an exclusive model of language, pointing out the differential access that people have to language, and by extension, the public sphere, the labor market, and opportunities in life in general.

Bourdieu argued that the need for a national standard language becomes pronounced during the creation of a nation. Citing the Durkheimian notion of consensus, he argued that language and education become tools for national "moral and intellectual" integration (Bourdieu 1991, 49). In a way, in pointing out the arbitrariness of a national standard language—how it in fact was not necessarily inherently better than so-called "dialects"—Bourdieu's argument acknowledged the artificial and constructed nature of a national speech community. At the same time, his argument took for granted the nation as a unit of analysis, an assumption whose limitations have been pointed out specifically in works that examine transnational contexts. For instance, Haeri's (1997a) work on Bourdieu's notion of "language markets," in which some languages are valued more highly than others, transplants his theory to Egypt, where foreign languages such as English, French, and German often deliver better-paying careers than the national standard, Classical Arabic. Bourdieu's use of the nation—and France specifically—is part of a broader trend of methodological nationalism addressed in Mitsuhiro Tada's critique of the "naturalization of a standardized national language" in sociological research (Tada 2018, 441). Both Haeri and Tada, as well as many others, point to the global dominance of English as evidence that the nation's conceptual hold on language, so long taken for granted, has never really been a workable idea (Gordin 2015; Pennycook 1994; Swaan 2001).

Though this chapter does discuss a national case—China—it does not ignore the global and transnational context in which the creation of a Chinese language and a Chinese nation took place simultaneously, a context in which the rapidly industrializing nations of Europe encroached ever more deeply into social life around the world. Chinese reformers, while resenting Western imperialism, admired what they perceived to be the Western model of language practice, in which a standardized language was made available to all citizens through mass education. In fact, recent historical research has shown how intellectual reformers in China sought explicitly to make the standard language accessible and to universalize literacy (Luo 2016; Merkel-Hess 2016, 54; Tam 2016a; Weng 2018).[14] Language, as structuralists posited and Bourdieu accepted, might be a symbolic system with its own internal logic, but I argue such a logic is susceptible to intentional modification and planning.

Moreover, even if building a community on the basis of a language, as Weber argued, is an exercise in prescribing (rather than describing) a social demarcation, such an association can still be planted in the minds of the members of any such community and thus become a social fact. As pioneering sociologist of language Joshua Fishman argued, debates over the arbitrariness of national languages—that is, how they are not inherently superior—are usually marshaled to prove or disprove "the validity of nationalist ideology (or of a particular nationalist ideology) concerning the crucial role and the superior quality of the vernacular (or of a particular

[14] The Chinese intellectuals' imaginings of Western linguistic egalitarianism may have been exaggerated, at least in the rhetoric of their advocacy: well into the twentieth century, Bourdieu (1991, 62–63), discussing France, was arguing that educated elites, in an endless pursuit of distinction over others, often ended up making the official language more difficult.

vernacular)" rather than to clarify "why such views have so frequently come to be held and to be held so fiercely and by so many" (Fishman 1972, 40). Such a critique applies as much to Bourdieu as it does to Weber. Bourdieu argues that standard languages are arbitrary ("misrecognized" as superior, in his parlance) and oppressive. Weber argues that there is no inherent conceptual basis for associating people by language, and that all such associations are artificial. As the Chinese case so well illustrates, neither argument is particularly satisfactory, because the state can both *make* a new language—one that is easier, rather than more difficult—and the state can *force* an association between that language and its designated imagined community. These policies then take on a life of their own, becoming social facts in their own right, external to and independent of any particular individual, and endowed with the power to coerce and constrain (Durkheim 1938, 1–13).

Reforming Language in China

At the time that Chinese language reformers were creating a new standard language in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, their country was home to about one-quarter of the earth's population. The new republican regime had nominally taken over the imperial territory of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), an agglomeration of extreme human diversity, though centralized authority was weak in the face of regional warlords that controlled substantial portions of China. The intellectuals who worked in the Ministry of Education sought to create a new standard language for a polity that previously had been held together by Literary Chinese, an arcane written language used mainly by elite literati, who constituted less than ten percent of the population (Elman 2013, 132). In attempting to create a unified written and spoken standard for use by the citizens of a post-imperial Chinese nation, these reformers were not simply elites who were imposing their own language on the rest of society. In fact, their overriding concern was the spread of literacy to strengthen the nation. Impassioned debates over many issues, ranging from the country's linguistic fragmentation to the difficulty of the character-based script, raged all through the first decades of the twentieth century. Many proposals were raised and discarded: some argued for the widespread use of Esperanto; others advocated the simplification of Chinese characters, or even their abolition in favor of an alphabetic script. In this section, I outline the complicated changes that occurred in China's existing language situation in the nineteenth century and how language reform took place early on in the republican era (1911–1949). I focus on the reform of the spoken language, as this process illustrates particularly well the ways in which language reformers attempted to make the language more accessible, adopting an inclusive approach to language by attempting to bring about a more linguistically egalitarian society.

The Evolution of Linguistic Culture in China[15]

Like virtually all modern nation-states, China is a multiethnic society, and its linguistic and ethnic diversity is special if only for its magnitude: China is, after all, the world's most populous nation and also the second-largest nation by territory, with a land area almost equal to all of the European continent. China's size is also matched by its antiquity, with a recorded history

[15] I follow Harold Schiffman's (2002, 5) definition of "linguistic culture": "the set of behaviors, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language, and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language."

stretching back at least two thousand years. In the eighteenth century, several Qing emperors were able to conquer or gain suzerainty over vast swaths of Inner Asian territory, roughly corresponding to today's Western regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. It was this territory that Chinese republican revolutionaries inherited in 1911 upon the collapse of the imperial system, and one that they fatefully decided to keep intact in their attempts to build a new nation from the ashes of empire (Crossley 2000, 341). With the exception of lands lost to Russia in China's northeast, the detachment of outer Mongolia, and Taiwan's de facto independence, China's current territorial holdings largely correspond to the Qing dynasty's multiethnic empire—a continuing source of tension, especially in its western territories, where ethnic minorities face continuing government repression.

China's official language is based on, but not identical to, the dialect of Beijing. The language is often referred to as "Mandarin," although this term specifically refers to the country's official spoken language, which is now called *putonghua,* or "common speech," especially in mainland China. (Another term *guoyu,* or "national language," is mostly used in Taiwan.) The written language, though closely based on Mandarin, retains some influence from Literary Chinese, and is usually simply referred to as written "Chinese." Favoring brevity over precision, this chapter will refer to China's official standard language as "Mandarin." Though drawing from existing language practices, Mandarin is in large part an artificial construct: by design, it was no one's native language, and even speakers of Beijing dialect today have to modify their speech in order to speak the standard (Duanmu 2007, 5). Mandarin is thus like all other modern standard languages, which have to varying degrees all undergone a process of active cultivation, whether through regulation by a state-sanctioned organization like the French Academy, or through private codification, as with lexical publications such as Webster's and the Oxford English Dictionary (Gordin 2015; Romaine 1998). Unlike unstandardized languages, mastery of standard languages does not simply happen by itself in childhood development; it must be gained through educational training (Milroy 2001).

What distinguishes Mandarin, however, from the familiar Western cases—most frequently English and French—is that it is an extreme case. Famed Chinese linguist (and all-around polymath) Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) noted that the vernacular speech of Beijing was not held in any particular regard in his childhood (Chao 1976b, 7). This state of affairs had been true for much of the preceding 500 years: the imperial lingua franca used by the literate elite, known as *guanhua* (meaning "officials' speech"), was an informal amalgam heavily influenced by the speech of Nanjing, the capital of the early Ming dynasty. The linguistic influence of Beijing, to which the Ming moved their capital in 1421, did not make itself felt until the latter half of the nineteenth century (Coblin 2000). All along, *guanhua* was never precisely defined in terms of pronunciation, grammar, or other conventions—Chao himself said his father and grandfather both spoke it "poorly" (Chao et al. 1977, 56–57).

Elisabeth Kaske (2008, 1–7) has argued that China's language situation before the 1920s was strongly diglossic. Diglossia is a "relatively stable language situation" in which there is a strong divergence between a heavily codified "high" variety for formal use and one or more "low" varieties for everyday use (Ferguson 1959). A classic example of diglossia is the superposition of Latin—premodern Europe's language of scholarship—over a wide variety of local vernacular languages. In China's case, the high variety was Literary Chinese, a language that exists primarily in written form, but there was no single low variety; rather, there were several different layers of linguistic practice. There was the imperial spoken lingua franca, *guanhua*. Based on this form of speech was a written language, known today as *baihua* (meaning "clear speech," or simply the "vernacular"), in which many popular novels of the past several centuries had been written. (These works of narrative fiction belonged to a genre much less prestigious than the historical and religious texts written in Literary Chinese.) There were also hundreds of forms of local speech all across China, mostly mutually unintelligible—what we today, purely for reasons of habit, would call "dialects."[16]

This language situation reflects a strong divergence in Chinese linguistic culture between the written and spoken word. Indeed, even into the late nineteenth century, the Chinese words, and thus concepts, for written language (*wenzi*) and spoken language (*yuyan)* were separate (Kaske 2008, 31–32). The complex language practices of China had pronounced implications for the organization of society: up until the twentieth century, empowering literacy in Literary Chinese was restricted to the less than ten percent of the population that had access to the resources necessary to learn and use that highly arcane language, which was useful primarily for the empire-wide civil service examinations (Elman 2013, 132–33).

There is no precise agreement about when this highly stratified language situation began to fall apart. Kaske (2008, xi) argues that China's unexpected defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 was the principal impetus, while sociolinguist Ping Chen (1999, 13) argues that it was China's defeat in the Opium Wars of the 1840s that spurred reform. Almost all observers cite the intentions of language reformers, working within the state, to align writing more closely with speech, a goal they borrowed from Meiji-era (1868–1912) Japanese reformers. For many progressive intellectuals in China, the use of Literary Chinese for most types of formal writing was an impediment to social progress and thus national strength, since mastering Literary Chinese and the large and arcane canon written in it was a long and arduous process, available only to the affluent (Elman 2013, 134). The purport of language reformers from the 1910s to the 1930s was to break the monopoly of Literary Chinese in most formal written domains and to create a new national lingua franca and a new literature for a newly imagined Chinese nation. In so doing, they were influenced by language reformers in Japan, who after many debates that began in the 1870s, shed their centuries-old reliance on Literary Chinese as a prestige language. Between the 1890s and 1920s, they settled on educated Tokyo speech as the spoken standard. A related written form that retained heavy use of Chinese characters, supplemented by a conservative *kana* orthography, served as the written standard. This situation remained largely in place until the end of World War II. Even today, however, Chinese characters remain in regular use in written Japanese (Clark 2009, 128; Gottlieb 2005, 8–9; Heinrich 2012, 69; Kaske 2008, 16–27; Lee 1996, 48–49).

This retention of Chinese characters makes Japan's script reforms more conservative than those carried out in Korea and Vietnam in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These two other countries in China's cultural orbit had also seen Literary Chinese employed by their educated elite. For Korea and Vietnam, as for Japan, language reform, to varying degrees, meant a rejection of the Chinese cultural heritage and an indigenization of language by nationalist intellectuals. In both cases, Chinese writing was jettisoned in favor of an alphabetic script. In contrast, China, as the former regional hegemon, found itself wrestling with a cultural inheritance that could only be understood to be its own, a point that infused debates over language reform with a unique anxiety.

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[16] No language can be demarcated purely on linguistic criteria. The conceptualization of "Chinese" as a unitary language with many "dialects," as opposed to a family of related but mutually unintelligible languages, is a political decision and not a linguistic one (Norman 1988, 1–3).

In more theoretical terms, language reformers and the state they served, in seeking to create a unified national standard language, were creating a linguistically inclusive Chinese nation, a task made more urgent by the polyglot and multiethnic legacy left by the Qing empire, defunct since 1911. The inclusion of hundreds of millions of new potential speakers into a freshly imagined (but yet-to-be-achieved) national speech community transformed what empowering literacy in an official language meant. The extension of an official language to people who had previously been mere linguistic bystanders meant that the value of such a language was now more broadly in demand. Stratification previously imposed largely by lineage and economic circumstance instead had to be legitimized through a reconstituted educational meritocracy, now conducted in a single unified national language. While Bourdieu reads this as an imposition of bourgeois hegemony—he says that, in France, the bourgeoisie had "everything to gain" from national linguistic unification—the Chinese case, in the extreme artificiality of its language, reminds us that such an imposition can also be read as incorporation and inclusion. Indeed, even for the French case itself, historian Eugen Weber (1976, 303) reminds us that the spread of standard French was facilitated mainly when ordinary people saw it as a benefit to themselves, useful for personal and familial advancement, an argument that de Swaan (2001) has taken up in more global form, with his analysis of the relative value of languages to individual interests.

Reformers and Standardization

The modern sounds of Chinese, essentially a modified subset of Beijing pronunciations, were created by a small group of men working within the republican Chinese state. The initial effort to standardize pronunciation took place in 1913, when some forty delegates from most of China's provinces and regions met in Beijing as part of the Committee for the Unification of Reading Pronunciations (*Duyin Tongyi Hui*). Given the controversies over what shape the national speech was to take, the Committee's ambit was exceedingly narrow—essentially, to codify a register of pronunciation for the formal reading of texts, as opposed to a more casual register of everyday speech. In this way, the Committee sidestepped the question of determining which region's grammar, syntax, and lexicon to adopt for the national standard, and it also punted on the heated question of script reform (i.e., retaining characters or adopting a phonetic script). Instead, the Committee took the highly limited step of standardizing the pronunciation of the characters of the existing script. The result of the Committee's work was a set of pronunciations for about 6,500 Chinese characters, ninety percent of which were based on Beijing pronunciations, and the other ten percent of which adopted features of other regions' forms of speech. This initial standardization, now usually known as "Old National Pronunciation" (*Lao Guoyin*), was strange indeed (P. Chen 1999, 16–19). It incorporated many elements from southern and eastern dialects that were wholly alien to what was permissible in actual spoken Beijing dialect. For instance, Old National Pronunciation incorporated an extra tone, the "entering tone" (*rusheng*) that was present in some southern dialects, in addition to the four existing tones in Beijing dialect (Kaske 2008, 414–15).[17]

[17] All Chinese languages are "tonal," meaning that the tones are highly significant. Changing the tone of a syllable will change more than its emotional expression—it will shift its meaning altogether, from, say, "sugar" (*táng,* uttered with a rising tone) to "hot" (*tàng,* with a falling tone). The fifth tone of Old National Pronunciation was derived from a category of syllables that, centuries ago, had ended in the stops *–p, –t,* and *–k,* a characteristic preserved in the more conservative dialects of the south, including Cantonese. This characteristic was lost over the

As years passed, this pronunciation system failed to take hold. Political turmoil in the fragmented political landscape of the late 1910s contributed to bureaucratic paralysis at the Ministry of Education, which failed to implement the decisions reached by the 1913 Committee until August 1918, when it officially promulgated the phonetic notation system developed by the Committee (Kaske 2008, 416–19). From a more practical standpoint, the failure of the original standard pronunciation was probably also due to a lack of teachers able to transmit the new pronunciation to the limited number of students able regularly to attend schools at the time. Yuen Ren Chao once claimed that he was the only person able to speak the new standard (Chao 1976b, 79). Starting in the mid-1920s, Chao and six other linguists working for the Ministry of Education formed a small subgroup to work out what they perceived to be the main technical problems with the standard pronunciation. In October 1925 they met for the first time and informally called themselves the "Society of a Few Men" (*Shuren Hui*) (Chao et al. 1977, 78).[18]

This group of seven comprised men of very similar upbringing. Its members, in addition to Chao, were Liu Bannong (1891–1934), Li Jinxi (1890–1978), Zhou Bianming (1891–1984), Lin Yutang (1895–1976), Wang Yi (1875–1960), and Qian Xuantong (1887–1939) (Su 2012, 97–98). All of these men came from well-to-do backgrounds and had been educated as linguists. Several had studied abroad: Chao and Lin in the United States, Liu in Europe, and Qian in Japan. Discussions about language reform and standardization often took place in informal settings outside the Ministry of Education, which was located in Beijing in the early 1920s. These were heady times for these language reformers, who made considerable progress in refining China's national language. Chao records in his diary that he met socially with others in the Society of a Few Men, sometimes at the home of prominent writer Hu Shi (1891–1962). The entry for September 11, 1920—as with most of his diaries, written in English—reads in part:

> Out to Suh Hu's [Hu Shi], a house with large low rooms, with mats for carpet & many Chinese books. Hu has invited several members of 國語研究會 [*Guoyu Yanjiu Hui,* The Association for National Language Research] to tea. 錢 [Qian] … & 汪怡 [Wang Yi] among them are most talkative. I discussed very rapidly & at great length various points with them. I am surprized [*sic*] at the comparative soundness & thoroness [*sic*] with which they have thought out things. They wrote a Chinese letter in international phonetic script, which I read with ease. Some of their ideas were exactly as I thought of several years ago, but thinking they would be too radical to find listening ears, I kept them all to myself. They are going to publish some sound tables & consulted my ideas. I contributed some which they adopted right there & then. They proposed to make me a member of the National Language Research Society. With men like those I just met, I think the Chinese language has hope (Chao 1920).

One might wonder how these men were able to communicate with one another. Not one of them had grown up in Beijing; all but one were from eastern and southern provinces, with

years in many northern dialects, including that of Beijing, which redistributed these fifth-tone syllables more or less randomly among the four remaining tones (Chao et al. 1977, 81; Kaske 2008, 413–14). Adding a fifth tone, therefore, is highly confusing—speakers used to four tones must redistribute an unsystematic and unpredictable subset of syllables from the usual four tones into the fifth tone.

[18] The nickname *Shuren Hui* was a reference to the *Qieyun,* a rhyming dictionary published in 601 CE by the lexicographer Lu Fayan, who wrote in the preface, "We few men decide, and it is decided" (*wo bei shu ren, ding ze ding yi*).

dialects differing greatly from that of Beijing. Only Chao grew up in the north, having been born in Tianjin (about 130 kilometers southeast of Beijing) to parents from Changzhou, in the eastern coastal province of Jiangsu, and he later recounted some familiarity with Beijing dialect as a child (Chao et al. 1977, 56–57). The usual practice at the time was to communicate roughly in what is now confusingly referred to as "blue-green Mandarin" (*lanqing guanhua*), which Chao later described thus: "Blue-green Mandarin is a popular phrase describing those people who pick up Mandarin keeping a lot of their own native accent. So there's no standard blue-green Mandarin [laughter]; it depends upon who is saying it" (Chao et al. 1977, 80). Further clues to this roughly defined common speech come from another famed language reformer (and onetime anarchist) Wu Zhihui (1865–1953), born near the city of Wuxi, also in Jiangsu, who in December of 1920 gave a lecture on the dual problems of pronunciation and literature in the new national language. Begging his audience's forgiveness, he explained why he was resorting to "blue-green Mandarin" in giving his talk: "Brothers (*xiongdi*), supposing I used Wuxi dialect to give this talk, it would sound awful (*nanting*), or if I used Shanghainese, I wouldn't be able to speak it very well (*shuo bu lai*), so I might as well use blue-green Mandarin to talk then" (Wu Z. 1920).

Over the course of the 1920s, Chao and other language reformers ended up modifying the "Old National Pronunciation" by replacing most of the non-Beijing pronunciations of Chinese characters with their Beijing equivalents, thus creating a "New National Pronunciation" (*Xin Guoyin*) (P. Chen 1999, 19–22). In an oral history compiled in 1977, Chao said: "We decided—that is, the National Committee on the Unification of the Language—decided that we'd better take the natural speech of Peking [Beijing] city. Peiping [Beiping] it was called then. And so, we just found out how people actually spoke. It's still the standard now—the so-called general speech—*p'u-t'ung hua* [*putonghua*]. Peking is now the standard dialect" (Chao et al. 1977, 78). In 1932, the Ministry of Education published the first glossary of modern Chinese pronunciation, the *Glossary of the National Pronunciation of characters in common use* (*Guoyin changyong zihui*) (Jiaoyubu Guoyu Tongyi Choubei Weiyuanhui 1933). The idea behind this almost wholesale adoption of Beijing pronunciations was mainly practical: in order to teach the Chinese a common language, there needed to be teachers able to teach such a language. And the easiest way to create such teachers was to conform to existing practice in a set region. "At one stroke," Chao wrote, "were created more than one million potential teachers" (Chao 1976b, 80). Of course, even in a single city, language can vary, and Beijing is no exception: the language (or perhaps better, languages) spoken in Beijing have varied greatly over time. They vary by location within the city, and they also vary by age among the speakers themselves. Two of the biggest turning points in the evolution of the language spoken in the city have been the capitulation in 1644 to Manchu invaders upon the collapse of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and the steady influx of migrants into the city ever since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 (Chirkova 2003, 6).

What then was the language that made its way into a government-produced dictionary in 1932? The distinguished linguist and sinologist John DeFrancis argued that the standard language was supposed to be that of the Beijing native with a "middle-school education" (DeFrancis 1950, 76). In so saying, he may have been unconsciously echoing the pronouncement of a republican-era language reformer, Ma Guoying, about whom little is known. Ma set forth a threefold definition of the New National Pronunciation: the standard language had "(1) A standard location: Beiping [now Beijing] in the Republic of China; (2) a standard people: natives of Beiping who had grown up there and experienced secondary education (*zhongdeng jiaoyu*);

[and] (3) a standard pronunciation (*biaozhun yin*): the Beiping pronunciation from the mouths of the standard people" (Ma 1929, 3).

These assertions, however, of the naturalness of the new standard by Ma, Chao, and others represented a significant oversimplification. Even as it was brought closer to Beijing speech, the national standard language was still a modified version of it. In the preface to the 1932 *Glossary,* language reformer Wu Zhihui cautioned that Beijing pronunciation had not been incorporated wholesale into the standard; some localisms had been shorn (Wu J. 1933, iii). Specifically, in the years since then, this has meant that, in a language dominated by monosyllabic sound units, contemporary Mandarin has about 30 fewer possible syllables than Beijing dialect's 432, when the four tones of this tonal language are excluded from consideration.[19] When the four tones are factored in, Mandarin has 80 fewer possible syllables than Beijing's 1,376.[20] While these differences may seem small, in practice, this means that people who are familiar only with standard Mandarin (from, say, the internet, or television and radio) have difficulty "understanding Beijing speakers when they visit the city for the first time" (Duanmu 2007, 5). In other words, the differences between the spoken form of the standard language and the dialect that supposedly constitutes its basis are significant enough to impede mutual intelligibility.

Nevertheless, the desire to bring the standard into closer alignment with a living local vernacular was an explicit attempt to make the language more accessible. Ma and Chao, among others, both pointed out the difficulty of teaching a language that no one spoke naturally; Ma himself said that language was "connected with locality" (*you difangxingde*), and that the older ecumenical Chinese standard language—"Old National Pronunciation" (*Lao Guoyin*) had no "standard location," which meant that "no one was able to speak such pure sounds"; such a language could not be used to unify the nation (Ma 1929, 2). In many ways, the creation of a standard that was accessible to a portion of the population with far less education than the people who created it represented a deliberate plebeianization of the language situation in China. Linguist Ping Chen argues that this was revolutionary: "In the 1930s, for the first time in the history of the Chinese language, it was specified that, instead of retaining historical distinctions that no longer existed in modern vernaculars, or accommodating features in dialects other than the base one, the phonology of the contemporary vernacular of Beijing should be adopted as its standard pronunciation" (P. Chen 1999, 21). In contrast to what Bourdieu has argued, in China, an educated elite in effect attempted to create something easy for everyone to learn.

While the standard was brought closer to the people, over the past hundred years since language reform began, the people themselves have had to be brought closer to the standard. It was only in about 2007 that, in the estimation of the Chinese Ministry of Education, the number of people who could "speak Mandarin" outnumbered those who could not (Reuters 2007). The most recent estimate optimistically puts the number of people able to communicate in the standard language at around seventy percent of the population, leaving the other thirty percent—about 300 million people—outside a national speech community that remains very much still under construction (BBC 2013). As the state continues to make efforts to promote Mandarin, within the population of Mandarin-speakers, there exists a continuum of skill levels. For teaching and broadcasting, as well as other professions in China that require a good command of standard Mandarin, job candidates must take examinations to gauge their mastery of the language. Indeed,

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[19] These numbers also exclude considerations of the retroflex suffix *r,* as well as merged and unstressed syllables (Duanmu 2007, 5).
[20] Not all syllables exist in all four tones.

over the past several decades, an entire intellectual and bureaucratic apparatus has arisen to assess the Mandarin competency of populations in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, based on local needs (Feng, Li, and Ma 2010; Guojia Yuyan Wenzi Gongzuo Weiyuanhui and "Yuyan wenzi yingyong" Bianjibu 1998; Zheng 2004).

Such a differentiation—treating the new standard as a measurable skill—dates back many decades to the beginning of language standardization. As early as 1930, there were Mandarin promotion schools at which teachers could take examinations to measure their competency in the standard language, both spoken and written. For instance, beginning in late December 1930 at a weekly session of the Shanghai Itinerant School (*Shanghai Liudong Xuexiao*), jointly organized by the Chinese National Language Education Association (*Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui*) and the Shanghai Education Bureau (*Shanghai Jiaoyu Ju*), 137 teachers from forty-six schools in the Shanghai area were able to participate in workshops on various aspects of the new national standard language, including seminars on national standard pronunciation (*Guoyin*) and the new romanization system known as Gwoyeu Romatzyh (*Guoyu Luomazi,* or National Language Romanization) (Quanguo Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui 1930c, 5). They were also able to take examinations that tested their ability to transcribe Mandarin Phonetic Symbols (*Guoyin Zimu*)[21] into Chinese characters, as well as their listening and speaking ability. Each examinee was awarded a maximum of forty points for the written portion and a maximum of sixty points for the oral portion of the test. A passing score was seventy points and above, a result that fifty-six participants were able to achieve (Quanguo Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui 1930c, 6).

Such an explicit hierarchy of skill, as established by examination, is only possible for people who have been incorporated into the community of linguistic practice on which such skill assessments are based. Indeed, the language examinations above, rather than limiting access to the language and education, were part of an effort to increase the number of speakers of the standard language. Bourdieu interprets the expansion of a standard language as a way in which most people's native language ability is demoted to slang, colloquial speech, *patois,* or dialect, and the elite establish their linguistic dominance by claiming the superiority of their own language. Scholars have noted a similar demotion of dialect in twentieth-century China (Tam 2016a).

While there is considerable truth in this reading of how language standardization transformed individual speech from a local identity marker into a marketable and measurable skill, one should also remember the linguistic world that language reformers sought to replace, one in which people who were not able to use the official language found themselves totally excluded from politics and from any job or other opportunity that lay outside their immediate linguistic environs. Indeed, as language reformers and the state sought to expand the reach of the new national standard language, the language increasingly became a national attribute. As the scope of this language grew, the possibility of a quantifiable ranking of skill in this language became increasingly possible. Thus, the Bourdieusian conceptualization of language as cultural capital only becomes plausible when the scope of the Weberian conceptualization of language as a facilitator of community-building expands to encompass most of the population of a nation.

[21] These alphabetic symbols were originally used in the 1913 Committee meeting to denote character pronunciations, and were called *zhuyin zimu* (sound-annotating letters), and later also *Guoyin zimu* (National Pronunciation letters). They are still in current use in Taiwan in Mandarin-language pedagogy and computer character input. In 1930 the government renamed them *zhuyin fuhao* (sound-annotating symbols) to avoid giving the impression that they were a replacement for Chinese characters (DeFrancis 1984a, 242). They are often informally called *bopomofo,* after the first four letters of this transcription system.

In other words, a state can make a national speech community by creating a language to suit the needs of the future society it envisions, and then by progressively reinforcing the association between that language and its national community through broadened access to this language, afforded through mass education. Both a language and its community, in the case of national standard languages, can be made by the state through increased access to the standard language via education and through the inculcation in the mind of each citizen of the bond between language and community.

Interpreting the Chinese Case: The Unanticipated Consequences of Rules Unification

In China, we find a case in which the implementation of a national language intentionally made to be accessible and egalitarian has nonetheless resulted in an increasingly linguistically homogeneous nation-state and the rise of new hierarchies of linguistic and cultural capital. China thus provides a case helpful in augmenting the Weberian and Bourdieusian social theories of language. To Weber's view of the artificiality of associations between languages and communities, I would add that such associations, once made, are real enough in their social consequences. To Bourdieu's theories of linguistic stratification, historically rooted in the rise of bourgeois dominance, I would add that such stratification can arise even when the bourgeoisie intends exactly the opposite: linguistic egalitarianism. Thus, I argue that it is more useful to think of linguistic stratification as an unintended byproduct of the unification of a linguistic field on a national scale. We might generalize from such a state of affairs by building a theory of unanticipated consequences of rules unification.

Why did language reformers and the Chinese state they served work to ensure that the new official language was accessible? One major reason was the kind of society they envisioned—one in which education and opportunity were more widespread. Splashed across the pages of countless late-Qing and republican-era tracts, the egalitarian intentions of language reformers are easy enough to discern among their many proposals to solve China's ills. Lamenting China's classical literature as a "dead" literature, and perceiving Chinese characters as incompatible with a modern society, progressive intellectuals repeatedly argued that the Chinese masses needed to be exposed to the benefits of modern ideas. To do so, education needed to be brought within their reach (Cheng 2001). Mandarin, as a new standard language, was therefore part of a larger social project: the language was explicitly designed by modernizing intellectuals to be more accessible in order to further national integration. Language standardization also reflected a new and broader meritocratic thinking—seeking to give all the nation's people access to literacy and education, something previously restricted to a small class of elite literati (Weng 2018).

I argue, and the Chinese case helps demonstrate, that the rise of national standard languages represents a new kind of sociality forged from the creation of a new kind of language and a new kind of association between language and peoplehood. Much of the debate about language outside the discipline of linguistics has been about how to associate languages with social aggregates. An important question in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, for instance, has been how "people are organized into collectivities through linguistic practices" (Muehlmann 2014, 593), an approach treated with caution by Weber. Research in sociology, on the other hand, usually begins with commonly recognized social aggregates (race, gender, class) and then imputes linguistic practices and characteristics to those groups (Tada 2018, 462). Bourdieu used this approach, taking social class as a starting point (the "dominant," the "elite") and then ascribing to them certain language practices that such a class designated as "official." Weber was right in pointing out that linguistically defined communities are artificial creations—an approach subsequently taken up by much of the literature on nationalism. Bourdieu was right in noting that linguistic practices are classed. Nevertheless, as Tada (2018) has pointed out, languages cannot be assumed to be inherently linked to certain collectivities—certainly not nations, given the increasing linguistic globalization of the world. In so arguing, Tada points to a much larger issue: language practices and their associations with groups can be and have been made and remade. The Chinese case shows how language reformers attempted to reshape society by remaking language and transforming its relationship to the people that the language was supposed to serve.

Language standardization in virtually all places has been an elite project, but the ends that elites sought to achieve have varied by time and place. In Europe, the rise of national vernaculars began in the Renaissance and intensified during the Reformation with the spread of vernacular religious texts through the new print markets (Chartier 2014; Febvre and Martin 1976; Martin 1994). The intention in almost all cases was the spread of literacy to the masses for one reason or another. During the Reformation, Protestant leaders wanted widespread literacy to give ordinary people direct access to scripture; it was also helpful that print was the great propagator of Protestant theology and ideology.

In early twentieth-century China, intellectuals believed that literacy led directly to national renewal. The unification of what Bourdieu termed the (national) linguistic field necessarily advantaged some while disadvantaging others. A unified linguistic standard does not even have to be particularly difficult to produce differential outcomes in life chances: as my empirical examination of the Chinese case has demonstrated, even a language designed to be accessible did not avert the rise of a new hierarchy of merit. But it does not follow that the rise of a national language was simply a bourgeois imposition of its own language. The Chinese case shows that reformers there implemented a language not their own and, for that matter, not anyone else's. Prior to the linguistic modernity exemplified by today's ubiquitous national standard languages, access to official languages was limited to a small elite who could read Latin (in Europe) or Literary Chinese (in East Asia). Modernity in the linguistic sense has meant the expansion of meritocratic forms of thinking—particularly in literacy and education—to the rest of the population, newly conceived of as national. It is thus useful to think in terms of what Robert Merton (1936) called the "unanticipated consequences" of purposive action: the rise and spread of national standard languages have led to the reproduction of social advantage in a newly reconfigured and unified linguistic field.

Such an entrenchment of elite privilege is almost self-evident in the more familiar Western cases: for instance, many sociolinguistic studies have delved into social stratification and language practices in Anglophone and Francophone countries (Grillo 1989; Milroy 2012). Sociolinguistic studies of China have followed in a similar vein. Working largely within the framework of Euro-American sociolinguistic theory, researchers have traced patterns of prestige and status associated with different kinds of accents within Mandarin, as well as among different Chinese dialects, finding that "standardness" is often strongly associated with social prestige and cultural cachet in both Taiwan and mainland China (C. W.-C. Li 2004, 2014; Liao 2008). In China, language reformers created a standard language that was intended to be more accessible than the Literary Chinese that preceded it. While sociolinguists often make valid critiques of the social inequities arising from standard language ideology, the prior language situation, in which only a very small segment of the population had access to education, was far more unequal.

Velitchkova (2014, 2015) has shown that, even in communities firmly committed to linguistic egalitarianism, hierarchies still can arise. The global Esperanto community, which promotes an artificial language that was deliberately designed to be easy to learn and had no native constituency, has nevertheless seen hierarchies of expertise and facility in Esperanto constitute themselves among the community's members.

Questions of language often reflect questions of equity: those who can more easily master the dominant language have an advantage over those who cannot. Such differences can arise from accidents of birth—for instance, those whose native language is globally dominant, such as English. They can also arise from random variation in individual human ability—in all societies, there are people who have more of a knack for polyglot glibness than others. In all cases, structural factors, such as one's class position within society, have a huge influence over whether one's native abilities can be fully realized. Thus, criticisms of the social stratification resulting from "standard language ideology" are not wrong (Heinrich 2012; Milroy 2001). But while it is true that societal attitudes should be more relaxed and tolerant of linguistic diversity, we nevertheless should also recognize the communicative gains that standard languages have brought about. Indeed, for a long time in many parts of the world, linguistic diversity was an impediment to communication over larger distances and thus confined populations to much more limited social and geographic spaces.

Therefore, efforts to address the inequities of our current language practices, while acknowledging the harm that has accompanied the rise of standard language ideology, must also realize that any melioristic attempts to transform human practices and institutions are bound to encounter unanticipated and perhaps even undesired consequences. Language reformers in China took a pragmatic and technocratic approach by seeking to create a standard that more closely reflected actual spoken practice among ordinary Chinese people, one that was easier to learn than Literary Chinese, a written standard that had for millennia been divorced from any sort of living speech. In spite of this attempt at creating a standard accessible to all, once this standard took hold after the 1940s, it is plausible then to think about who might have the most advantage in achieving mastery of this new standard in school—those with the various forms of capital sufficient to acquire education.

What should be added to Bourdieusian theory about language, capital, and fields of power is that, even when agents in power seek a more egalitarian way of organizing knowledge, those egalitarian aims may be thwarted by the nature of the field, in which differential advantage at a given starting point translates into social stratification along the dimension in question—in this case, language. Today, Beijing-based Mandarin is associated with education and sophistication (C. W.-C. Li 2004), something that would not have necessarily been true at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Beijing dialect seemed to represent a lower register of speech (Chao 1976b, 7). Bourdieu mistakes the effect (language-based social stratification) for the cause, which he argues is a shift in class dominance. Moreover, in taking official "French" as a given (effectively treating language as autonomous), while at the same time considering French the possession of a particular social class, he leaves us with a simplistic view of how national standard languages came to be: the language of the dominant class equals the official language. But China, as we have seen, is a counterexample: bourgeois intellectuals, a "dominant" class (or at least the most influential in linguistic matters), sought to create an official language that was accessible to most people.

Weber, too, assumed linguistic autonomy when he treated language effectively as a given, a symbolic system independent of its speakers, and thus not a natural basis of group identity. However, such associations between language and peoplehood, while not necessarily coming into existence on their own, can be made. Language reformers in China attempted to create a language that would reflect the population's current usage and thus constitute a new form of Chinese cultural practice and identity. They attempted at first to create an ecumenical standard that reflected linguistic practice from several different regions of the country. When that failed, they changed tack and adopted in almost its entirety the speech of Beijing, making it easier to find qualified teachers. Here we can observe an empirical instance of a language being deliberately created to constitute a newly imagined national community. Thus, as Mandarin is used by ever larger portions of the population, the nationalist vision of a polity unified by language is slowly being realized.

In many ways, nationalism is not necessarily an ideology that describes any actual reality, but rather is one that prescribes a normative way of organizing society—unifying society by fabricating a language and assigning it to the desired population. In short, we know that languages can be artificially made, and that communities, too, are social constructions. However, we must also recognize that the connection between languages and the communities to which they are assigned can also be made and thus are no less "real," no less of a social fact. The agent in making such a connection is usually the state. The apparent artificiality of such an association between languages and communities is, as I have shown, not a sufficient argument to detract from their reality and the actual effects they have in constituting those communities and influencing the life chances of individuals within those communities. Moreover, how those languages are designed and how they are linked to their communities can reflect a panoply of social goals, not just the entrenchment of a dominant class. The state in China attempted to create a more egalitarian situation, both linguistically and otherwise. How hierarchies of cultural and economic capital have arisen, in spite of the state's best efforts through most of the twentieth century to quash such inequalities, is an interesting question in its own right, rather than an intellectual given, as is commonly understood (Andreas 2009, 277, 2019).

Conclusion

There is, as we have seen, great theoretical confusion in determining the connection between languages and human collectivities, and thus in explaining the rise of a national standard language. This confusion results from, I argue, a lack of clarity on whether to think of language as something that is autonomous or something that is purposive, intentional, and transformable. For instance, when Bourdieu critiqued structuralism's disregard for the social conditions of linguistic "production," he did not seek to discard structuralism's insights altogether. He had no dispute with the idea that symbolic systems such as language are internally structured according to a logic independent of human intentions. But in treating language—specifically, an official language—as an autonomous system that was at the same time a form of cultural capital, language's internal logic was put beyond human control, while at the same time language itself was able to be deployed as one form of capital convertible into other forms of capital. Bourdieu's paradigmatic case of such capital conversion was the accumulation of cultural capital in schools and its subsequent conversion to economic capital on the labor market. While both sides of such a dualistic conceptualization—structuralist and also political-economic—of language do not at first appear to be incompatible, its implicit empiricism—a philosophical position that sees a phenomenon, in this case language, as autonomous and thus beyond individual human control—is actually at odds with the obvious intentionality we have seen in the Chinese case, in which even the internal logic of the standard language itself was subject to human manipulation and planning.

This tension between empiricism and intentionality, a language's form and function, is what the Chinese case highlights. Language reformers in China sought both to shape the internal form of the language itself—its lexicon, its grammar, and its pronunciation—as well as to recast the external role the language played in society—a tool of social inclusion in furtherance of nation-building. In their minds, the one was not separable from the other. The Chinese language first had to be made simpler and more accessible before it could serve as a tool to turn a polyglot hodgepodge into a unified nation. The Chinese case also turns on its head the question of how languages are associated with social groups. The Weberian approach was to show how conceptually untenable grouping people by language was: any analysis of actual societies would undermine the notion of a speech community. Weber implicitly assumed linguistic autonomy when he argued that a community defined by language was an inherently constructed concept. But the artificiality of assigning a language to any group of people does not preclude people from actually putting such an association into effect. The Chinese case shows how language reformers sought deliberately to create a speech community, first by standardizing a language and then by assigning it to and propagating it among the group of people they conceived of as constituting a Chinese nation.

The subsequent stratification of Chinese society appears to be a failure of their egalitarian vision and a confirmation of Bourdieusian theory, in which linguistic dominance is predicated on class dominance. However, one must remember that Bourdieu's theory took place within a national framework. For him, it was only after people entered, voluntarily or not, into a national linguistic field, that they became subject to the state's valuation of their utterances. For Bourdieu, the state was the unifier of the linguistic field and the monopolist of symbolic capital, and France, with its language academy and powerful, centralized state, furnished the empirical underpinning of his thinking. This nationalist and statist framework, however, becomes problematic when we expand the scope of analysis to other parts of the globe. The Chinese case, in being an even more top-down case of linguistic design, seems at first to be a more extreme version of France. But one must consider the global context of China's language reform. The impetus to change in China was the subordinate position in which China found itself in an imperialist global system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even today, a transnational view of the world's language situation reveals that English, without a central state body explicitly regulating its form and inhabiting a quasi-anarchic global system, still dominates.

Both the Weberian and Bourdieusian models of language have often been mobilized, in part, to explain the nature of national lingua francas. The Weberian model pointed out the artificiality of grouping people into nations according to language. On the other hand, the Bourdieusian model, based on Marxian insights into class, saw language dominance as reflecting class dominance: the rise of an educated bourgeoisie heralded the rise of the language of that same class. Language was possessed and defended by that class as a form of cultural capital. As this chapter has shown, however, neither model adequately captures the intentionality that can underlie the creation of both a national language and the nation such a language is meant to bring into being. The Chinese case reminds us that a language's form, as well as its function, is susceptible to being molded by conscious human effort, and that the shape of the resulting society can outrun the intentions of even the most clear-eyed of visionaries.

3

Stop the Presses! Character Simplification and the Publishing Industry in China under the Nationalists, 1935–1936

Simplified Chinese characters are so closely associated with the People's Republic of China (PRC) that people are often surprised to learn that simplification first became official policy, albeit fleetingly, in the 1930s under Nationalist rule. Even in the scholarly literature, in the few instances in which this episode is mentioned at all, this initial simplification is usually treated as a strange prelude to the more thoroughgoing script reform starting in the 1950s under the Communists. Although the success of character simplification in the PRC might suggest a stronger commitment to mass literacy on the part of the Chinese Communist Party, and conversely a stronger commitment to cultural preservation on the part of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), I argue that one cannot rely on ideological and political commitments alone to explain the KMT's hesitation. Rather, one must also consider the material costs that any script reform would have entailed. In 1935, when the official implementation of character simplification was first attempted, complaints from the publishing industry illuminate the material and economic side concerns raised by script reform. There is in fact a political economy of orthography.

It is easy to forget that language is a material thing. True, it is a symbolic system of sounds and signs, but without neurons, vocal chords, eardrums, nasal cavities, teeth, tongues, paper, ink, metal type, laser printers, computer screens, radio waves, speakers, and a whole host of other things, there would be no language. The material nature of language gives it life, but it also acts as a constraint on how language can be transmitted. In the case of writing, the printing press has long been recognized as a chief disseminator of texts and a key force for stabilizing and standardizing spelling. Scholars have generally recognized printing as the first capitalist undertaking, and so printers have always had an interest in orthographic stability. That is, if spelling changed radically, then printers' initial investment in large sets of metal type would be wasted (Anderson 1991, 37–38; Febvre and Martin 1976, 324; Reed 2004, 8). That was the publishing industry's concern in 1935 when it objected to the Ministry of Education's promulgation of simplified characters, a protest that made sense in a society in which publishing had become a large capitalist undertaking.

The ensuing chapter starts with a historical overview of script reform in late Qing and early republican China. I then introduce the development of the Ministry of Education's plans for simplified characters, which became official policy in the summer of 1935, and discuss existing scholarly explanations of why this policy was quickly rescinded early in the following year. Finally, I use archival sources hitherto overlooked in the scholarly literature to demonstrate the publishing industry's material interests in the cancellation of character simplification.

Orthography can be a touchy subject. Even minor spelling reforms have provoked major backlash—for instance, in the US, with Benjamin Franklin's and Noah Webster's advocacy of radical reforms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; and in France and Germany in the 1990s, in which even minor changes in spelling failed to gain traction among the public (Ball 1999; Hodges 1964; Johnson 2005, 1–4). Sociolinguists, noting the resistance provoked by many such attempts at spelling reform, have generally argued that such resistance is rooted in emotional or political attachments to the status quo (Coulmas 1994, 241; S. Zhao and Baldauf 2008, 271–72; Bourdieu 1994, 1–2). The Chinese state, such as it was in the 1930s, attempted to impose orthographic reform, but reversed course. Blaming the resistance to change of political and cultural elites might be the obvious explanation—one, as we will see, to which many analysts have resorted—but there is also a material dimension to the story. This attention to the materiality of language was foreshadowed by historian Lucien Febvre and his protégé Henri-Jean Martin, both of whom highlighted the role of printers in stabilizing orthography and, more broadly, standardizing vernacular languages in Reformation-era Europe. As we will see, the debates over character simplification involved several different approaches, reflecting different political and social priorities, to how characters could be modified. Printers, in contrast to reformers, had an economic interest in orthographic stability—any reform would impose costs in equipment modifications. In 1935–36, the government attempted to impose two demands on the publishing industry simultaneously: first, to print didactic texts with phonetic annotations, and second, to gradually introduce an increasing number of simplified characters. These measures highlight how language reform was not just a political battle, but a material one as well.

Script Reform in late Qing and early Republican China

Since the late nineteenth century, intellectuals in China of various stripes had lamented what they perceived to be widespread illiteracy and ignorance, seeing it as one of the root causes of China's weakness on the global stage (Cheng 2001, 473–76). China's progress towards modernity, wealth, and power, depended on having a literate and educated population. Starting in the 1890s, character simplification was but one of many solutions proposed by language reforming intellectuals, many of whom advocated the abolition of characters altogether, in favor of alphabetic and other phonetic scripts (P. Chen 1999; DeFrancis 1950; Kaske 2008; Kuzuoglu 2018; Söderblom Saarela 2016; Tsu 2010).

One of the first, in 1909, to advocate the simplification of characters—i.e., the reduction of the number of strokes in complex characters—was Lufei Kui (陸費逵 1886–1941), who later was to become a publishing giant as owner of the Chunghwa Book Company (中華書局 Zhonghua shuju). He argued that regularizing the use of "vulgar" characters, *suzi* (俗字) or *sutizi* (俗體字), that were already commonly in circulation, could reduce the amount of effort needed to attain literacy (Barnes 1988, 140; Kuzuoglu 2018, 195–96; Lufei 1909a, 1909b). This was also the reasoning that Qian Xuantong (錢玄同 1887–1939), another supporter of simplification, drew on in the 1920s and 1930s, when he became a leading advocate of script reform. Born into a family of prominent scholar-officials in Wuxing, Zhejiang, Qian became a scholar of language and history whose radical streak revealed itself repeatedly in a life committed to modernization and development. In 1915, he gained a teaching appointment at Peking University, where in 1918 he became an editor of *New Youth* (新青年 *Xin qingnian*). In the March 1918 issue of the magazine, he argued that the Chinese language had to be "gotten rid of" in order to overthrow the deleterious ideology of Confucianism (Boorman, Howard, and Cheng 1967a; Schwarcz 1986, 27–28, 65, 80–81). He then spent the better part of the following decade developing schemes for script reform.

In 1923, in a special issue of the *National Language Monthly* (國語月刊 *Guoyu yuekan*), a journal put out by the National Language Research Association (國語研究會 Guoyu yanjiuhui), he and several other well-known language reformers made the case for script reform

(P. Chen 1999, 151). For Qian, character simplification was not an end in itself, but rather a step on the way to full phoneticization of the script, which for him meant using "the world's letters—roman letters." Arguing that Chinese characters were "hard to recognize, hard to remember, and hard to write," Qian hoped to save future generations of students from the laborious process of writing in characters, expending valuable energy that could be more profitably directed towards the absorption of new ideas (Qian 1923, 7–8). He hoped that in ten years' time (by 1932), students would be learning to write wholly in a romanized script. In the meantime, he proposed, students could write using "colloquial" or "vernacular" characters (破體字 *potizi* or 白字 *baizi*), or their own dialect using phonetic symbols (注音 *zhuyin*) (Qian 1923, 24–25).

Qian's was not alone in his advocacy of script reform. In a commendatory note prefacing the same issue of the *National Language Monthly,* Hu Shi (胡適 1891–1962) wrote that "colloquial characters" (破體字 *potizi*)—referring to shorthand characters in common use—were a "remarkable innovation." Such innovations had arisen from "the masses" (小百姓 *xiaobaixing*), often a force for change and often stymied by the conservatism of scholars (Hu S. 1923). Elaborating on such calls for using simpler character forms, Qian set out to systematize character simplification in the second of a pair of proposals that were printed at the end of the issue of the *National Language Monthly*. He argued that there had been a secular trend, in the time since the earliest appearance of writing in China, towards ever simpler character forms, a trend that had run into countervailing forces only during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, with the ponderous codifications found in such publications as the Kangxi Dictionary (1716). Thus, there were many existing simple forms in common use, many of which had been in circulation since the Song (1127–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties. It was on such common simple forms that he based his eight principles of constructing simplified characters:

(1) Subtracting strokes while leaving the overall shape of the character; e.g., 龜 to 龟
(2) Replacing a print form with a cursive form; e.g., 為 to 为
(3) Replacing a character with only a portion thereof; e.g., 聲 to 声
(4) Replacing a complicated portion of a character with a simpler portion; e.g., 鳳 to 凤
(5) Using a simpler ancient form in place of a current form; e.g., 禮 to 礼
(6) Replacing a complex phonetic component with a simpler one; e.g., 遠 to 远
(7) Inventing a wholly new simpler form; e.g., 竈 to 灶
(8) Substituting a complex character with a simpler homophonous one; e.g., 薑 to 姜. (P. Chen 1999, 151–53; Qian and Li 1923, 162)

Qian soon found himself among many others speaking out about script reform. Historian Ulug Kuzuoglu, in his insightful account of script reform, highlights several significant intellectual currents in the discourse on simplification. The *suzi* project, he points out, required considerable efforts to mine existing texts of all sorts—ancient treatises, letters, mimeographs, and all sorts of other formal and informal written materials—to compile simpler variants of thousands of characters, ancient and contemporary. Two such efforts included the *Jianyizi shuo* (簡易字說), published in 1928 by Hu Huaichen (胡懷琛 1886–1938), and the *Song Yuan yilai suzi pu* (宋元以來俗字譜 *A Genealogy of Common Characters since the Song and Yuan Dynasties*), published in 1930 by Liu Fu (劉復, courtesy name 劉半農 Liu Bannong, 1891–1934) and Li Jiarui (李家瑞 1895–1975). These compilations put on display the rich heritage of simpler variants in Chinese practice over the centuries, but they did not answer how to sort through these linguistic raw materials and create a workable system for everyday use (Kuzuoglu 2018, 197–99; Liu F. and Li 1930; Hu H. 1928).

Even more radically, the unsung advocate of simplification Chen Guangyao (陳光垚 1906–1972) virtually made stroke reduction and end in itself, targeting almost all commonly used characters for simplification, and not shying away from creating simplifications from scratch. But, perhaps because of his lack of social status and an advanced education, leading script reformers kept their distance (Barnes 1988, 144–49; Kuzuoglu 2018, 200; Odhner 2015, 12–14). One of the most prominent supporters of simplification was the writer and inventor Lin Yutang (林語堂 1895–1976), who pushed for *suzi* in a series of articles published in his journal *Lunyu* (論語 Analects) starting in 1933. He and his colleagues, Kuzuoglu has argued, were influenced by research then emerging from studies in the psychology of reading, which did not always produce findings that conformed with the goals of simplifiers. Virtually all studies found that simplifying characters, though it eased the effort of writing, did not necessarily make characters easier to learn to recognize (Kuzuoglu 2018, 203–28).

In spite of the vagaries of Chinese cultural politics over the past century, it is striking that many of the simplifications proposed in these early years have endured to the present day. The principles first laid out by Qian in 1923 were incorporated into Nationalist policy in the 1930s, and they are the same ones by which, starting in the 1950s, the Communist government created the simplified characters now in use (Barnes 1988, 157–59; Huang 2013, 161–62). Indeed, simplification is really the only major script reform that ever became official government policy. Moreover, it was a policy that mandated specific changes to printing equipment and practices, and so for the first time, the economic interests of printers and publishers were linked directly to script reform, which up until the simplification of 1935–36 had existed only in unrealized proposals.

The Character Simplification Scheme of 1935

Wang Shijie (王世杰 1891–1981) became Minister of Education in 1933. Born in Chongyang, Hubei, he studied abroad, returning to China in 1921 to become a professor of comparative law at Peking University, where in 1923 he was appointed dean of the law school. After his appointment as education minister ten years later, he worked to promote compulsory education nationwide, as well as to increase science education and to expand normal and vocational schooling (Boorman, Howard, and Cheng 1967b). On June 4, 1935, in the midst of an effort that would last into the following year to restructure the Ministry of Education in the interest of efficiency, Wang forwarded a proposed set of regulations from his Ministry to the Central Political Council (中央政治會議 Zhongyang zhengzhi huiyi) of the National Government (國民政府 Guomin zhengfu). The Proposal for Promoting Simplified Characters (推行簡體字案 *Tuixing jiantizi an*) had been under official development since January 1935 by a group within the Ministry of Education, the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language (國語統一籌備委員會 Guoyu tongyi choubei weiyuanhui). The group included such noted language reformers as Li Jinxi (黎錦熙 1890–1978), Wang Yi (汪怡 1875–1960), Yuen Ren Chao (趙元任 1892–1982), Wu Zhihui (吳稚暉 1865–1953), as well as Qian Xuantong.

The proposal called for the official adoption of 324 simplified characters, to go into effect in the summer of the following year. These characters had been selected from more than 2,000 that had been considered, and three overriding guidelines held sway: (1) the principle of describing and not prescribing (依述而不作之原則 *yi shu er bu zuo zhi yuanze*)—in effect, rejecting the radical approach of Chen Guangyao;[22] (2) prioritizing and selecting the simplifications already in common use; and (3) not simplifying characters already simple in form. Based on these principles, the Ministry expected that many of the simplified characters would already be familiar to the literate public. As Qian Xuantong and others had pointed out in the previous decade, simplified and abbreviated forms of Chinese characters had been in circulation, albeit informally, for centuries. Some of the simplifications in the proposal were merely simpler ancient forms of existing characters; others were abbreviated forms in common handwritten use; and still others were print versions of cursive forms. More importantly, as part of a larger drive to spread literacy and thus modernize and strengthen the nation, the simplifications were intended to make writing easier to learn. The government's order to use simplified characters was initially to be applied specifically to educational texts: simplified characters were only to be mandated for use in elementary school textbooks. Moreover, the proposed set of simplified characters was only to be a first step: the Ministry envisioned a gradual increase in the number of simplified characters over time (Guomin Zhengfu 1935, 10–15).

Over the next few months, the proposal wended its way through bureaucratic channels between the Ministry of Education, the Central Executive Committee, and the Executive Yuan, before finally receiving approval on September 27, 1935. A directive (訓令 *xunling*) was then sent out the following week from the Executive Yuan on October 3 to the relevant local government agencies, directing publishers of elementary school textbooks, children's books, and mass literacy reading materials to begin using simplified characters by July 1936. Included in that directive was a diminutive thirty-two-page booklet, the *Table of Simplified Characters: The First Scheme* (簡體字表：第一批 *Jiantizi biao: di-yi pi*), dated August 1935 and published by the Ministry of Education. The booklet explained the reasoning behind the new simplified character scheme, listed all of the simplified forms and their complex equivalents, and stipulated the format in which simplified characters were to be introduced to students in elementary school textbooks. (Traditional characters were to be retained for reference in these textbooks' vocabulary lists.) To an observer today, many of the simplified forms would appear familiar, seeing continued use in the contemporary PRC (see Fig. 1). Of course, the list of 324 characters in the 1935 *Table* was far more limited than the set now in use, which includes more than 2,000 simplified forms. The subtitle of the table, *The First Scheme,* was an indication that the education ministry sought gradually to increase (逐漸擴充 *zhujian kuochong*) the number of simplifications in future schemes, to be promulgated periodically (陸續公布 *luxu gongbu*) (Jiaoyubu 1935, 30–63).

Accounting for Failure

The Ministry of Education's character simplification policy was rescinded on January 23, 1936, having lasted all of four months. The suddenness of the rescission caught many by surprise. For some, the policy reversal came as a relief. On February 5, in an article signed Jing Chen (靖塵)

[22] The phrase *shu er bu zuo* comes from the *Analects* of Confucius (Bökset 2006, 25).

in the Changsha-based *Guoguang zazhi* (國光雜誌) argued that, at a time when many other national exigencies existed (presumably meaning impending war with Japan), the elimination of a few strokes from some characters was a "pointless exercise" (沒有意義的舉動 *meiyou yiyi de judong*). What difference, Jing asked, would it make to someone who did not even have access to education? Applauding the Central Political Council's decision to suspend character simplification, Jing argued that the Ministry of Education could focus on policies that would really make a difference: national emergency education (國難教育 *guonan jiaoyu*) and compulsory education (義務教育 *yiwu jiaoyu*) (Jing 1936, 31).

Others were disappointed. Leftist editor Zou Taofen (鄒韜奮 1895–1944) ran an unsigned piece in the February 1 issue of his Shanghai-based magazine, *Dazhong shenghuo* (大众生活), decrying character simplification's demise. In a world in which the masses were seeking to throw off the exploitation of a small oppressive class, any measure to broaden access to culture meant progress. The author argued that, although the masses needed more "thoroughgoing" (澈底的 *chedide*) script reform, anything to make literacy easier was better than maintaining the status quo—a difficult-to-learn Chinese script. The Ministry of Education was taking a step backward (開倒車 *kai daoche*) (Zou 1936). A few days later, another writer using the name He Feng (何封) echoed this view in another Shanghai publication, *Shenghuo zhishi* (生活知識). He Feng tartly observed that the government seemed to be afraid of its own people, given its sluggishness in expanding education. Was the government afraid of the "troublemakers" (搗亂分子 *daoluan fenzi*) that might emerge as a result? Going further than his *Dazhong shenghuo* counterpart, He Feng argued that simplified characters, whether or not the Ministry of Education had remained committed to them, were ultimately a dead end: a halt was "their only future" (「停止」是牠唯一底前途 *"tingzhi" shi ta weiyide qiantu*). What the masses really needed, and what would really and quickly universalize education, was the Latinization (拉丁化 *ladinghua*) of Chinese script. Sarcastically, He Feng noted that the rapid spread of education might, in the government's view, present a danger (He 1936, 397).

What united many of the supporters and detractors of the government's character simplification policy was puzzlement at its quick demise. Jing Chen found the government's sudden about-face "difficult to fathom" (無法揣想 *wufa chuaixiang*) (Jing 1936, 31). Zou Taofen felt that there was "no reason" for the rescission (無故停止 *wugu tingzhi*) (Zou 1936). He Feng, with little evidence, attributed the reversal to the government's mistrust of the people (He 1936, 397). The confusion about the end of the National Government's attempt at character simplification lasted far beyond its immediate aftermath. Zhao and Baldauf note how, even today, there is "disagreement among scholars why such a carefully deliberated and extensively discussed reform program should be withdrawn less than six months after its formal ratification" (S. Zhao and Baldauf 2008, 31). Kuzuoglu posits that it "is not clear what happened in the five months from the promulgation of the project to its postponement" (Kuzuoglu 2018, 236). Both of these relatively recent accounts are some of the very few works that touch on this episode in any depth, probably because life of the policy was so brief. But this early foray by the government into implementing script reform is worth examining more carefully, for it illuminates the often unanticipated collision of policy goals with their overall political-economic context.

Amid the uncertainty over why character simplification was rescinded so quickly, scholarly explanations in the past two decades have generally centered on political opposition within the KMT. In a 1999 book, Ping Chen wrote that, "reportedly," the failure of the KMT's simplification scheme was "due to the fierce opposition of some high-ranking officials in the government" (P. Chen 1999, 153). Roar Bökset's 2006 account tells a story about Dai Jitao (戴季陶 1891–1949), President of the Examination Yuan in the 1930s, who was "said to have kowtowed in despair before the Kuomintang assembly while begging it to retain the traditional forms," a display that "impressed" the government and led to its abolition of simplification (Bökset 2006, 25). Zhao and Baldauf, in their 2008 book on Chinese script, were understandably skeptical of this highly individualized account of political opposition, given what they saw as its secondhand nature and a lack of reliable evidence to back it up (S. Zhao and Baldauf 2008, 31–32). For originating the story about Dai Jitao, they incorrectly credited a 1979 book by PRC language reformer and developer of *pinyin* Zhou Youguang (周有光 1906–2017) (Zhou Y. 1979, 325 fn. 3).[23] Given what, in their view, was a dearth of reliable sources, they left it to "further historical investigation" to establish whether Dai could be assigned primary responsibility for quashing simplification.

Such an investigation came in 2018 with the publication of a book by historian Cui Minghai. Not only did he find multiple sources providing firsthand evidence for Dai Jitao's influential opposition to character simplification, he also demonstrated that a torrent of opposition, copiously recorded in the press, had erupted upon character simplification's promulgation in the autumn of 1935 (Cui 2018, 116–27). Cui found that Dai himself had sent two letters protesting character simplification to KMT officials. In the first, dated September 29, 1935 and addressed to Wang Shijie and the Acting Secretary of the KMT Central Political Committee Zhu Jiahua (朱家驊 1893–1963), he complained that simplification was the scheme of a few scholars and literati who "had nothing better to do" (無事中找事做 *wu shi zhong zhao shi zuo*). Invoking the memory of Sun Yatsen, he argued that simplification would damage the education that was so critical to the people's livelihood (Dai 1959b). A few days later, in a separate letter to Wang Shijie dated October 3, Dai went further, arguing that simplification was worse than national destruction and that it had been concocted by Shanghai publishers, those corruptors of morals, to increase their profits (Dai 1959a). This opposition was remarkable enough to be noted in a diary entry dated January 11, 1936, by Control Yuan member Wang Zizhuang (王子壯 1900–1948), in which he recalled the extreme "distress" (痛心 *tongxin*) of Dai, who urged the rescission of simplification and eventually got his way (Wang Z. 2001, 3:11). Years later in 1954, Lin Yin (林尹 1909–1983), a student of Liu Bannong and Qian Xuantong who in 1935 had been appointed professor of Chinese at National Beiping Normal University, recalled that he had been so incensed at the time by Dai's sabotaging of simplification that, in a chance encounter on the train home for winter break, he berated the man for his obduracy (迂腐 *yufu*) (Lin 1955, 245–46). Wang Shijie himself, in a diary entry dated April 10, 1969, more than thirty years after the fact, looked back on the episode with "extreme regret" (不勝痛惜 *busheng tongxi*), blaming Dai for the demise of simplified characters (Wang S. 2012, 2:1251–52).
The controversy, Cui has argued, formed part of the larger debates about script reform at the time, which, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, spanned the whole political spectrum, from conservative intransigence to radical Esperantism (Cui 2018, 119–27). Kuzuoglu, delving more deeply into the politics of the simplification debate, noted the rising visibility of leftist script reformers as the upper echelons of the KMT were swinging rightward towards fascism, a trend that had begun in the early 1930s. He suggests that reformers working with the KMT were

[23] This story had already appeared in a 1974 *Guangming ribao* (光明日报) propaganda piece (Xia 1974; Bökset 2006, 25n3; Wang X. 1994, 32n9).

attempting not only to avoid being coopted by leftists (many of whom saw character simplification as an intermediate step towards Latinization), but also to circumvent conservative opposition based on the KMT's renewed emphasis on nativism and indigeneity. Kuzuoglu points to a series of publications touting "handy" characters (手頭字 *shoutouzi*)—in contrast to the "simplified" characters (*jiantizi*) of liberal reformers—that were published in *Shenbao* (申報) and leftist outlets in 1935. While there was considerable overlap between handy and simplified characters, the sourcing of handy characters emphasized the everyday practices of ordinary people, as opposed to the text mining of learned old sources done by less radical reformers. Promoters of handy characters even announced a successful effort to cast type for 300 characters, which shared many forms with the simplified characters that those in the Ministry of Education had been working on for the preceding decade (Kuzuoglu 2018, 228–38; Ba 1935; Shenbao 1935d, 1935e; Pan 1935).

He further notes that the divergent terminology—*shoutouzi* versus *jiantizi*—was a sign of the political leanings of the backers of each project (Kuzuoglu 2018, 234). I would go further and broaden the scope of that insight, and point out that, in general, there was a great terminological disarray associated with characters whose stroke-number had been reduced. This confusion was a sign of the wide-ranging and unsettled nature of the broader debate about simplification. As we have seen, stroke reduction went by a number of different names: in addition to *jiantizi,* we have also seen *suzi* or *sutizi,* as well as *potizi, baizi, jianyizi,* in addition to *shoutouzi.* But writers also used *jianzi* (簡字), *jianhuazi* (簡化字), and *jianbizi* (簡筆字). All of these terms haphazardly reflected the different end-games (simplification-as-waystation, as opposed to end-in-itself), the different pitfalls they sought to avoid (leftist co-optation and nativist opposition), as well as the different origins—text-mined or newly invented—of the characters that might ultimately make it into an officially sanctioned set. Moreover, Cui has pointed out that these terms for simplified characters evoked a set of oppositions among certain educated people—"vulgar" (*suti*) and "refined" (雅體 *yati*), "colloquial" (*poti*) and "standard" (全體 *quanti*), "abbreviated" (小寫 *xiaoxie*) and "full-form" (大寫 *daxie*)—that reflected class prejudices (Cui 2018, 126–27).

Overall, the existing literature focuses on the multifaceted politics behind simplification. Cui noted that news reports of simplification's end registered opposition from publishers, Dai Jitao's diatribes against them notwithstanding, but Cui argued that the "primary reason" for the failure of the policy was opposition from within the KMT on the part of conservatives like Dai Jitao and Governor of Hunan (and later Minister of the Interior) He Jian (何鍵 1887–1956) (Cui 2018, 116). Politics were important to be sure, but Cui's view reflects his sources, among which political insiders predominate. In contrast, I argue that any account of the politics of script reform also needs to include a consideration of material and economic factors. All changes carry costs, whether or not newer ways of doing things are better or more efficient. Examples of costs preventing change are easily found: the American resistance to the metric system and the global persistence of the inefficient QWERTY keyboard are merely two of countless examples. In 1935, switching even just a small percentage of characters was an imposition on the publishing industry. The papers of the Shanghai Booksellers Industry Association (上海市書業同業公會 Shanghai shi shuye tongye gonghui) are particularly illuminating in this regard. The Association had originated from trade guilds in the nineteenth century (Yuan 1987, 37–38). In 1930, the Nationalist government, seeking to better control the industry, forced all publishing companies, most of which were based in Shanghai, to join (Reed 2004, 224). Sixty-seven publishing houses belonged to the Association according to a survey done in December 1936, including the three biggest: the Commercial Press (商務印書館 Shangwu yinshuguan), the Chunghwa Book Company, and World Books (世界書局 Shijie shuju) (Yuan 1987, 47–49).

The Ministry of Education vs. the Shanghai Publishing Industry

The rollout of simplified characters did not go smoothly. One harbinger of trouble was a telegram that Wang Shijie sent to Chiang Kai-shek on October 9, 1935, just six days after the directive on simplified characters had been sent out. In it, Wang reiterated the reasoning and methods behind implementing simplified characters, stating that notable experts, among them KMT stalwart Wu Zhihui, had been consulted in the creation of the new simplified characters. He then emphasized that students would still be taught to recognize traditional characters (正體字 *zhengtizi*), but that simplified characters would make their writing less burdensome (以輕負擔 *yi qing fudan*). Wang noted that Turkey's script reform—presumably its conversion from Arabic to Latin letters in the late 1920s—had greatly furthered education in that country, and that the Chinese government's efforts, like the promulgation of the *zhuyin fuhao* (注音符號) phonetic annotation system, had increased knowledge of standard Mandarin, especially among elementary school students in Guangdong and Fujian.[24] At the time the telegram was sent, Chiang was on a military tour suppressing disorder in Sichuan and Shaanxi Provinces. Wang pointed out that the new policy on simplified characters had been in effect for only a month or two, and he indicated that he was willing to discuss the policy further with Chiang after his return to the capital, Nanjing (Wang S. 1935; Kuzuoglu 2018, 237).

If the promoters of character simplification were worried about further obstruction, their fears were confirmed the following month. In a petition to the Ministry of Education, dated November 2, 1935, the Shanghai Booksellers Industry Association complained about the cost of this new policy (Shanghai Shi shuye tongye gonghui 1935). The petition ended with five signatures, only two of which were completely legible to the present author: that of Lü Ziquan (吕子泉 dates unknown), whom Yuan Fang lists as "manager" (经理人 *jingliren*) for the Great East Book Company (大东书局 Dadong shuju), as well as that of Xu Baolu (徐寶魯 dates unknown), listed as manager for the Huiwentang Xinji Book Company (会文堂新记书局 Huiwentang xinji shuju) (Yuan 1987, 45, 47). After a conference in which the Association members discussed the changes, they agreed that, while simplified characters were easy enough to write by hand (書寫 *shuxie*), printing them (刊刻 *kanke*) was an entirely separate matter (Shanghai Shi shuye tongye gonghui 1935, 33).

The association members listed three major difficulties of the new policy. First, they criticized the Ministry of Education's policy of gradual implementation. They pointed out that the initial set of 324 simplified characters was only preliminary, and that successive sets of simplified characters were likely to be put out in the future—something that the Ministry itself had explicitly said it intended to do. As a result, with each successive promulgation, the publishing industry, in order to meet the textbook standards of the Ministry, would have to strike new matrices in order to cast new type for printing new characters, and that previously printed materials with old sets of obsolete characters would become "waste paper" (廢紙 *feizhi*)—a lamentable state of affairs that would result in "incalculable losses" (此項損失，已屬不貲 *ci*

[24] Government complaints about the unintelligibility of the speech of people from Guangdong and Fujian dates at least as far back as the Yongzheng reign (1678–1735) (Paderni 1988).

xiang sunshi, yi shu bu zi) (Shanghai Shi shuye tongye gonghui 1935, 34). Second, the association underscored the difficulties that would be faced by the compositors in the printing plants under the new policy. Already they had to deal with more than 8,000 Chinese characters in common use, not to mention the Western script that often in appeared in modern publications. Even though the Ministry had held off with changes in character radicals that would have affected thousands of characters, the policy of retaining traditional characters for reference in textbook vocabulary lists would mean that, not only would new matrices have to be struck for the simplified characters, but that old matrices for traditional characters could not then be discarded. This would make the job of the compositors even more difficult that it already was (Shanghai Shi shuye tongye gonghui 1935, 34). Third and finally, the association complained that the new policy of gradually increasing the number of simplified characters (增訂辦法 *zengding banfa*), with consultation from different parties (各方意見 *ge fang yijian*), would introduce an unacceptable level of instability into orthography. Who was to say that the increase in characters would not be accompanied by changes in characters that already had been simplified before (蓋「增」則不僅限於此數，「訂」則不免有所改定) (Shanghai Shi shuye tongye gonghui 1935, 34–35)?

For each of these three reasons, the association implored the Ministry to temporarily suspend implementation of simplified characters (暫緩推行 *zanhuan tuixing*) (Shanghai Shi shuye tongye gonghui 1935, 36). A response from the central government was not long in coming. Two months later, on January 23, 1936, a directive went out from the Central Executive Committee of the Nationalist government, in which the government called a halt to the simplification policy. The sole reason given was that simplified characters "still required further consideration" (尚須重加考慮 *shang xu chongjia kaolü*) (Guomin Zhengfu 1936, 93–94). By February 10, 1936, this order had reached the Shanghai Bureau of Education (上海市教育局 *Shanghai Shi jiaoyuju*), which relayed the directive to the Shanghai Booksellers Industry Association (Shanghai Shi jiaoyuju 1936, 39–40).

The end of the government's character simplification policy must have come as a relief to the publishing houses of Shanghai, for simplified characters were not the only demands that the government had placed on them that year. On January 26, 1935, the Ministry of Education in Nanjing had convened a meeting to discuss character simplification and the promotion of *zhuyin fuhao* as a part of a broader push to spread literacy. Present at the meeting were the Deputy Minister of Education, as well as Wu Zhihui, Li Jinxi, and Wang Yi (Shenbao 1935a). They decided that the Ministry should ensure that educational material for elementary school students as well as adult learners were printed using *zhuyin hanzi* (注音漢字), literally "Chinese characters with phonetic annotations." These annotations, according to Li and Qian, resembled (and were influenced by) Japanese educational texts that included *kana* ruby characters next to *kanji,* or Chinese characters, used in pedagogical Japanese-language materials to show the readings (i.e., pronunciations) for those *kanji* (see Fig. 2) (Li J. and Qian 1936, 123–24).
The phonetic symbols, which were derived from parts of Chinese characters to represent portions of Chinese syllables, had originally been devised in the early 1910s to help the delegates to the Conference for the Unification of Readings Pronunciations (讀音統一會 Duyin tongyi hui) set standard pronunciations for characters. At that time, the symbols had been called *jiyin zimu* (記音字母), "sound-notating characters," and then later *zhuyin zimu* (注音字母), or "sound-annotating characters." These symbols passed into obscurity in the following decade amid more pressing matters (Kaske 2008, 410–18). Then, in the spring of 1930, the KMT government

decided to revive the use of these characters to further the spread of Mandarin and literacy. In a move congenial to those who feared that phonetic writing would replace Chinese characters, the government, in April 1930, renamed these symbols *zhuyin fuhao* ("sound-annotating symbols") to emphasize that they could not stand on their own, and mandated that they be taught widely (Guomin Zhengfu 1930).

In spite of this renewed push, by the beginning of 1936, *zhuyin* remained largely ignored by a seemingly indifferent populace (Li 1935).[25] Li Jinxi blamed the unwillingness of printers to spend the money necessary to print materials with *zhuyin* (Li J. 1936, 1–4; Cui 2018, 116n5). To break through this impasse, the government decided to ensure the production of metal type to print texts with *zhuyin.* At the January 26, 1935, meeting at the Ministry of Education, the participants decided to send Li Jinxi and Wang Yi to Shanghai to investigate whether the government itself should strike the copper matrices necessary to produce the lead type used in printing, or whether production should be assigned to a private company (自鑄或商鑄 *zizhu huo shangzhu*) (Shenbao 1935b). The two arrived in Shanghai on January 27, the day after the meeting adjourned, and stayed for about a week, presumably making inquiries among the various publishing companies that were based in the city (Shenbao 1935c). They ultimately decided that the Ministry of Education should enter into a contract with the Chunghwa Book Company to produce the matrices, for which purpose the Ministry appropriated 20,000 yuan (Li 1935). Apparently, the task turned out to be more troublesome for Chunghwa than anticipated, because scarcely two months later, Li Jinxi found himself defending the government's efforts in an open letter to Chunghwa's editorial department head, Shu Xincheng (舒新城 1893–1960), arguing about the total number of characters for which matrices should be struck (Li J. 1935a). By April, the government and the publishing company agreed on 6,788 as the number of characters to produce, a development reflected in a directive from the Shanghai Bureau of Education sent out to the Shanghai Booksellers Association, dated July 10, which included detailed specifications for how *zhuyin* should appear in print (Li J. 1935b; Shanghai Shi shuye tongye gonghui 1935, 8–9). By November 1935, Chunghwa had finished striking matrices for about 5,000 characters (Shenbao 1935f). The government's intention was that other publishers who wished to have their products approved for use in schools would purchase matrices from the Ministry or from Chunghwa (see Fig. 3) (Shanghai Shi jiaoyuju 1935, 2).

The order from the government to produce type for annotated matrices must have collided with the push for simplification, for which there is no record of any government financial support. To the publishers, the simultaneous push for two kinds of major modifications to their manufacturing equipment must have been vexing. Not only were they expected to produce a new kind of type with phonetic annotations, they were also expected to replace traditional Chinese characters with simplified ones. Given that Chunghwa had already produced matrices in several different font sizes for 5,000 annotated characters—presumably traditional characters—producing a further set of fonts for simplified characters would have ballooned into a much larger task—324 characters would have meant producing however many more annotated versions in several different sizes, not to mention characters with multiple readings (see Fig. 4). It is little wonder that the publishers would be opposed to character simplification.

[25] Though published simply under the name Li, this article was probably authored by Li Jinxi, who subsequently included it in a 1936 compilation (Li J. 1936).

Scripts, Texts, and Markets

Even before the publishers themselves had officially received the news of simplification's demise in a directive from the Shanghai Bureau of Education, reports of the publishing industry's economic objections to character simplification had already appeared in Chinese- and English-language newspapers. On January 26, *Zhongyang ribao* (中央日報) announced the end of the policy and cited the printers' difficulties as a reason (Zhongyang ribao 1936, 6; Cui 2018, 116). On January 27, the *North-China Daily News* published a newswire piece from the Central News Agency that said that "the joint petitions of several publishing houses" had caused the Central Political Council of the national government to halt character simplification, on account of the great expense that would be incurred in the "replacing of a large number of types and the disuse of the existing ones"; two days later, the sister publication *North-China Herald* carried an identical story (Central News 1936a, 1936b).

Clearly, money mattered to printers more than ever. Moveable type appeared in China far earlier than it did in Europe, having been invented in the eleventh century. However, as Christopher Reed has argued, mechanized production of texts, to be distributed by capitalist firms in a market economy, did not exist as such in China until the late nineteenth century, when the practice arrived with European incursions into China's economic life. One of the major challenges for publishers in China and Europe was finding enough capital to finance publications. The need for capital gave the state considerable leverage over publishing. In China, the print market itself was essentially a creation of the Chinese state, since the bulk of the publishers' revenues derived from the sale of textbooks for the public-school system, which was rapidly expanding in the first decades of the twentieth century. Interestingly, in the last years of the Qing dynasty and throughout the Republican period, textbook publishing remained in private hands, with the exception of one abortive attempt by the Qing Ministry of Education (學部 *Xuebu*) to produce a textbook of its own. Nonetheless, the publishing industry still remained dependent on the Ministry of Education's approval in order to sell textbooks, and thus the Ministry had a say in what went into textbooks (Reed 2004, 205–11, 228). When in 1920 the Ministry of Education directed that textbooks be published in the vernacular, the industry complied (Culp 2008, 4).

However, as Febvre and Martin note, because of the high capital demands of equipment and production, printers have long had a strong interest in maintaining orthographic stability (Febvre and Martin 1976, 324). This was as true of the Republican-era Chinese publishing companies as it was of the sixteenth-century French printers they were discussing. Hence, as we saw above, the opposition to even a modest orthographic reform promulgated by the Ministry of Education.[26] It should be unsurprising, then, that publishers would object to the simplification scheme of 1935. On top of the considerable political opposition to simplification, it seems the publishers' objections provided the government with an excuse to drop the cause altogether for the next two decades.

Conclusion

Language is intimately tied to the material and institutional conditions of its production and reproduction and the economic systems in which it circulates. The structuralist revolution in

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[26] John Chen (1980, 55) characterizes the Minister of Education's approach as "cautious" (*prudent*) and the whole simplification process as "rather complicated" (*assez compliquée*).

linguistics effected by Swiss scholar Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and his successors posited a bifurcation of language into two parts: a platonic ideal of language, which he called langue, and the actual realization of that ideal in everyday life, which he called parole (Saussure [1916] 1959). This bifurcation has meant that linguistics as a discipline has for the past century grown up on the assertion first posited by Saussure that the proper focus of linguistics is on investigating the nature of langue and not parole.

But we cannot escape the fact that language, too, has a social life, and that its existence as a tool of communication makes it inseparable from the social and material context of its use. For structuralists, script is simply a notation of (and thus secondary to) sound, a phonocentric orientation that has come under fire in recent years (Söderblom Saarela 2016, 237). The 1935 attempt to implement simplified characters in China shows us that, though script reform is certainly a political issue, it also has an important material and economic dimension. Thus, attempts to change the platonic ideal of script are subject to material constraints. The government's attempts to mandate two simultaneous changes in printing practices—annotated characters and character simplification—provoked objections from the publishing industry, objections that appear to have, if not influenced, at least provided the government with a plausible excuse for its decision to rescind its simplification policy after only a few months. Politics strongly influence the way a language is spoken and written, no doubt, but the first attempt to simplify characters in Republican China underscores how important it is to remember the materiality of language as well.

Figures

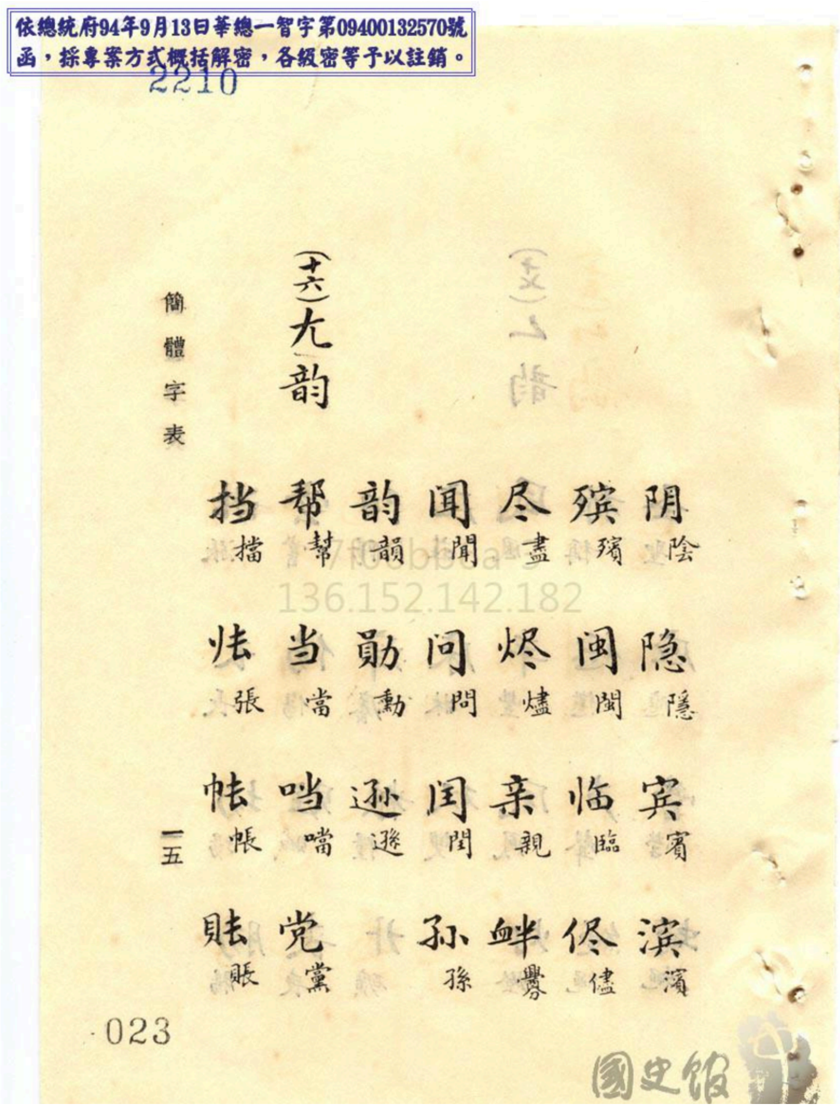


Figure 1. A page from the Ministry of Education's 1935 *Table of Simplified Characters* 簡體字表. The simplified characters were listed in order of syllabic final (rhyme) according their order in *zhuyin fuhao*. Here, we see the end of the ㄣ (*en*) rhyme, starting with the characters *yīn* 陰／阴 and *yǐn* 隱／隐 and the beginning of the ㄤ (*ang*) rhyme, with *bāng* 幫／帮 and *dāng* 當／当. Note how all four of these character simplifications were later adopted by the Communist government and are still in official use today (Jiaoyubu 1935, 23).

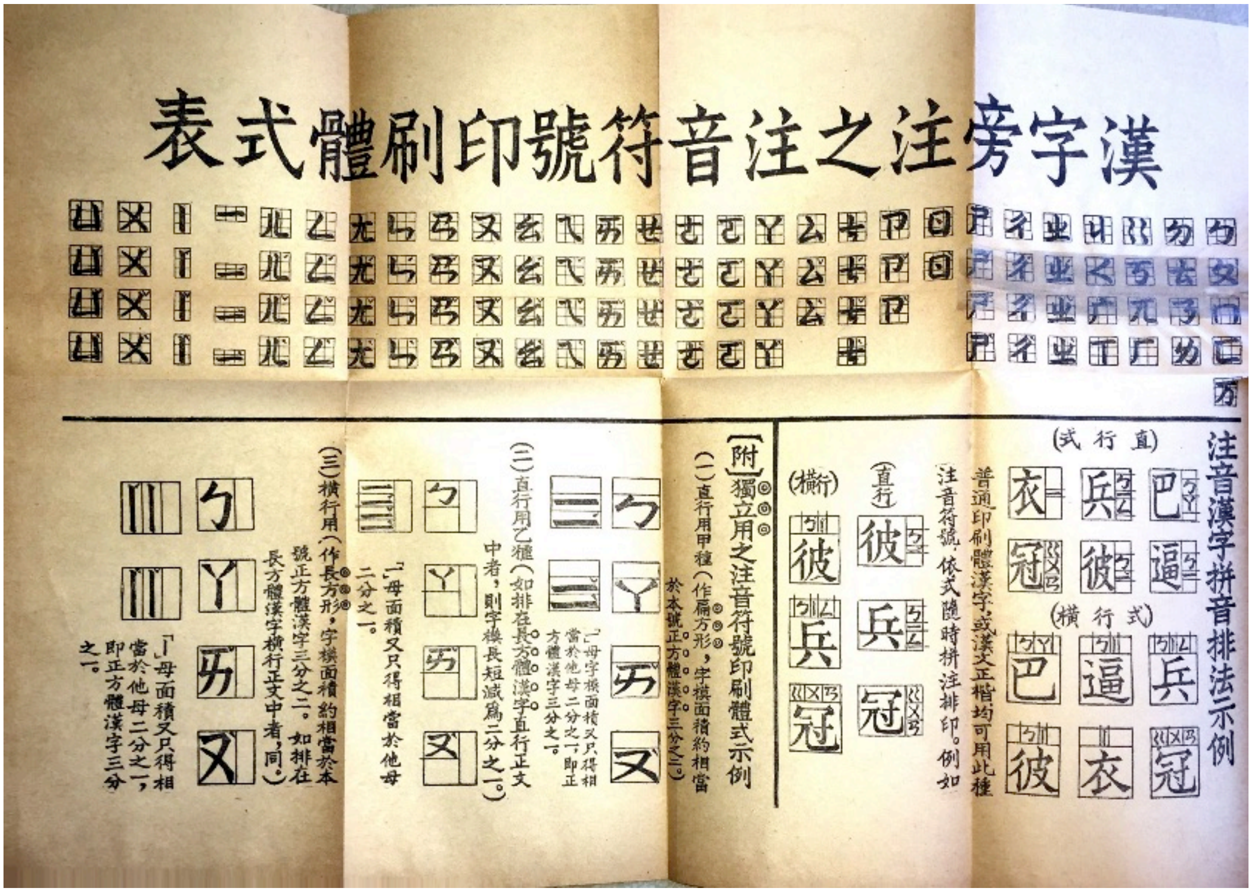
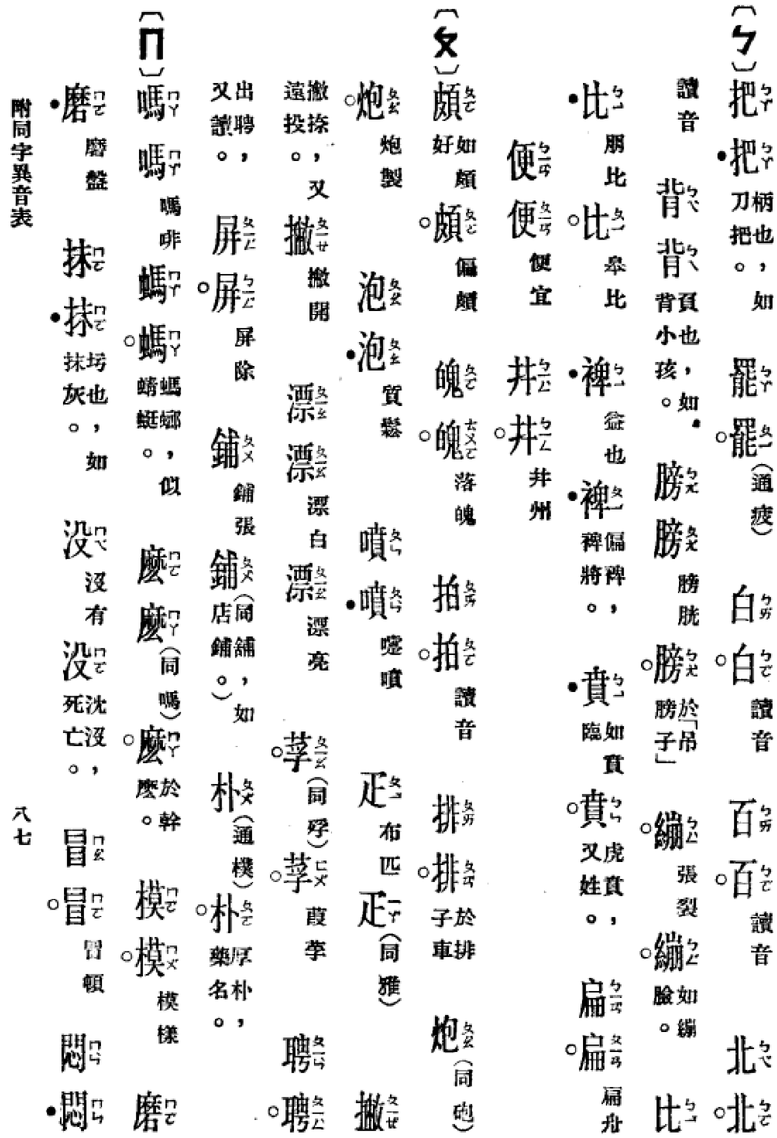


Figure 2. “Type Specimen for Phonetic Symbols Placed Beside Chinese Characters” (漢字旁注之注音符號印刷體式表) from *Sound-Annotated Characters* (注音漢字 *Zhuyin Hanzi*) by Li Jinxi (foldout insert between pages 16 and 17). This table illustrates the printed form of each of the phonetic symbols and how the tones are to be indicated (the first tone was unmarked; the second, third, and fourth tones were indicated with the signs used today in both *zhuyin* and *pinyin* to the upper right of the relevant symbols). Additionally, the table shows how the symbols should be printed alongside Chinese characters as ruby characters for both vertical and horizontal text (lower right), and also how phonetic symbols could be printed independently (lower left) (Li J. 1936, 16–17).

Figure 3. The first page of the “Table of Sound-Annotated Characters 6,788 Most Commonly Used Characters” (注音漢字常用六七八八字表). Note that simplified characters, without *zhuyin,* are included in parentheses after some of the characters in this list. The number 6,788 was the result of haggling between the Ministry of Education and the Chunghwa Book Company, which had received a government subvention of 20,000 yuan to create the matrices to print these sound-annotated characters (Li J. 1936, 37).



〔ㄅ〕把ㄅㄚˇ •把ㄅㄚˋ 柄也，如刀把。 罷ㄅㄚˋ ◦罷ㄆㄧˊ（通疲） 白ㄅㄞˊ ◦白ㄅㄛˊ 讀音 百ㄅㄞˇ ◦百ㄅㄛˊ 讀音 北ㄅㄟˇ ◦北ㄅㄛˋ
讀音 背ㄅㄟˋ 背ㄅㄟ 負也，如背小孩。• 膀ㄅㄤˇ 膀ㄆㄤˊ 膀胱 ◦膀ㄅㄤˋ 於「吊膀子」 ◦繃ㄅㄥ 張裂 ◦繃ㄅㄥˇ 如繃臉。 比ㄅㄧˇ
•比ㄅㄧˋ 朋比 ◦比ㄆㄧˊ 皋比 •裨ㄅㄧˋ 益也 •裨ㄆㄧˊ 偏裨，裨將。 •賁ㄅㄧˋ 如賁臨 ◦賁ㄅㄣ 虎賁，又姓。 扁ㄅㄧㄢˇ ◦扁ㄆㄧㄢ 扁舟
便ㄅㄧㄢˋ 便ㄆㄧㄢˊ 便宜 幷ㄅㄧㄥˋ ◦幷ㄅㄧㄥ 幷州
〔ㄆ〕頗ㄆㄛ 如頗好 ◦頗ㄆㄛˇ 偏頗 魄ㄆㄛˋ ◦魄ㄊㄨㄛˋ 落魄 拍ㄆㄞ ◦拍ㄆㄛ 讀音 排ㄆㄞˊ ◦排ㄆㄞˇ 於排子車 炮ㄆㄠˋ（同砲）
◦炮ㄆㄠˊ 炮製 泡ㄆㄠˋ •泡ㄆㄠ 質鬆 噴ㄆㄣ •噴ㄆㄣˋ 噴嚏 疋ㄆㄧ 布匹 疋ㄧㄚˇ（同雅） 撇ㄆㄧㄝ
撇捺，遠投。又撇ㄆㄧㄝˇ 撇開 漂ㄆㄧㄠ 漂ㄆㄧㄠˇ 漂白 漂ㄆㄧㄠˋ 漂亮 ◦莩ㄆㄧㄠˇ（同殍） ◦莩ㄈㄨˊ 葭莩 聘ㄆㄧㄣˋ ◦聘ㄆㄧㄥ
出聘，又讀。 屏ㄆㄧㄥˊ ◦屏ㄅㄧㄥˇ 屏除 鋪ㄆㄨ 鋪張 鋪ㄆㄨˋ 店鋪（同舖），如 朴ㄆㄨˇ（通樸） ◦朴ㄆㄛˋ 厚朴，藥名。
〔ㄇ〕嗎ㄇㄚˊ 嗎ㄇㄚ 嗎啡 螞ㄇㄚˇ ◦螞ㄇㄚˋ 螞螂，似蜻蜓。 麼ㄇㄛ 麼ㄇㄚ（同嗎） ◦麼ㄇㄚˊ 於幹麼。 模ㄇㄛˊ ◦模ㄇㄨˊ 模樣 磨ㄇㄛˊ
•磨ㄇㄛˋ 磨盤 抹ㄇㄛˇ •抹ㄇㄛˋ 圬也，如抹灰。 沒ㄇㄟˊ 沒有 沒ㄇㄛˋ 沉沒，死亡。 冒ㄇㄠˋ ◦冒ㄇㄛˋ 冒頓 悶ㄇㄣ •悶ㄇㄣˋ
附同字異音表 八七

Figure 4. One of the challenges of striking new matrices for sound-annotated characters was that many characters had more than one reading (that is, pronunciation), as shown in this "Table of Characters with More than One Reading" (同字異音表 *Tong zi yi yin biao*). Thus, separate matrices had to be made for each distinct reading of the same character. For instance, in the leftmost column, note the two different readings given for the character 沒: the first is *méi* as in *meiyou* (沒有 not have), the second is *mò* as in *chenmo, siwang* (沉沒，死亡 death by drowning) (Li J. 1936, 87).

4

End of an Era: Transforming Language and Society in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, c. 1870–1950

Amid Western imperialism and the rise of nationalism in East Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perhaps the most significant change that occurred was the massive shift in language practices that took place between about 1870 and 1950, as regional hegemony shifted from China to Japan. Bound for two millennia by their common use of Classical Chinese, elite literati in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam all moved away from that abstruse *lingua franca* and turned to the creation of new national vernaculars. Today, each country has a distinct national standard language written in its own script, which in Japan consists of a combination of Chinese characters and *kana*; in Korea, a script with an indigenously developed alphabet; and in Vietnam, a Latin-alphabet script. Only China has retained Chinese characters as a written medium, but even then, for a much different language from before. These new languages were meant to (and did eventually) inhabit an entirely new social environment. Before, literacy had been reserved for a small elite, and the difficulty of the language they monopolized—Classical Chinese—was seen as a feature and not a defect. When circumstances changed, however—when the industrializing nations of Europe and the US began to force trade and diplomacy on their own terms onto Asia, the resulting crises in each country forced a reevaluation of existing cultural practices and attitudes. Obscurity in language was no longer a virtue in a world in which mass literacy appeared intimately connected with national strength: the new national vernaculars had to be made accessible, both linguistically and institutionally. The new social word of these vernaculars included such institutional innovations as public education; a commercial publishing industry; musical recordings, radio, and films made for a mass market; a national industrial economy; and a global system of national states engaged in a Darwinian struggle for survival of the fittest. Amid these modern institutions and practices, an official language that required years of study and was accessible only to a small minority of the population no longer had a place.

What is modernity in the context of language? The answer to such a question depends on whether one treats modernity as a positive or a normative state—that is, whether one's conception of modernity is descriptive or prescriptive. Virtually no one treats modernity strictly as one or the other; most accounts discuss modernity from both perspectives. Nonetheless, each perspective remains distinct and is almost always in tension with the other. For instance, Bourdieu, in discussing language, takes modernity as a given—it is, after all, the principal concern of sociology—and describes contemporary language practices as a part of modern social reality. The "standard" or "official" language, for him, is the language consecrated by the state as the best kind of language, which forms part of the habitus of the best kind of people (who constitute the "dominant classes"). The arbitrariness of a standard language goes almost unnoticed, its superiority misrecognized as "natural." Thus, Bourdieu takes a more descriptive approach, while ascribing the prescriptive (normative) aspects of standard language ideology to the complicit misrecognition of the masses (Bourdieu 1991, 43–65). In so doing, he echoes Gramsci, who posited that, whenever the "question of the language" arises, larger changes are taking place in the relationship between the "governing class" and the "national-popular mass"—in other words, a reorganization of cultural hegemony, in which the rulers strengthen their position and the masses are complicit in their own linguistic domination (Gramsci 1991, 183). Eugen Weber, on the other hand, takes a more even approach, describing the normative aspirations of French revolutionaries for linguistic uniformity (and thus national unity), coming into conflict with the stubbornly polyglot reality of France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From a modernization standpoint similar to that of Karl Deutsch (1966), Weber shows that it was only later in the nineteenth century, when the larger social context in France changed—industrialization, urbanization, war mobilization—that revolutionary nationalist aspirations for linguistic uniformity were gradually attained. Thus, for Weber, the normative aspirations of nationalism preceded—and were facilitated by—the positive achievements of economic development. The spread of standard (Parisian) French was helped by the rise of an economic context in which provincial speakers of dialect (*patois*) found that speaking French was personally advantageous (E. Weber 1976, 67–94, 303–37).

The Diffusionist Model

For both theorists, the unit of analysis is the nation-state, which exists in a world of other nation-states. Thus, linguistic modernity is read as linguistic nationalization, in which all citizens supposedly have equal access to learning the national language. This putative equal access is what Bourdieu criticizes, given that the abstruseness of the standard language plays an important role in class reproduction. Linguistic modernity thus comes about through the diffusion of a standard language from a geographical and class center—the Parisian bourgeoisie, in the French case. The spread of this language is then facilitated by a variety of forces. In Weber's account of a modernizing France, these forces include industrialization and urbanization. For Benedict Anderson (1991), who leans heavily on the Annales-school historians Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin (1976), the main force is print-capitalism. While this diffusionist model at first glance seems plausible, its reliance on European examples limits its usefulness in helping us understand the process elsewhere. The usual interpretation of Europe's experience of vernacularization, in which Latin was gradually supplanted by national vernaculars that then in turn supplanted local dialects, takes as structuralist view of language. That is, a language is a self-contained symbolic system involuntarily inherited within a community whose boundaries are often defined by that language—whether based on class or ethnicity; it follows then, that a language is elite because elite people speak and write it. Thus, as Weber has it, "French" is the language of the Parisian bourgeoisie, and French becomes more widespread almost in spite of elite efforts to spread it through the schools. Rather, it diffuses beyond its social and geographic origins because, for an urbanizing population, it is the key to accessing employment and opportunity.

As we will see, however, the process of attaining linguistic modernity in East Asia was far more state-led and top-down, not least because the region's premodern language situation was more complicated than people unfamiliar with it might think. Moreover, modernity in Asia arose within a context of an imperialist world system that shaped developments in each country in different ways depending on its position within the system and its relations to different regimes at different times. Indeed, the diffusionist model's geographical and conceptual narrowness leads us to such errors as Anderson's, when he says that Japan, unlike the national states of Europe, was possessed of a "relatively high degree of…ethnocultural homogeneity"—it was not (Lie 2001)—and that its "half-Sinified ideographic reading-system was long in place throughout the islands, and thus the development of mass literacy through schools and print was easy and uncontroversial"—a mistake, as I will show, based on a misunderstanding of the "reading" (writing?) system (Anderson 1991, 95–96).

The Integrationist Model

In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the countries of Asia that had previously shared in their use of Chinese characters and Classical Chinese each engaged in contentious debates about language standardization, and each developed national linguistic forms to suit the context of modern national societies. The developments in each country influenced those in neighboring countries, and all were influenced by what they perceived to be Western language ideologies and models of practices and institutions. I focus on Korea, Japan, and Vietnam in this chapter because, until the end of the nineteenth century, they were bound to China by an elite culture for the better part of two thousand years. More importantly, each country's modern history after the collapse of Chinese hegemony was marked to varying degrees by a nationalist rejection of the Chinese heritage. I show that, while the selection of Europe's national vernaculars might have been relatively "unselfconscious" early-modern bureaucratic developments—only afterwards to be taken up by dynasts in pursuit of "official nationalisms" (Anderson 1991, 42, 84), Asian nationalisms, which arose later than their European counterparts, took European developments as a model, but implemented them much more aggressively. The selection and codification of national standard languages by newly constituted nation- and empire-states in Asia was eminently self-conscious, and both the design and spread of these languages were marked by efforts to be more egalitarian than before—the languages were purposely made simpler for greater ease of access, thus facilitating a nationalist project of "status integration" as well as "cultural integration" (Lie 2004, 99).

I argue that the Asian cases I examine, different as they are from the European norm, are better understood through an *integrationist* model, in which linguistic unification is pursued far more inclusively and heavy-handedly by the state. Rather than explaining today's dominance of national standard languages as resulting from diffusion from a class and geographical center (the bourgeois elite of the capital city), I show that, in my Asian cases, social elites arbitrarily designated the educated speech of the capital cities as the basis of the national standard language. While European standard languages were in many ways "artificial" (E. Weber 1976, 336), their Asian equivalents were even more extreme in their artificiality, having virtually no constituent speakers or writers before their creation. The propagation of these languages therefore was necessarily much more top-down: a language cannot diffuse from a center if it has no initial population of speakers. In each case, the standard language was based on, but not identical to, the existing speech of the capital. The new standard language had first to be taught to teachers before being spread among the people. New media had to be created from scratch—vernacular newspapers, school textbooks, radio, film, phonographs—and all had to be cultivated and monitored for linguistic conformity. In each case the heavy hand of the state was the guiding force. Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, in short, represent extreme versions of what their elites perceived to be the European norm when it came to state language policy.

In the following sections, I first outline the premodern language situation in Asia. The discussion then proceeds chronologically, starting with Japan, followed by Korea and then Vietnam: in each case, I demonstrate how an integrationist model better accounts for the rise of the national standard language than the regnant diffusionist model. Furthermore, the implications of my alternative perspective for social theory are manifold. The diffusionists' explanation of the past is often used to criticize the conditions of the present: the diffusion of a standard language represents a "colonization" of the periphery by the center (E. Weber 1976, 485–96). Bourdieu's approach is similar—the standard language aids the reproduction of privilege. My integrationist model delivers a different perspective: while there will always be advantaged and disadvantaged people under any set of social arrangements, the Asian cases show that the very incorporation of previously excluded populations into a unified language and educational system represents an advance, however flawed, toward a more egalitarian vision of society.

Premodern East Asian Cosmopolitanism

For the Anglophone readership of this chapter, it might be hard to imagine a world in which the upper classes used a language wholly different from the rest of the society, but much of East Asia (and Europe) inhabited just such a world up until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In China's East Asian neighbors—Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—the language of government and scholarship and religion was Classical Chinese.[27] The power and appeal of what we think of today as foreign languages was very much a part of elite life in premodern Europe and Asia. In Europe, Latin was integral to governmental and intellectual life in the medieval and early modern periods, and French was the dominant language of aristocrats and the educated bourgeoisie in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Leonhardt 2013, 1–8, 36; Gordin 2015, 16–18). The strangeness to us of people in the thrall of what we would consider to be foreign languages speaks to how thoroughly the ideology of nationalism has permeated the contemporary consciousness. Nationalism calls for political communities bound by a common culture, of which language forms a critical component. The idea that the elite members of a polity would have more linguistically in common with elites from other countries than with other members of their own seems quite unnatural to us (Lie 2004, 13–21). But such was the case in East Asia right up until the end of the nineteenth century.

Literate elites in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam were thoroughly imbued with the Confucian canon and with the language in which it was written: Classical Chinese. It is hard to imagine a Western analogue to the complete and utter dominance of this form of culture among the upper echelons of society. Latin is frequently cited as a comparative case, but Latin was a language that originated in a polity, Rome, that had long since passed into history by the time of its ascendance throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and the early modern era. Indeed, it is important to note that the great majority of Latin texts were written after the fall of the empire (Leonhardt 2013, 14). In essence, Latin was a language whose original speech community had long since disappeared but was kept alive by the literate elite of multiple lands. In contrast, the society in which Classical Chinese originated, in spite of invasions, conquests, and periodic dynastic changes, had never ceased to exist, and it constituted the region's political and economic center of gravity until the mid-nineteenth century. Its cultural hegemony was such that, while a great many books produced in China were sought after and obtained outside of China, very few books—even those written in Classical Chinese—ever made their way in the reverse direction.

[27] Instead of the term "Classical Chinese," distinguished linguist and sinologist Victor Mair (Kornicki 2018, 19; Mair 1994, 708, 2004, 11; Wells 2011, 1) prefers his own coinage "Literary Sinitic" for its precision, since the term indicates the language's status as but one member of the larger Sino-Tibetan family of languages. In advocating such a nomenclature, however, he has largely remained *vox clamantis in deserto* (Mair 2004, 11). I persist in using the term "Classical Chinese" for the convenience of its greater popular familiarity, and also because, as I argue in this chapter, much of the emergence of linguistic modernity in China's East Asian neighbors consisted in the nationalist rejection of the Chinese heritage.

Peter Kornicki has described Chinese textual culture before the nineteenth century as “self-sufficient”; the productions of writers outside of China were largely beneath the notice of the Chinese literati. Buddhism, one of Asia’s major transnational religions, was transmitted to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam virtually exclusively through Chinese translations; Buddhist and Confucian texts, philosophical and political treatises, works on military strategy, and dynastic histories were among the books written and published in China that were in high demand in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Scholars, bureaucrats, and diplomats from these neighboring countries regularly traveled to China specially to obtain these texts. Scholars outside of China needed to go to China and have their books published there in order to gain any wider notice—a situation quite unlike that in Europe, where books routinely circulated among different countries (Kornicki 2008, 17–21, 2018, 130–54).

Given the utter dominance of Chinese culture and Chinese language for the better part of a thousand years, the reorientation of East Asia in the nineteenth century from a Sinocentric regional order to a Eurocentric global system was bound to be painful and traumatic. The prestige of China’s culture had been rooted in its great size, wealth, and military power relative to its immediate neighbors. In the millennium prior to 939 CE, most of today’s northern Vietnam had experienced direct Chinese rule, and the area faced repeated invasions during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Korea had sustained repeated invasions from China, most notably in the early 1600s in the chaotic years before the start of the Qing dynasty, when Manchu invaders forced the country’s Chosŏn (1392–1910) rulers to break their allegiance to the defeated Ming dynasty. And Japan, though it did not face a direct military threat from China, having remained largely isolated through much of the Edo period (1603–1867) under its Tokugawa rulers, nonetheless remained in the cultural thrall of Chinese language and texts until the middle of the nineteenth century (Dreyer 2016).

By the 1920s and 1930s, in contrast, all of the modern nations that formerly had used Classical Chinese as a prestigious medium of communication had marginalized that linguistic heritage and adopted homogenizing national language policies. Local vernaculars in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam were standardized and elevated to official, national status. Gone were the class and status distinctions that had divided each country’s populace by language competency. In place of the diglossia of Classical Chinese and multiple local vernaculars that had marked the elite language practices of each country for more than a thousand years, unification proceeded instead among all classes within each country’s national borders: all citizens of these newly reimagined national communities were obliged by the state, through newly created modern mass education systems, to learn the national language, based on the educated speech of each country’s capital. In surveying the course of language reform among the countries in East Asia that formerly used Classical Chinese as a medium of elite communication, it becomes clear that Japan was at the forefront of this trend, as it was the earliest country to embark on a program of modernization, which uniquely it was able to do largely on its own terms, especially by the end of the nineteenth century.

Japan

In many ways, the massive shift in social practices in East Asia—industrialization, the opening up to global trade, military modernization, nation-building—began in Japan. That Japan was at the vanguard of this kind of change is startling in one respect, because, from the perspective of the Western powers at the time—Britain, France, the United States—Japan was rather marginal in the broader scheme of Far Eastern trade. China was by far the larger market, and China's centrality and importance to global commerce is in part why the British, the foremost exponents of free trade, concentrated on their access to the China trade to the point of instigating war in 1839. The First Opium War with China (1839–1842), in which Britain forcibly expanded its access to Chinese ports, stemmed from a breathtaking sense of commercial entitlement rooted in a peculiar marriage of politics and economics first expounded in the eighteenth-century political economic theory of the Scottish Enlightenment (Hont 2005, 1–8). The greed of individual traders and adventurers intersected in the first third of the nineteenth century with the newfound conviction of an increasing number of politicians that economic interests were inseparable from national interests (Platt 2012, 261–62; Semmel 1970, 7–13). In fact, unbeknownst to the Japanese, as early as 1845 the British were planning to open Japan, by force if necessary, but they found themselves tied down in the Crimean War (1853–1856) along with two other potential rivals in Asia, the French and the Russians (Beasely 1972, 76; Green 2017, 49). Thus, the United States, whose recently acquired Pacific coast territories of California and Oregon reinforced its interests in the Pacific, sought to negotiate access to a coaling station and Japanese ports by sending a naval squadron led by Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858), who arrived in Edo Bay in July 1853 (Beasely 1989:264–65).

Given Western modernity's intrusion into East Asia in the nineteenth century, numerous debates went on in elite circles in Japan about what had enabled Western superiority and what Western practices were worth imitating. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, Japan's language situation was highly stratified, with considerable linguistic diversity scattered across the country among the uneducated masses, and a variety of registers of speech and writing used among the tiny educated elite. Such a hierarchically segmented language situation made sense in the feudal society of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600–1868), but with the imposition of a unified and increasingly powerful central government under the imperial partisans that came to power during the Meiji Restoration in 1868, such a situation seemed more and more out of touch with the society that they thought Japan needed to become in order to retain its independence from increasing Western encroachment. Thus began a decades-long cultural engagement with outside societies with an intensity hitherto unseen. Missions from Japan were sent to Europe and the United States, and one of the best remembered exchanges of this period was that between Mori Arinori (1847–1889) and William Dwight Whitney (1827–1894). Mori, a prominent statesman, diplomat, and a founder of Japan's modern mass education system, published in 1873 a book of letters that he had solicited from American educators. The best-known exchange from this collection was with Whitney, a linguist at Yale famous for his philological research in Sanskrit. In their exchange, Mori inquired if the language situation in Japan was irreconcilable with the modern world, and whether as a result the Japanese should learn English instead. Whitney suggested that, in Japan, English replace Classical Chinese as the language of scholarship and government, while retaining Japanese as the everyday language of communication (Whitney 1873). This exchange has subsequently been remembered as an instance in which Mori sought the replacement of Japanese with English, though such a reading is an exaggeration (Lee 1996, 7–14).

Nonetheless, this episode was a sign of the freewheeling nature of debates over language reform in Japan in the late nineteenth century. Under the new imperial regime, many more things seemed possible than ever before, and the complexity of existing language practices meant that there were many options for reform. In addition to Classical Chinese at the apex of linguistic prestige, the Japanese had developed several different vernacular styles of writing atop a striking diversity of spoken languages across the different classes and regions of the country. Intellectuals interested in the development of a Japanese nation and the reform of language practices to further that goal formed many different organizations. Prominent among these organizations in historical memory were the Meiji Six Society, the Kana Society and the Rōmaji Society. The Meiji Six Society, or *Meirokusha* in Japanese, was so named for its founding in 1874, the sixth year of the Meiji reign (1868–1912), and it counted among its members such eminences as Mori Arinori and Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901). Fukuzawa was a prominent author and teacher, as well as founder of the prestigious Keiō University. He and the other members of the Meirokusha, though not always in agreement about particulars, sought the standardization of the Japanese language (Clark 2009, 27).

The proliferation of societies interested in such language reform pointed to the many options for standardization that reformers could choose from. The members of the Meirokusha sought a simpler written style. The Kana Society, whose name reflected its advocacy of the *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries indigenously developed in Japan in the ninth century, was founded in 1884 as a merger of two related language reform groups. The Rōmaji Society was founded in the same year and advocated the romanization of Japanese writing. Both groups sought an end to the use of Chinese characters in Japanese writing altogether. Nor was orthography the only issue at stake in language reform. The prevalence of any given written style in late nineteenth-century Japan fluctuated greatly, and there were several to choose from. *Kanbun,* or Classical Chinese as used in Japan, was written wholly in Chinese characters. *Sōrōbun,* an epistolary style less formal than *kanbun* named for the predominance of the copula *sōrō,* was derived from a modified form of *kanbun,* written in a combination of Chinese characters and *kana* in early Meiji times. *Wabun,* or Classical Japanese, was derived from colloquial writing entirely in *kana* in the Heian period (794–1185). And *wakankonkōbun* was a literary Japanese style with, as its name suggests, *kanbun* elements mixed with Japanese colloquialisms, frequently used in government documents in the Meiji era (Clark 2009, 14–22; Twine 1991, 48).

None of these difficult written styles reflected the speech of anyone in early Meiji Japan. With Japanese missions returning from Europe and the United States, the beginnings of a nationalist language ideology began to take shape, most prominently with the byword *genbun itchi,* or the "congruence of speech and writing." Colloquial writing and advocacy for language reform had appeared even before the Meiji Restoration. Religious tracts dating to the 1810s recorded sermons verbatim, and the first official call for a reform of writing came in 1866, made by Maejima Hisoka (1835–1919), Japan's first postmaster general, whose petition to the shogun called for an end to the use of *kanji* (Chinese characters) and a simplification of the language used in textbooks, an idea that at the time fell on deaf ears. Nevertheless, a series of institutional developments in Japanese society increased the need for a language for the masses: the founding of the first daily newspaper in 1870 (followed by many others), the formation of a Ministry of Education and the postal system in 1871, and the inception of compulsory education in 1872. Intellectuals in newspapers began publishing opinion pieces discussing the merits of a writing style that more closely reflected everyday speech (Twine 1978, 337–42).

The primacy of speech in linguistic thinking was inherited from late nineteenth-century European linguistic trends, which were heavily influenced by a group of German language scholars known as the Neogrammarians (*Junggrammatiker*). This group of scholars was known for its advocacy of the idea that changes over time in the sounds of a language proceed according to "rules without exceptions" (Amsterdamska 1987, 94; Lee 1996, 79; Weinreich, Labov, and

Herzog 1968, 119–20). German linguistics in general at the time was perhaps the most well-developed and thoroughly institutionalized in the Western world, and its influence was felt in Japan through the work of Ueda Kazutoshi (1867–1937), one of the biggest names in the formation of a nationalist Japanese language policy. Ueda was an 1888 graduate of the Department of Classical Japanese Literature at Tokyo Imperial University and was a student of Basil Hall Chamberlain's (1850–1935). Chamberlain was a professor of linguistics at Tokyo Imperial University, a supporter of *genbun itchi* and a founding member of the Rōmaji Society (Clark 2009, 84–106; Lee 1996, 73–89).

The primacy of speech in the thinking of language scholars and language reformers stemmed from the Neogrammarian tendency toward phonocentrism, the idea that sound is more fundamental to language than script. This attitude went against assumptions that had prevailed in Asia for the better part of two thousand years: an emphasis on the primacy of Classical Chinese *script,* which could be rendered into sounds in many different ways depending on local speech customs, much like mathematical notation read aloud in different languages. That is, any given text written in Classical Chinese could be read aloud in a multitude of ways: the Japanese would do it according to their pronunciations (or "readings"), the Koreans according to theirs, and the Vietnamese according to theirs; not to mention the many different kinds of regional pronunciations of China. All of these different readings would not necessarily have been mutually intelligible to one another, despite the same underlying written language they were meant to reflect (Kornicki 2018, 17–18).

The reversal in linguistic priorities, then, resulted from European influence. This trend, motivated by foreign ideas, waxed and waned in the next three decades, and the existing historiography recognizes two phases. The initial phase of the rise of *genbun itchi* occurred in the periodical press and schools in the 1870s and 1880s, while the latter phase occurred primarily in literature starting in the 1880s through the 1910s (Heinrich 2005, 116; Twine 1978, 339). The urge to reach more readers motivated in the 1870s the publication of colloquial articles in periodicals, many of whose text was mainly *kanbun,* although a decline in the number of colloquial articles started in 1879, possibly because of a perceived increase in their readership's educational levels (Twine 1991, 95). Conservative and xenophobic opposition incited the next retrenchment in the late 1880s, following a general political swing to the right, and an acrimonious debates over *genbun itchi* appeared in a series of exchanges in the pro-colloquialization magazine *Bun* ("The Written Word" or "Letters") and in the Tokyo newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* that began in late 1888 and lasted into the summer of 1889. The intellectuals who opposed a general colloquial writing style generally objected to what they saw as its coarseness. While the debate ended inconclusively in 1889, developments in Japanese literature continued in parallel. The year 1875 saw the publication of the first major vernacular Japanese novel, *Ukigumo* (The Drifting Cloud) by Futabatei Shimei (1864–1909), who was followed by several other authors. A temporary retrenchment in the conservative years of the early 1890s gave way to a burst of national self-confidence after victory in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), which resulted in the decline of the prestige of Chinese linguistic influences in the older forms of Japanese writing. By 1908, all novels published were in the colloquial. Schools began dropping older forms of writing in favor of *genbun itchi,* and newspapers altogether ceased printing in older styles by 1926 (Heinrich 2005, 129–30; Twine 1991, 198–204).

A leading figure in the state's codification of modern Japanese was Ueda Kazutoshi, who had studied in Germany on government scholarships, starting in 1890 at Berlin University and then in 1892 at Leipzig, where he worked with the prominent Neogrammarians August Leskien

(1840–1916), Karl Brugmann (1849–1919), Eduard Sievers (1850–1932). During his time in Germany, Ueda adopted the German Romantic view that a given language was the embodiment of its society—a nation (Kaske 2008, 24–25; Lee 1996, 118–130). When in 1894 he returned to Japan and was appointed Professor of Linguistics at Tokyo Imperial University, he became thoroughly instrumental in the formation of a national language policy. In 1903, Ueda, Maejima Hisoka and other "prominent educators, linguists, authors, and journalists" helped found the National Language Research Council (*Kokugo i'inkai*), which was established by a legislative act of the Imperial Diet to standardize the Japanese language (Clark 2009, 124). The national language that ultimately emerged from the Council's codification efforts was called *kokugo.* This term represented a lexical "round trip" from China: the two Chinese characters used to write the word *kokugo* originally meant "language of a country" or "language of a place," but as neologized by the Japanese (under German Romantic and nationalist influence), it came to mean "language of a nation." Later in this chapter we will see *kokugo* reappear first in Korean as *kugŏ,* then in Chinese as *guóyǔ,* and finally in Vietname as *quốc ngữ*—all local readings of the same two Chinese characters (Ramsey 1991, 37, 44). Arguments over what this *kokugo* should look and sound like had raged in Japan over the three decades following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and the spoken form it achieved towards the end of the Meiji era was essentially upper-class Tokyo dialect, shorn of localisms, with the incorporation of some token Kyoto dialectal elements, while its written form consisted of a mixture of Chinese characters and the *katakana* syllabary (Clark 2009; Heinrich 2012; Kaske 2006; Twine 1991).

The standardization and nationalization of the Japanese language, contrary to Anderson's (1991, 96) account, was thus far from simple. Nevertheless, over the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the Japanese set the linguistic agenda for the rest of East Asia. Influenced by its forcible opening to the West, it embarked on a quest to answer the questions it felt were raised by the cultural and institutional changes concomitant with modernity: What was the relationship between the sound and script of a language? What was the relationship between a nation's language and its people? Japan's answers were distinct: the script of a language should closely follow its sound, and all of a nation's people were obliged to learn the national language through the new institution of mass education. While diffusionist thinking would posit the spread of a previously prestigious form of speech and writing from center to periphery, the Japanese case—in which the imperial capital itself was shifted from Kyoto to Tokyo—shows us that the process there was much more intentionally driven from the top down. A new language ideology was adopted, a new language was invented, a new capital was designated, and a population newly conceived of as national was the target of these new ways of thinking. Japan's integrationist approach was to have a strong impact on its Asian neighbors.

Korea

The governing regime in Meiji Japan, in adopting the strategies of its Western adversaries to strengthen the nation, did not limit its reforms to domestic policy. Towards societies overseas, the government began behaving in ways that were rather similar to the Western powers that had so recently imposed themselves on Japan. It is in this context that an isolationist Korea enters the picture in 1875 with a diplomatic incident in Kanghwa Bay, on the country's west coast, near Seoul. In that year, Japan sent three gunboats to Korea in an effort to open up diplomatic relations. When one of them was fired on, the Japanese saw fit to retaliate by returning fire on several coastal batteries. Subsequently, in January 1876, the Japanese sent three more gunboats to Kanghwa Bay with a diplomat charged with negotiating treaty relations with the Chosŏn government. The resulting Treaty of Kanghwa opened three Korean ports to trade with Japan and, moreover, stipulated that Korea was an "independent nation," meaning that its erstwhile tributary relationship with the Qing court in China was to be curtailed. While Japan's ambitions on the Korean peninsula were not to be substantially realized until its victory in the First Sino-Japanese War, the Kanghwa incident marked the beginning of Japan's engagement in "gunboat diplomacy," which heretofore had been confined to Western foreign policy. In a striking echo of Japan's forcible opening to trade by Commodore Perry's US mission in 1853, Japan had turned Western tactics to its own advantage. The shock of the opening of Korea precipitated major changes in the Korean state and society, not least language reform, which began in earnest in the years between the Treaty of Kanghwa and Japan's formal annexation of the Korean peninsula in 1910 (Iriye 1989, 745–46; Schmid 2002, 26).

Korean linguistic culture for centuries had been thoroughly permeated by the Confucian canon and the Classical Chinese in which it was written. While its contemporary orthography consists almost solely of an alphabetic script, *han'gŭl,* the dominant language of Korean scholarship and government was Classical Chinese until the end of the nineteenth century. The alphabet itself had been developed in the early 1440s under the direction of King Sejong (1397–1450, r. 1418–1450), the fourth monarch of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Confucian scholar-bureaucrats in the government, in reaction to the development of *han'gŭl*, sought to double down on Classical Chinese's supremacy in Korean practice, now calling it *chinsŏ* and *chinmun,* "true writing" or "true script." Texts written in Sejong's alphabetic script were, in contrast, termed *ŏnmun,* or "vulgar writing." Such a response seems an overreaction, especially given that *han'gŭl* was developed primarily to aid in the correct pronunciation of Chinese characters. It was, after all, promulgated in a 1446 publication entitled "The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People" (*Hunmin Chŏngŭm*). Moreover, the use of the term *chinsŏ* for Classical Chinese never acquired currency in China, Japan, or Vietnam. While a vernacular literature written in *han'gŭl* did arise after its creation, the importance of Classical Chinese, written in characters, remained undiminished until the end of the nineteenth century, given its central role as the written medium of the Confucian canon on which the civil examination system, modeled on that of China, was based. It was only after the Classical Chinese was marginalized in subsequent decades that *han'gŭl* became prominent as an element of non-Chinese indigeneity that nationalist language ideologists could draw on (Schmid 2002, 65–66; Wells 2011, 17–18).

Within months of the conclusion of the Kanghwa treaty in January 1876, Korean state delegations began to be sent abroad on observation missions. The first of these missions were particularly struck by the new system of mass education that had begun to be developed in Japan, where commoners as well as elites—and even girls—were educated in schools using a curriculum that no longer gave primacy to Classical Chinese or its attendant canon. In part, as a result of this and subsequent missions, the importance ascribed to *chinsŏ* began to wane, and this decline in importance was evident in the increasing use of the word *hanmun*—the Korean equivalent of the Japanese term *kanbun*—to refer to Classical Chinese. Additionally, Korean-language writing began to be called *kungmun,* or "national writing," the spoken correlate of which was *kugŏ*—the Korean equivalent of the Japanese *kokugo,* "national language." Peter Wells (2011, 8–11) has argued that this terminological shift constituted a "decentering" of Classical Chinese within Korean discourse about language; indeed, Andre Schmid has described the discursive construction of a Korean national identity a "decentering" of China in general

(Schmid 2002, 55). In the immediate decades after Kanghwa and under Japanese influence, *ŏnmun ilch'i*—the Korean equivalent of the Japanese phrase *genbun itchi*—became an increasingly widespread catchphrase among literate elites who advocated language reform. Thus, as Korea's position within the regional political order took a turn for the worse, its language practices came under scrutiny.

In this context, the prevailing written style in Korea began moving away from the strict use of Classical Chinese in the 1880s and 1890s toward a mixed style known as *kukhanmun,* in which Chinese words still predominated, but now interspersed with Korean particles written in *han'gŭl.* The shift did not occur without opposition, but the discourse of nationalism had become so widespread that traditional literati whose education was deeply invested in Classical Chinese, were reduced to arguing on nationalist grounds: that Chinese characters were not foreign interlopers but in fact native to Korea (Schmid 2002, 69–70). At the same time, Korean students began studying abroad in Japan. Two of these students, Yun Ch'iho (1864–1945) and Yu Kilchun (1856–1914), later became advocates of language reform. Yu was able to study at Keiō Gijuku, the early incarnation of today's Keiō University, under the school's founder Fukuzawa Yukichi, whom we met earlier as a language reformer and member of the Meirokusha. These and other students would subsequently bring back to Korea the German Romantic idea of indigenous speech as the essence of nationhood.

A string of unequal treaties in the following decade, starting with the United States in 1882, followed by Germany (1883), the United Kingdom (1883), Russia (1884), and France (1886), compelled the Chosŏn government further to open the country's ports to trade. The treaty with France specifically guaranteed religious freedom and the right to proselytize, which allowed Protestant and Catholic missionaries to enter Korea. These missionaries conducted their work through a number of channels, one of which was to run schools in which Classical Chinese was marginalized as one of multiple subjects that were taught. Additionally, missionaries began the task of translating the Bible into Korean, and their efforts to reach a broader audience meant that they pursued this task through the medium of *kungmun,* written in *han'gŭl.* As in other parts of East Asia, Western missionaries were baffled by the language situation in Korea. To better evangelize, Christian missionaries from the West were among the first to create dictionaries of Korean—in fact, such bilingual dictionaries predated by several decades the publication of the first monolingual Korean dictionary in 1938. Given the unstandardized state of the Korean language situation, lexicography was no straightforward task. In addition to their efforts at translation, the missionaries also brought with them their attitudes regarding linguistic practice. The sway that Classical Chinese held over Korean literary culture they found off-putting, since being in the thrall of a foreign culture in the age of rising nationalism seemed increasingly obsolete—a viewpoint of which the Koreans themselves were aware (King 2004, 15; Kornicki 2018, 47–48; D. O. Pieper 2017, 101, 154, 292, 299).

The Chinese defeat in 1895 in the First Sino-Japanese War sharply marked the decline of Chinese political influence and cultural prestige in Korean society and the ascendance of Japanese power on the Korean peninsula. Earlier, in March 1894, a peasant rebellion had broken out in the southwestern province of Chŏlla, the proximate cause of which was the depredations of an unscrupulous official. The Tonghak rebels, so named for their guiding religious ideology ("Eastern Learning"), were quickly able to seize control of a significant portion of territory, including the provincial capital, Chŏnju. When government troops proved unable to retake the capital in June 1894, the Chosŏn court, fearful of the collapse of its authority, petitioned the Qing government for assistance in quelling the rebellion. The Qing agreed to send help, prompting the

Japanese, who had been monitoring the situation closely, to send troops of their own. Though the Kanghwa treaty two decades before had stipulated the end of Korea's tributary relationship with the Qing court, in practice the relationship had never ended, and the Japanese seized the opportunity to realize their political ambitions on the peninsula. Japan ignored the state of truce between the Chosŏn government and the rebels and suppressed the Tonghak rebellion. By July 1894, the Japanese had taken control of the royal palace in the capital Hansŏng (now Seoul) and "sequestered" the monarch, provoking the Qing to go to war. Japan's victory over China in the ensuing first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, which surprised virtually all observers, precipitated a series of political reforms on the peninsula under Japanese direction. Korea was firmly excised from the Qing sphere of influence, but the "sovereignty" it gained under the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki that concluded the hostilities, attained by the force of Japanese arms, proved to be hollow and short-lived (Schmid 2002, 25–27).

Newly empowered in Korea, the Japanese from 1894 to 1896 were behind a series of political changes known as the Kabo Reforms, named for the lunar year in the sexagenary cycle of the Chinese calendar that fell mostly in 1895. The reforms covered many realms of life—among them government organization, financial management, marriage practices, and the abolition of slavery—and language policy did not escape these changes. In a symbolic move, the government issued a statute in 1894 that elevated *kungmun* to the status of national script. The reforms abolished the traditional form of the civil service examination in 1894, more than ten years ahead of its abolition in China in 1905. For centuries, the system had tested candidates' knowledge of the Confucian canon, as well as their compositional ability in Classical Chinese. The cachet of Classical Chinese had always been rooted in its being a requirement for prestigious bureaucratic posts. The abolition of Korea's civil examination system struck a major blow to Classical Chinese's position in Korean society (D. Pieper 2011, 42; Schmid 2002, 62; Wells 2011, 6, 50).

Two major linguistic developments stand out in the years between China's defeat in 1895 and the Japanese annexation in 1910: the rise and growth of a periodical press, and the development of mass education. This era, commonly known in the historiography as the "Enlightenment" period, was heavily colored by the catchphrase *munmyŏng kaehwa,* or "civilization and enlightenment," which was probably derived from the Japanese equivalent, *bunmei kaika,* a catchphrase popular in Japan in the 1870s and 1880s (Clark 2009, 12; Schmid 2002, 24). In 1895, there were no "privately managed Korean-language newspapers" in Korea; twelve years later, there were several newspapers and "a dozen educational magazines" in circulation domestically and overseas (Schmid 2002, 47). While the bulk of these publications were written in the *kukhanmun* mixed-script style, a few pioneers wrote solely using the alphabetical *kungmun,* most notably the *Tongnip Sinmun* (*The Independent*), founded by Korean American returnee Philip Jaisohn (Sŏ Chaep'il) (1864–1951) and Christian essayist Yun Ch'iho (whom we met earlier as a student in Japan), which combined radical politics with a staunch Christian outlook. Similarly, as modern education—public, private, and missionary primary and secondary schools—that taught a variety of subjects began to supplant traditional Confucian education, a new generation of people were raised on *kukhanmun* textbooks produced by the government, a striking departure from previous practice where Classical Chinese was the sole formal way to write (D. O. Pieper 2017, 107–20).

These developments—the opening of the ports, the decline of the prestige of China and its language and culture, and the rise of a modern press and language practices—parallel developments both in Korea's neighboring empires, China and Japan. Where Korean history diverges, however, is the increasing encroachment of Japan on its domestic affairs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that culminated in a total takeover 1910. While Japanese officials had begun to play a role in Korean governance following the conclusion of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Japan's involvement escalated during its war with Russia (1904–1905). In spite of the Korean court's declaration of neutrality amid the conflict, the Japanese took advantage of the exigencies of war to strengthen their military and political position on the peninsula, and a Japanese minister took responsibility for education policy. In August 1905, the Japanese forced the Korean emperor Kojong, under military duress, to sign the Ŭlsa treaty making Korea a protectorate. In the midst of this high drama, the Chosŏn government created the National Script Research Center in 1907, which collected a group of language scholars among whom was founder of Korean linguistics Chu Sigyŏng (1876–1914). When Kojong proved recalcitrant after the protectorate treaty, the Japanese forced his abdication in 1907 in favor of his apparently more pliable son, Sunjong, under whom, three years later in 1910, Korea formally was annexed to Japan (Schmid 2002, 28).

The annexation effectively cut off most indigenous developments in the evolution of Korean language practices for almost a decade. The Korean press was taken over by the Japanese colonial government and greatly diminished, and Korean as a language began to be taught in schools merely as one subject, the medium of education increasingly becoming Japanese. The oppressive political environment of the first decade of Japanese rule led to widespread discontent that found expression in 1919 in the March First Movement, in which mass demonstrations prompted the colonial government to reconsider the terms of its rule, eventually loosening restrictions on expression. The vernacular press experienced a revival and growth in the 1920s, surpassing the previous generation of newspapers, each of whose circulation had never exceeded a few thousand. Korean language reform also continued. In 1921, students of Chu Sigyŏng founded the Korean Language Research Society (*Chosŏnŏ yŏnguhoe*), forerunner to today's Han'gŭl Society, which promoted the term han'gŭl for Korea's alphabet that Chu himself had coined in 1910. The society also published a standardized orthography in 1933, though the colonial government itself had produced standardized Korean orthographies for use in schools through the 1910s and 1920s. The relatively tolerant state of affairs in language policy ended in 1938, as Japan's war of expansion in Asia intensified, the Korean language was further demoted, first becoming an optional subject, and then in 1942 suffering total removal from school curricula (King 2007, 207; D. Pieper 2011, 68–88; D. O. Pieper 2017, 400; Schmid 2002, 257).

It was only after the Japan's defeat in 1945 that Koreans regained control of their own language and education policy. In the time since 1945, both the North and the South have engaged heavily in the promotion of literacy. While the North banned Chinese characters outright in 1949 (though later reincorporating them into the curriculum), the characters remained a feature of South Korean writing, for which the government's support was alternately given and withdrawn all through the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, until the 1990s. Over the decades of separation, the North and the South's language practices have diverged significantly, particularly in terms of lexicon, the North eschewing foreign loan words and the South ambivalently embracing them (King 2007, 215–18; Schmid 2002, 258–60; Yi and Ramsey 2011, 289).

Developments in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Korea show how the eventual vernacularization and nationalization of language practices was a deliberate and conscious act on the part of language-reforming intellectuals both inside and outside the state. The more radical parts of the vernacular press virtually invented a new language for a new purpose—mass communication—and the state gradually incorporated these trends into a new mass education system. Rather than the simple diffusion of elite language among the masses, the elites themselves invented a new set of language practices, national in scope and popular in orientation, and spread it among the people. This required deliberate changes to the language itself—its written form in particular—to make it easier to learn. Moreover, the nation-state as a unit of analysis is insufficient, as Japan's imperialist behavior towards Korea demonstrates. Language change was influenced by both nationalism and imperialism. Korean language change, taking place within the context of both a nation-state as well as an empire-state, reinforces a more integrationist reading of the development of modern language practices in Asia.

Vietnam

Vietnam is often an afterthought in a scholarly literature on East Asia that often focuses on China, Korea, and Japan. Indeed, Vietnam is often classified geographically within the separate category of "Southeast" Asia. However, Vietnam, too, was a part of the elite cosmopolitanism that included China, Japan, and Korea for the better part of two thousand years prior to the twentieth century (Kornicki 2018, 10). The Vietnamese were securely in the Chinese cultural orbit even long after China's formal rule over the northern part of the country was ended after nearly a thousand years in 939 AD. They also possessed a class of literati bureaucrats who were steeped in the use of Classical Chinese and the Confucian canon. Moreover, this class of bureaucrats was selected using the same sort of civil examinations in use in China as well as Korea, a system that was not abolished in Vietnam until 1919, more than ten years after the Chinese, and more than twenty years after the Koreans. However, Vietnam is unique among societies that formerly used Classical Chinese as a prestige language in that it is the only one that, in the end, adopted an orthography wholly based on the Latin alphabet.

This romanization is due in large part to the French, whose progressive conquest of southeast Asia beginning in 1859 makes them an inescapable presence in any discussion of the evolution of Vietnamese language practices. Prior to the French conquest of Vietnam, the language situation of the country was similar to that of Japan and Korea: Classical Chinese at the social apex, mastered by a privileged few in government and high culture; a vernacular literature, written by the same literate elites using an indigenous script, called *chữ nôm,* adapted from Chinese characters; and numerous local forms of speech used by the rest of the people. This state of affairs was maintained and reinforced by the Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945), Vietnam's last, which replicated many aspects of Chinese rule. For instance, the central government, based in Huế in central Vietnam, ruled through six boards or ministries, emulating exactly the organization of the Qing imperial government. The government also selected new bureaucratic officials through a competitive civil examination system, which tested candidates on the Confucian classics in Classical Chinese, and which produced a degree hierarchy almost identical to that used in China. The Nguyễn dynasty placed Vietnam firmly back in a tributary relationship with the Qing empire; its founding emperor Gia Long (1762–1820, r. 1802–1820) even petitioned the Qing court for recognition of a new name he proposed for his realm, Nam Việt, and acceded to their modification: Việt Nam. While this is the modern name for the country, it did not come into general use until the early twentieth century. Early in the dynasty, up until 1815, *nôm* script was used just as frequently in palace memorials as Classical Chinese. However, the Nguyễn monarchs that succeeded Gia Long retreated into conservatism, requiring that all memorials submitted to the court be written in Classical Chinese (Kiernan 2017, 270–91). It is clear, then, that Vietnam is more than simply a national case: its evolving relations with the empire-states of China and France strongly influenced the course of its language changes.

The current appearance of written Vietnamese is perhaps what distinguishes it most from its neighbors: among the countries that formerly used Chinese writing in Asia, it is the only script written in Latin letters. This distinctive practice can be traced to the presence of Catholic missionaries, principally French Jesuits, that began proselytizing in Vietnam in the mid-seventeenth century. While he certainly was not the originator of the currently used Latin-alphabet writing system in Vietnam, the French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660) was the first to systematically codify the writing system in a dictionary published in Rome in 1651. Known from the mid-nineteenth century on as *quốc ngữ*, this script employed the Latin alphabet with orthographic influences from French, Portuguese, and Italian, along with numerous diacritics to indicate vowel quality and tone. The term *quốc ngữ* itself is a curious one, given that the Chinese characters on which the term is based are the same as the ones used to represent the Chinese *guóyǔ,* the Korean *kugŏ,* and the Japanese *kokugo,* all of which mean "national language." But while the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese terms most usually refer to the spoken language (and only sometimes the written language), the Vietnamese term refers to the romanized orthography imposed by its former French colonial rulers (DeFrancis 1977, 83–100).

Of course, in the nineteenth century, missionaries were present in many parts of Asia: many romanized scripts were developed for various Chinese dialects, for instance, to help missionaries learn local forms of speech for the sake of proselytizing. While the intent of the Catholic missionaries in developing and using the romanized script is not clear from the surviving documentary evidence (after 1651, there were no printed texts in the script until the publication of two dictionaries by a French priest in 1838), it probably saw continued, albeit limited, use among the Catholic minority from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (DeFrancis 1977, 61–66). The French, for their part, took up the orthography as a convenient means to administer their colonial holdings in Southeast Asia, for it allowed them to avoid having to deal with the language of the recalcitrant literati class—Classical Chinese—as well as the complex script based on Chinese characters that had been developed to write Vietnamese, *chữ nôm.* Indeed, the French, throughout their conquest and administration of what eventually became French Indochina, sought to detach Vietnamese society from its former relations with China, seeing the Chinese influence as inimical to advancing their rule, their cultural influence, and their "civilizing mission" to bring the benefits of modern technology, industry, agriculture, and medicine to the Vietnamese. In such a context, the Chinese language was seen as antithetical to modernity (DeFrancis 1977, 77, 141–42; Kelly 2000, 96–100; Marr 1981, 146; K. W. Taylor 2013, 467).

The French conquest of Indochina, which took place between the seizure of Saigon in 1859 and the administrative unification of Laos, Cambodia, and the three colonial administrative units of Vietnam (Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin) by 1899 under French rule from Hanoi proceeded in fits and starts. The immediate pretext for hostilities was the persecution of Catholics and Catholic missionaries, leading to abortive French attacks on Đà Nẵng in 1847 and (after Napoleon III came to power in 1852) in 1856, and 1858. The more tangible reasons for the French presence in Asia were political competition with more established powers in the region (among them Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain), economic desires for commodities such as cotton, sugar, silk, rice, and coffee, and markets for French manufactures (K. W. Taylor 2013, 447). When the last attack on Đà Nẵng failed in late 1858, the Franco-Spanish force that carried out that attack moved south and seized Saigon in 1859. The expansion of French rule into the provinces surrounding Saigon proceeded at times independently of direction from Paris, eventually resulting in the creation of the directly administered French colony of Cochinchina in the south by 1867 (Tucker 1999, 28–30). While the Third Republic, in the years after France's humiliating defeat by the Prussians in the war of 1870–1871, hesitated in pursuing colonial expansion, French officers on the ground, hopeful for a trade route into southern China (beyond British coastal control) and mindful of competition from other European powers, attempted to gain more control over Vietnamese affairs in the north (K. W. Taylor 2013, 454–61). Instability in the remaining regions in the north of Vietnam under ineffectual Nguyễn emperor Tự Đức (1829–1883, r. 1847–1883) caused the French to fear the intervention by the Qing or other European powers and led to a confrontation between Qing and French forces after the latter took Hanoi in 1882. The resulting Sino-French War, which lasted until 1885, resulted in the French-induced abrogation of the tributary relationship between Vietnam and the Qing and also in the imposition of a French protectorate over the remaining two-thirds of Vietnam: Tonkin in the north and Annam in the center, which (unlike Cochinchina in the south) were ruled indirectly through the Nguyễn court and the mandarinate selected through the examination system (C. Taylor 1992, 468–72, 484).

The evolution of Vietnamese language practices in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, as a result of French conquest, proceeded almost entirely under French rule, and any assessment of the French impact and the Vietnamese response with respect to the language situation in Vietnam depends on how one interprets French administrative policy during the colonial years. Such an interpretive task, at least in the English-language literature, is complicated by painful memories of American involvement in Vietnam starting in the mid-1950s after the French defeat at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954 and culminating in the US's withdrawal in 1972 and the conquest of South Vietnam by the North in 1976. Linguist and sinologist John DeFrancis (1977, 229), strongly sympathetic to the North Vietnamese and writing in the heated aftermath of the American withdrawal, argued vehemently that the French were engaged essentially in a genocidal mission to eradicate the Vietnamese language and ultimately replace it with French. Of the debate about "association" versus "assimilation" among French colonial policymakers, in which some argued for ruling through Vietnamese institutions (association) rather than replicating French institutions (assimilation), he took a cynical view, arguing that actual French policy hardly ever departed from assimilationist goals (DeFrancis 1977, 91–92). Accounts of a succeeding generation of scholars have moderated in tone and have expressed more ambivalence about the French role in Vietnam. Of the same association-assimilation debate, historian K.W. Taylor (2013, 467–68), who himself was deployed by the US in Vietnam during the American war, argues that, however short of their ideals they fell, the French belief in their "civilizing mission" was largely genuine, and that, though they recognized the Vietnamese were already civilized, they still needed the French to bring them the benefits of modern technology and institutions. Deeply flawed as their rule was, the French, Taylor (2013, 467) argues, should not be considered any more "virulent" or "corrupt" than Vietnamese regimes in generations past.

However one might characterize French motivations, two things remain true: it was under French rule that *quốc ngữ* became a medium of widespread literacy, and this medium soon outran French control. The French themselves were responsible for spreading the *quốc ngữ* script beyond the narrow confines of the Catholic community, founding a network of schools across Vietnam in which Vietnamese students learned French, as well as Vietnamese written in *quốc ngữ*. This system of French-language schooling, known as "Franco-Vietnamese" education, began in Cochinchina in 1879 and spread north to Hanoi thereafter. By 1910, 4,900 students were enrolled in primary schools in this system in Tonkin, and by 1914, 40,000 in Cochinchina (Kiernan 2017, 332). As French and *quốc ngữ* became ever more important, traditional education in Classical Chinese and *nôm* writing steadily lost ground. The number of civil examination candidates declined, and the examinations themselves were ultimately ended in Tonkin in 1916 and in Annam in 1919. In 1865, the French started the first journal to be published in *quốc ngữ,* the Saigon newspaper *Gia Định Báo,* edited by the pro-French Catholic Trương Vĩnh Ký (also known as Pétrus Ky, 1837–1898), a polyglot genius, promoter of *quốc ngữ,* and author of many works in the new script. The establishment of the *Gia Định Báo* was followed by eight more *quốc ngữ* newspapers, founded between 1868 and 1907.

The Franco-Vietnamese system of education has been criticized as a deliberate strategy to keep the Vietnamese segregated from more elite schools geared towards French colonists and to preempt any notions of Vietnamese autonomy (Kelly 2000, 114–17). Indeed, private Vietnamese attempts at running schools were sometimes forcibly ended—the most famous being the Tonkin Free School, founded in 1907 and shuttered by the French in 1908, in which the newest ideas in Asia were disseminated. In spite of this strategy, the last generation of Vietnamese educated in Classical Chinese and their successors, the first generation to be educated in French, were key in the development of nationalist and anticolonial thought. The dissemination of their ideas and of new ideas from abroad was greatly facilitated by growing literacy in *quốc ngữ.* Two early advocates of modernization, Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940) and Phan Châu Trinh (1872 – 1926), were classically educated literati who were strongly influenced by Japanese and Chinese thinking, including the works of reformers Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929). Both Phans advocated the abolition of the mandarinate, and both traveled to Japan. Trinh, who mastered several foreign languages as well as *quốc ngữ,* was impressed by Japanese mass education and influenced by the ideas of Fukuzawa Yukichi. Châu, far more anti-French than Trinh, never mastered any languages beyond written Classical Chinese and *nôm* and was a notable influence on the next generation of intellectuals, among them Hồ Chí Minh (1890–1969).

This generation came of age during a time when French rule became more relaxed starting in the 1910s until the outbreak of war in 1939. Governor general Albert Sarraut (1872–1962), who was in office from 1911 to 1914 and then again from 1917 to 1919 sought a more collaborative style of French rule, and thus tried to engender enthusiasm among the Vietnamese for the regime. In 1917, the French started and funded the literary monthly *Nam Phong tạp chí,* which until it ceased in 1934, greatly helped further the development of *quốc ngữ* literature. The 1920s were crucial in the development of Vietnamese language practices, as it was then that an explosion in the amount of print media in *quốc ngữ* took place. One of the more notable publications of this period of literary and intellectual ferment was *La cloche fêlée,* a "provocative weekly newspaper" often critical of the French regime, founded in 1924 by Phan Văn Trường (1876–1933) and Nguyễn An Ninh (1900–1943), the latter of whom had studied law in France for three years (Kiernan 2017, 500; Marr 1981, 161). Overall in the 1920s, there was phenomenal growth in the number of weekly and daily periodicals being published, with sixty founded between 1923 and 1928 alone. As publishing expanded, so did the literate population; by 1939, ten percent of the population of Vietnam—about 1.8 million people—could read a newspaper (Kiernan 2017, 345–48; K. W. Taylor 2013, 503). Such an estimate compares favorably with figures from Korea, where definitions of "literacy" under Japanese rule in the 1930s required both proficiency in both Japanese and Korean, something just under seven percent of the population possessed in the 1930s (D. O. Pieper 2017, 496). As Shawn McHale

(2004, 11) has argued, a veritable public sphere, in which "particularistic interests contested their views," arose in Vietnam in the 1920s.

One striking feature of the territory that now constitutes Vietnam is its relative linguistic uniformity: while there are differences in speech in different regions, the differences are relatively small and do not interfere significantly with mutual intelligibility (DeFrancis 1977, 5; Kiernan 2017, 1–19). This language, encoded in the form of *quốc ngữ,* began as a tool for proselytizing, transitioned into a tool for the French more easily to administer their conquests, and became a weapon in the hands of the Vietnamese to spread literacy and new ideas, most notably nationalist and anticolonial ideas (DeFrancis 1977, 258–59; Marr 1981, 188). The Vietnamese case demonstrates how the French colonial state took a writing system invented by French missionaries and deliberately spread it among its subjects. While the state intended the spread of such literacy to facilitate its rule, the writing system took on a life of its own in the hands of the Vietnamese. By the 1970s, the North Vietnamese state was actively promoting spoken Vietnamese and *quốc ngữ* in all areas of life, even where previously French had been the norm (such as in academia). One might think of *quốc ngữ* as even more artificial than its Asian counterparts, having been wholly invented by foreign learners of the Vietnamese language. Nevertheless, its rise, along with Vietnamese nationalism, was due in large part to the efforts of the French colonial state and then the Vietnamese state after independence. The revolution in Vietnamese language practices was not simply the diffusion of the language of one set of elites that had displaced another set. Rather, the spread of a written language that was easier to learn than the existing elite languages—Classical Chinese and Vietnamese written in *nôm*—was an explicitly integrationist and deliberately planned effort to incorporate the previously excluded masses into a unified linguistic field. French colonialism highlights the deliberate, conscious, and top-down nature—and also the unintended consequences—of this large-scale change in social practices.

Conclusion

The major shift in language practices in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, I have demonstrated, were deliberate acts on the part of nation- and empire-states. The existing diffusionist understanding of the rise of national standard languages is too mechanistic and structuralist, not to mention Eurocentric. This approach conceives of a state that promotes the language of a new bourgeois elite, supplanters of an aristocratic and clerical elite that had maintained far more difficult language practices, followed by other forces (principally economic development) facilitating its spread. Moving beyond Europe, however, highlights how this framework does not travel well. In this chapter, I have presented a more top-down and yet egalitarian interpretation of developments that better account for three major cases beyond Europe. As we have seen in this chapter, the Japanese were at the vanguard of change, while the Koreans—forcibly opened up through aggressive Japanese diplomacy—followed closely behind. Vietnam, on the other hand, constitutes a rather distinct case in language change, in that much of the evolution of its linguistic culture took place under French rule between 1859 and 1945. Nonetheless, intellectuals from Vietnam were certainly in contact with their counterparts in the other countries discussed in this chapter, and the influence of nationalist language ideology was strong throughout the region

The nationalization of language in each country meant a broadening of horizons for the great masses of people who were newly empowered to gain literacy: mass education systems were set up by the state, and people were taught standardized languages that were simpler and more easily acquired. Rather than being merely instruments of elite domination, standard languages also facilitated the incorporation of many people previously excluded from broader political and societal discourse. At the same time, the nationalization of language also meant a narrowing of horizons as well—a decline in the linguistic and cultural cosmopolitanism among the region's elites. These changes were pushed forward by European incursions that threatened the independence of Japan and China, and also led to the end of Korean and Vietnamese self-rule until after the end of the Second World War.

Classical Chinese, then, was not just a language—a symbolic system—but rather an entire social phenomenon—a set of practices, institutions, and attitudes, all of which could not survive in the context of a world in which societies in Europe, organized as nation-states, sought to became empires and expand their overseas markets and ensure their commercial and political security through military threats, unequal treaties, and outright conquest. In response, societies needed military forces to protect themselves, as the Japanese were the first to realize, and modern militaries required literate soldiers drawn from a literate population. And in order to support a state—whether governing an empire or nation—that could provide the functions that could produce such a population, there needed to be an economy—industrialized and urbanized—that could produce the resources and technologies to support such a state and its military. In this new social reality, a language which could only be mastered by a few who were meant to rule over an illiterate many no longer had any place. In Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, under pressure from a European onslaught, an elite cosmopolitanism gave way to an array of popular nationalisms.

5

Hiding in Plain Sight: Language and the Construction of the World's Largest Ethnoracial Group

In the formation of ethnic boundaries, scholars have long been ambivalent about the role of language. Max Weber (1978, 395–96) considered it an important basis of ethnic and national formation, but at the same time he argued that language was neither necessary nor sufficient factor for such boundary-making. Language is the defining feature of one of the fastest-growing ethnic categories in the United States (Mora 2014, 48–49), but it is the basis for no major social cleavages in Switzerland (Wimmer 2008, 976). Linguistic differences led to political disintegration in both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, but such differences appear to have been neutralized in China (Wimmer 2018, 113–70). As a skill acquired and not inborn, but one whose acquisition becomes harder with age, language seems both a solid and a shaky foundation for ethnic identity (Lie 2004, 15–21). Why this ambivalence? I argue that the scholarly equivocation on language stems from a faulty conception of what language is. Virtually all of the sociological literature treats language as an autonomous symbolic system, a set of signs and practices on which people draw in their everyday lives, but one that is so democratic and diffuse that it is unresponsive to individual attempts to change it. This chapter shows that language is in fact more susceptible to intentional modification than we might think. Using an extreme case of linguistic artificiality, Mandarin Chinese, I show that a language's shape—its pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar—as well as its relationship to ethnic boundaries are subject to conscious manipulation. It is precisely because language is so malleable that its relationship with ethnicity is so variable and uncertain.

Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), both Enlightenment philosophers and students of Kant, are frequently credited with (and blamed for) originating modern linguistic nationalism—the notion that language lies at the heart of peoplehood. Herder, however, was more of a cosmopolitan than some might think, and both his and Fichte's associations with German nationalism were partly posthumous appropriations, their ideas sometimes taken to extremes (Coulmas 1997; R. A. Fox 2003; Patten 2010; Breazeale 2018; Forster 2019). Subsequent scholarship on nationalism has largely consisted in repudiating these thinkers' supposed primordialism (Wimmer 2013, 16–17). Starting with French philologist Ernest Renan (1823–1892), who famously described a nation as a "plébiscite de tous les jours" (Renan 1882, 27), a long line of constructivists has repeatedly demonstrated the belatedness and malleability of ethnic and national identity, and constructivism has been the hegemonic paradigm since the late 1990s (Wimmer 2008, 972n4). In the immediate years after World War II, this constructivism was heavily colored by modernization theory. Karl Deutsch (1966, 97), for instance, proposed a functional definition of nationality consisting in "wide complementarity of social communication," not just based on language but on mutual cultural understanding as well. Succeeding scholars took this developmentalist approach further. Eugen Weber's (1976, 67–94, 303–38) influential account of Third-Republic France evocatively chronicled the spread of the French language from the Parisian center to the rural periphery between the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Ernest Gellner's (1983), Benedict Anderson's (1991) and James Scott's (1998, 72–73) books followed in the same vein, emphasizing the imperatives of modernization and economic development that spurred the spread of national standard languages. Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 43–65), too, while emphasizing language's classed nature, recognized the centrality of language in state formation and nation-building.

What unites these accounts of language and nation-building is a functional conception of language itself. That is, language is a tool or medium for building social relationships—ethnic, national, and otherwise. Such a functional conception goes back to Weber and Durkheim, the former who noted language's potential in facilitating the formation of social relationships (M. Weber 2019, 122; Tada 2018, 18; Weng 2020), and the latter who saw the rise of national languages as concomitant with the spread of organic solidarity (Durkheim 1893, 204). Though functionalism has largely fallen out of fashion in sociology, a functionalist understanding of language still remains. Why? There are two interrelated reasons. One is disciplinary: language is often seen as the province of linguistics, and thus beyond the scope of sociology. The other reason is that, because language is viewed as being beyond sociological study, it is treated as opaque and thus resistant to sociological examination. Such an attitude finds expression in how languages are usually taken for granted, seen as self-evident entities, independent of human intentionality and impervious to human manipulation. The source of this thinking is the discipline of linguistics itself, a significant faction of which treats language as "autonomous"—that is, a code structured by its own internal logic and not subject to human modification (Newmeyer 1986, 9; Hanks 2005, 75). The failure of such wholly-invented languages as Esperanto, along with the occasional missteps of such government language authorities as the French Academy, reinforces this widely held assumption of linguistic autonomy, even though the flat-footedness of such linguistic interventions are more plausibly attributed to institutional shortcomings rather than linguistic limitations as such (Gordin 2015, 109–10).

Assuming the autonomy of language forces a choice: either ethnic boundaries are drawn in agreement with linguistic boundaries or they are drawn against them. It follows that language cannot reliably correspond with ethnic or national identity, a fact about which virtually all of the nationalism scholarship is in agreement. Examples of boundaries not respecting languages and vice versa are easily found: many countries (such as Switzerland and Canada) are multilingual, and some languages (such as English and German) are spoken in more than one country. But the distinction between "artificial" and "natural" languages is mostly arbitrary and really forms more of a continuum than a dividing line (Jespersen 1929). Artificial languages, perhaps better termed "constructed" languages (such as Esperanto, or even the Elvish of J.R.R. Tolkien and the Klingon of *Star Trek*), often draw on (or deliberately avoid) elements from existing languages. And so-called natural languages—their pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary—are in fact susceptible to deep, purposive intervention. That language is frequently a basis for ethnic distinctiveness, while at the same time being quite malleable, has significant implications for ethnic boundary-making.

China's national standard language, Mandarin, is a heavily artificial one, invented only about a century ago (DeFrancis 1950; Kaske 2008; Simmons 2017; Tam 2020; Weng 2018). Though based on Beijing dialect, the intellectuals who designed Mandarin so differentiated it from its source that mutually intelligibility between the two is difficult (Duanmu 2007, 5). I argue that an important and necessary component of the ethnoracial formation of China's majority, the Han, was the creation of this national standard language, which was aimed at bridging the country's many divisions of language, particularly among the Han themselves. In this chapter, I highlight the linguistic dimensions of ethnic boundary-making and nation-building in China. Examining such a transition in language practices spurs us to rethink the relationship between language and human collectivities—racial, ethnic, and national groups—by moving us beyond the prevailing understanding of national standard languages as oppressive and exclusionary instruments of elite domination (Bourdieu 1991). Instead, given the transparent artificiality of Mandarin as a language meant to unify a diverse and fragmented population, this project of linguistic integration shows how it may very well be more useful to treat language as a malleable instrument, one that is able to achieve a panoply of social goals.

Language and Nation-Building

In his recent book *Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart*, Andreas Wimmer (2018, 113–70) poses an interesting question about nation-building in China. In spite of its considerable internal diversity, China's Han ethnic majority seems less to have been created than to have been taken for granted, both by early twentieth-century nationalist intellectuals and by subsequent scholarship. Referencing a Sherlock Holmes story, Wimmer (2018, 11, 114, 138) asks: Why have the "dogs of linguistic nationalism never barked" among the Han? His answer: China's unique script. He notes that China's written language is not alphabetic, consisting of thousands of characters that, in part, carry semantic content and are only loosely connected to the sounds they represent; that is, written Chinese is logographic. Because the script is not bound closely to sound, it does not represent any single spoken language, and so therefore it could serve as a unifying factor among the linguistically diverse ethnic Han majority for the past several centuries. Wimmer describes this state of affairs as "monographia"—that is, a single written language inhabiting a society of many languages (polyglossia). Moreover, Wimmer argues that elite recruitment into the imperial bureaucracy did not favor any particular Han language group, and that in pre- and post-1949 China, there has been no discernible pattern of linguistic distribution among the Han political leadership of the country (Wimmer 2018, 119–35). Only after the founding of the Communist-Party-led People's Republic in late 1949, he states, did the central government attempt to designate a national language and impose it on the whole population (Wimmer 2018, 122, 310n4).

In pointing to China's unique non-alphabetic writing system as a unifying factor, Wimmer presents an intriguing argument, echoing Deutsch (1966), about the importance of "communicative integration" (Wimmer 2018, 113) in nation building. Moreover, he brings up a good point about how "[m]ost analyses imply that the Han majority represented a natural, self-evident category waiting to be called a race and do not problematize the linguistic heterogeneity within the Han category" (Wimmer 2018, 137). Linguistic divisions within the Han ethnicity never became potent, Wimmer argues, because "the alliance networks inherited from the late Qing period and reknit along similar structural patterns under republican, nationalist, and communist governments stretched across regions and linguistic frontiers" (Wimmer 2018, 138). If we take Wimmer's arguments as a starting point and venture beyond where he left off, his reasoning seems to suggest that China was *sui generis* in being able to hold together such a polyglot collectivity. After all, Chinese is the only major language with a nonalphabetic script, and few other premodern multiethnic land empires have managed until now to hold themselves together the way China has. Wimmer himself points to the Ottoman and Habsburg empires as counterexamples, in which adopting the language of the rulers as the official language proved to be divisive—the transition from Ottoman to Modern Turkish in early twentieth-century Turkey and the replacement of Latin with German in late eighteenth-century Austria (Wimmer 2018, 122). The Russian case, in particular, is Wimmer's case-in-point for linguistic disintegration: the Russian Empire comprised many different languages that used different writing systems, and this polyglossia, combined with ethnic inequality, impeded the formation of cross-ethnic political alliances, leading to the dissolution along ethnic boundaries, first of the empire in 1917, and then of the Soviet Union in 1989 (Wimmer 2018, 145).

Wimmer is certainly onto something when he points to language as a crucial factor in preserving (or, perhaps better, engendering) ethnic Han unity in China. The linguistic fragmentation among the Han that Wimmer describes was, in fact, a source of great anxiety to progressive Chinese intellectuals starting in the late nineteenth century, as their society faced mounting challenges to its existence. For them, a common written language in the guise of Literary Chinese—a supranational lingua franca, akin to Latin, used by literate elites not only in China, but also in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—was not enough to hold the country together. The abstruseness of this language made it accessible only to the well-to-do and left the bulk of the population illiterate. Though virtually all of these intellectuals saw the Han as an ethnicity *in itself,* they certainly did not necessarily believe that it was an ethnicity *for itself.* This lack of popular consciousness about the unity of the race—coupled with its great cultural and linguistic fragmentation—worried China's progressive elite. Their response to this dilemma, a complex and multistage reform of the Chinese language, dates to the late imperial and republican eras before the Communists took power in 1949.

The story of language reform in China is perhaps even more intriguing than Wimmer allows: progressive Chinese intellectuals, in effect, invented a new language, based on existing practices, but historically discontinuous from all linguistic antecedents and geographically discontinuous from all existing regional dialects (Weng 2018, 611–12). Thus, Wimmer is in a sense right about scriptural unity—in fact, the total linguistic unity of both the spoken and the written language across China was a goal of early twentieth-century language reformers—but the Chinese case is even more curious than his account might suggest. As the modern era dawned, Literary Chinese—the language of government and scholarship—united a small transnational elite. Progressive intellectuals saw this elite lingua franca as an impediment to China's modernization, and they sought to renovate existing language practices to help transform Chinese society from a loosely bound empire to a more tightly integrated nation-state. The highly constructed nature of the language they created, Mandarin, and the way that it was promoted and spread among the people, helps to show how highly malleable language can be, both as a symbolic system and as a set of social and cultural practices binding together a human collectivity. Moreover, the process in which Mandarin was created helps to dispel the apparent taken-for-grantedness of the Han as an ethnic category. As I will show, Hanness was in fact not taken for granted in China at the turn of the twentieth century. It was the fear of political disintegration because of the lack of unity—linguistic, ethnic, national, and otherwise—that drove China's progressive intellectuals to create Mandarin in the first place. Thus, the linguistic unity of China and the ethnic unity of the Han are in fact modern political projects that began as responses to an acute set of social and political crises besetting China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that today are still ongoing and incomplete.

Premodern Language Practices in China

Up until the very end of the nineteenth century, China's—in fact, all of East Asia's—principal lingua franca was Literary Chinese.[28] Not just a script or writing system, this language was very much like Latin in that it was used by educated elites across political and cultural boundaries: not just in China, but also in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Because it is logographic and not alphabetic, Chinese writing has long been subject to the common misconception that it can facilitate translingual communication (DeFrancis 1950, 1984a). That is, because Chinese characters do not as directly represent sound the way an alphabetic or syllabic writing system does, people have often thought that these characters can represent ideas and thus mediate communications between speakers of languages that sound very different. However, although the characters do carry some semantic content, they primarily represent sounds, albeit in a more abstract way than the letters of an alphabet do. Specifically, in premodern China, a character could often be read aloud differently depending on the reader's regional pronunciations. This does not mean, however, that the characters as a writing system do not ever refer to any particular language. Much like the Latin alphabet, Chinese characters can be and have been used, unmodified and modified and in conjunction with other local writing systems, to represent multiple languages: not only Literary Chinese, but also various forms of Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese (Kornicki 2018), as well as such Chinese dialects as Cantonese (Snow 2004).

Literary Chinese, in particular, is a language unto itself. It has its own particular lexicon—mostly monosyllabic words represented by single characters—and these words are arranged according to grammatical conventions dating back to fifth century BCE (Norman 1988, 83). Thus, facility in Literary Chinese must effectively be acquired as a foreign language, and again the analogy to Latin holds, because literary conventions for Latin in post-Roman Europe and for Literary Chinese in post-Han-dynasty China (206 BCE–220 CE) were governed by the classical canon of those defunct regimes. Moreover, given the archaic nature of the languages, both Literary Chinese and Latin existed primarily in written form, though both could be read aloud in any number of ways that were almost always influenced by a given reader's own regional linguistic background. In a sense, Literary Chinese, like Latin, was a "dead"—or at least "fixed"—language (Leonhardt 2013, 17–20). Thus, premodern literate elites could communicate across linguistic and geographical boundaries in both Europe and East Asia because they had the time and resources to acquire these abstruse and difficult lingua francas, much in the same way that English functions as a common language for today's global elite.

The realm of speech in premodern China was populated by mutually unintelligible local languages spoken by elites and ordinary people alike. Beginning in the 1870s, however, Japan, followed by China and Korea, and then Vietnam, began to move away from Literary Chinese towards national vernaculars whose written and spoken forms were more closely aligned. Given China's much larger size, the linguistic diversity it encompassed is particularly extreme. China's boundaries by the end of the nineteenth century, which have remained mostly intact to this day, reflected nearly three centuries of expansion through conquest by its ruling dynasty, the Qing (1644–1911). The result of this expansion was a diversity of peoples that encompassed ethnic Koreans in the northeast; Mongols in the north; dozens of ethnoracial groups in the south and southwest abutting the diverse polities of Southeast Asia; Turkic-speaking Muslim Uighurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Tajiks in the far northwest; and the vast mountainous region of Tibet, ruled by a Buddhist theocracy. Apart from these frontier regions, many only acquired in the eighteenth century, China "proper" itself encompassed a large diversity of people, themselves

[28] For precision's sake, noted language scholar Victor Mair (2004) prefers the term "Literary Sinitic," because China was only one of several societies that made use of the language.

using many different mutually unintelligible forms of speech—dialects, in common parlance.[29] The most widely used linguistic classification scheme places these dialects into seven large dialect families, each with many subvarieties and millions of speakers. It was this chaotic Babel that nationalist intellectuals faced at the end of the Qing dynasty, one that they saw as an impediment to the modernization that China needed to strengthen itself amid increasing Western incursions into its political and economic life.

Chinese intellectuals feared a loss of independence with the increasing encroachments of Western powers into the Qing empire starting in the nineteenth century. In 1915, Fan Zimei (范子美, 1866–1939), editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Progress* (進步) published by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of China, was just one of many to express just such an anxiety in an article in that year's August issue. In an article signed "Bihui" (皕誨), his literary name, he lamented the linguistic fragmentation of the country, arguing that "the four hundred million people" of China were like "four hundred million different countries, each having nothing to do with the others" (四萬萬人爲四萬萬國，肥瘠不相視，痛癢不相關), an embarrassment of which the people of Europe and America were well aware (蓋吾國人散沙之譏，彰聞於歐美). Indeed, Fan wrote, the strength of a country lay in its unity (一國之強弱，視國民團結力之何如), and the unity of a country was rooted in its "race, religion, politics, customs, all of which were united by language" (夫一國團結之本源，有在於種族者，有在於宗教者，有在於政治者，有在於風俗者，而皆以言語合一) (Bihui 1915, 22).

Language was so important, according to Fan, that colonial powers often sought to compel the people of their colonies to learn the language of the metropole: English in British-ruled India and Egypt, for instance, or Russian in Russian-ruled Poland, or German in recently-annexed Alsace-Lorraine (Bihui 1915, 23). Noting the linguistic fragmentation of the Habsburg Empire, with German, Hungarian, and Czech speakers each demanding education and cultural institutions in their own languages, he concluded that, "if the language of the people of a country were not unified, in the end they must fracture and take leave of one another" (一國民族言語之不統一，終必爆裂而離去) (Bihui 1915, 25) Fan felt that it was ridiculous that, when two speakers different dialects met in China, they sometimes resorted to speaking a foreign language in order to communicate (Bihui 1915, 23).[30] They ought, instead, to speak a "national language" (國語) (Bihui 1915, 24, 27).

How Chinese intellectuals dealt with China's linguistic fragmentation has been recounted extensively elsewhere. This process received its first retrospective scholarly treatment in English starting in the late 1940s with the initial publication of the work of noted linguist and sinologist John DeFrancis (DeFrancis 1948, 1950, 1984a). While there were some notable works in the meantime on the subject (Chao 1976a; Norman 1988; Ramsey 1987), momentum only really began to pick up in the 1990s with the publication of innovative works in linguistics and comparative literature (Gunn 1991; L. Liu 1995; P. Chen 1999). The beginning of the present century has seen a steady uptick in scholarship on the politics and history of language in China. W. South Coblin's historical linguistic investigations into the origins of today's Mandarin, along

[29] Mair (1991) prefers his own (more precise) neologism "topolect," derived from the Greek roots for "place" and "language" to reflect the Chinese term *fangyan,* or "language of a place" (i.e., dialect).
[30] The famous educationalist Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868–1940), writing under his literary name Cai Jiemin (蔡孑民), complained in 1922 that some university instructors in Beijing, because they were unable to converse in the "national language" (國語) with their students, sometimes had to print out their lecture notes, or even resort to using English in class (Cai 1922, 1; Shang 2014, 268n34).

with Shang Wei's research in literary developments in the early twentieth century, heralded a new wave of scholarship (Coblin 2000, 2007; Shang 2002, 2014). Historian Elisabeth Kaske's (2004, 2006, 2008) groundbreaking works on language reform in early republican (1911–1949) China, in particular, have spurred a new generation of scholars researching the evolution of language in China (J. Y. Chen 2013b, 2015, 2019; Kuzuoglu 2018; J. Liu 2016; Söderblom Saarela 2016; Tam 2016a, 2016b; Tsu 2010; Weng 2018; Zhong 2014).

Given this wealth of existing scholarship, I need not retell the whole story of how China's national language was created. Instead, I will focus on the two aspects of Chinese language reform that clarify the role of language in ethnic boundary-making. I will first demonstrate how the design of Mandarin, a new national language for China, disconnected it from existing peoplehood groupings. I will then demonstrate how Mandarin was reconnected to a new Chinese ethnoracial configuration, one in which the language was meant to be emblematic of multiethnic Chineseness but in fact has over time become a proxy for Han ethnic identity. In this way, I show how a functional conception of language is untenable insofar as language itself is subject to deep, intentional change. Thus, I also show that China's linguistic unity cannot be taken as a given, because in fact it is of a relatively recent vintage, having been initiated only a little more than a hundred years ago.

Inventing a New National Language: Mandarin

A common misconception about Mandarin is that it is equivalent to Beijing dialect. In fact, a person who only speaks Mandarin will find Beijing dialect, at best, hard to understand and, at worst, mostly unintelligible. This unintelligibility exists because Mandarin is to a significant degree a constructed (i.e., "artificial") language. Most aspects of its current form—its pronunciation, its lexicon, and its grammar—took shape between the 1910s and 1930s, when a succession of committees convened by the central government, first in Beijing and then (from 1928 to 1937) in the new capital Nanjing, met to design the language. Their goal was to create a language meant to unify the nation. The initial approach among the designers of the language was to incorporate elements from several major dialect regions into the national language.

Up until the early twentieth century, the main means of interregional spoken communication was *guanhua* (官話), which literally means "officials' speech," an apt name given that it was mainly used by officials in the imperial bureaucracy recruited through an arduous examination system requiring years of preparation in studying classic literature. Based on this fact, *guanhua* is, confusingly, also referred to in English as "Mandarin," a word derived from the Portuguese verb *mandar,* "to command"—a reference to officials in the imperial bureaucracy.[31] In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), this *guanhua* was mostly based on the speech of Nanjing, whose dialect is a part of the larger "Mandarin family" of dialects whose speakers inhabit a wide swath of Chinese territory stretching from the northeast of the country to the southwest. The reason for this basis in Nanjing was that, until 1421, the city served as the Ming capital. Even after the Ming emperor moved the capital north to Beijing that year, Nanjing as a city retained its cultural prestige, and its language remained the predominant basis of *guanhua* until the mid-nineteenth century, when the influence of Beijing pronunciation began to dominate. Nevertheless, *guanhua,* being a loosely defined interregional language of convenience, what

[31] To reduce confusion, in this chapter, I will use "Mandarin" to refer only to the modern national standard language of China.

linguists refer to as a *koiné,* was never identical to the language or dialect of any particular place (Coblin 2000, 549–50).

Even well into the twentieth century, people needing to communicate with others from outside their own dialect region would speak a version of *guanhua* heavily influenced by their own native pronunciation, a phenomenon affectionately known as "blue-green" *guanhua* (藍青官話)—that is, a kind of *guanhua* that was from neither here nor there (Chao et al. 1977, 80). Reflecting the freewheeling nature of the language debates of the early twentieth century, leading intellectual Qian Xuantong (錢玄同, 1887–1939) conceded in an exchange of open letters in 1918 with Chinese anarchist and Esperantist Ou Shengbai (區聲白, 1892–1945) that an "official speech" (官音) was needed to overcome linguistic barriers before Esperanto could feasibly become widely used in China—especially between two people like them, one from Zhejiang (Qian) and one from Guangdong (Ou), whose native dialects were so different (Ou and Qian 1918, 76). Indeed, the force of convention in *guanhua* usage caused there to be considerable opposition in the 1910s and 1920s to basing the pronunciation of the newly designed national language too closely on Beijing dialect (Weng 2018, 10, 14).

The result was a hybrid that later came to be known as "Old National Pronunciation" (老國音), created at an initial series of meetings in 1913 of the Committee for the Unification of Reading Pronunciations in Beijing (讀音統一會). The committee comprised representatives from each Chinese province, from each of the four recognized ethnic minority groups, as well as one representative of overseas Chinese. At these meetings, the Committee voted to determine official pronunciation of 6,500 Chinese characters drawn from an eighteenth-century rhyming dictionary, the *Subtleties of Phonology* (音韻闡微). Rhyming dictionaries played an important role in literati culture in imperial China, classifying the "reading pronunciations" —a literate register of pronunciation that was more elevated than that used in colloquial speech (Børdahl 1992)—of characters into abstract rhyming categories that did not necessarily reflect the characters' actual pronunciations in any living Chinese dialect. Influenced by this tradition of abstractly defined rhymes that contributed to the euphony of classical poetry, Committee members created for the first time an official pronunciation system meant to be realized in actual spoken practice, but one that was still at a distance from common usage. Although ninety percent of the pronunciation system was based on the reading pronunciations of Beijing, the remainder incorporated pronunciations found in neither the reading or colloquial registers of Beijing speech. The principal source of these non-Beijing pronunciations was the Wu dialect region of eastern coastal China, which comprised the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, as well as the city of Shanghai. This region had a particularly large representation among the Committee members. This hybrid pronunciation system was codified by the Ministry of Education in a *Dictionary of National Pronunciation* (國音字典) published in 1919 (Kaske 2008, 405–16).

This version of the national language, however, never became widely spoken. Since it was a hybrid, no one actually spoke it natively, and so there was virtually no one who could teach it. Famed Chinese linguist and polymath Yuen Ren Chao (趙元任, 1892–1982) once joked that, for some years, he was the only person able to speak this version of the national language (Chao 1976b, 79). In spite of the evident impracticality of Old National Pronunciation, its existence sputtered on through the 1920s in part because of the resistance to its principal rival: using purely Beijing-based pronunciations. Some of this opposition stemmed from the association of Beijing dialect with the recently deposed imperial government and its Manchu overlords. Other opposition was based on more technical reasons—Beijing dialect, from a poetic perspective, was a poor repository of sounds that properly reflected the abstract rhyming categories of classical poetry. The controversy reached a peak in the early 1920s but quickly died down in the face of a new threat: the year 1925 saw the installation of a new Minister of Education, Zhang Shizhao (章士釗, 1881–1973), a former radical who had become a reactionary advocate of education in the classics and firmly opposed to the language reforms that had taken place over the previous decade (Li J. 1925, 1926; J. Y. Chen 2013a).

Even as the new minister sought to reestablish the teaching of the classics in the state school system, his intellectual opponents set about further refining Mandarin. In October 1925, Chao and several other language reformer colleagues who had been meeting since 1920 at the Ministry of Education in Beijing as a part of the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language (國語統一籌備委員會), began meeting informally to discuss changes to make Mandarin more practicable. Calling themselves the Society of a Few Men (數人會), a reference to the authorship of a seventh-century Chinese rhyming dictionary, they decided that the national language should more closely reflect the pronunciation of the ordinary speakers of Beijing dialect (Chao et al. 1977, 78). The aim of their design was to reflect the speech of natives of Beijing with a "middle-school education" (Ma 1929, 3; DeFrancis 1950, 76), and their decisions were ultimately reflected in a pronouncing glossary published by the Ministry of Education in 1932. Again, though they claimed that the new Mandarin, also known as "New National Pronunciation" (新國音), was Beijing dialect in its essentials, the reality was not so simple. Even in the prefatory material of this *Glossary of the National Pronunciation of Characters in Common Use* (國音常用字彙), the authors were quick to point out that not all Beijing sounds had been accepted wholesale into the new standards (Wu J. 1933, iii). What this means in practice today is that, in a language composed of about 400 monosyllabic sound units (excluding tonal differences), Mandarin contains about 30 fewer syllables than Beijing dialect, which has about 432. When accounting for tones, of which Mandarin has four, Mandarin has about 80 fewer syllables than Beijing dialect's 1,376. Even such a seemingly minor difference, is enough to impede mutual intelligibility between speakers of Mandarin and Beijing dialect (Duanmu 2007, 5).

What we have in Mandarin, then, is a highly artificial language, deliberately disconnected even from the original dialect on which it was based. At the time of its creation, Mandarin had almost no native speakers, although Chao claimed that bringing the standard closer to the natural speech of Beijing natives in effect created "more than one million potential teachers" (Chao 1976b, 79)—the operative word here being "potential." As we have seen, there was still a significant distance between Mandarin and existing "natural" languages in China. Teachers of Mandarin would have to be trained, regardless of their native language background. Now disconnected from any existing speech community, Mandarin would have to be reconnected to people in order to succeed in the goal its creators had set for it, which was to function as a national language, facilitating communication across the far-flung reaches of the former Qing territories, which after 1911 had been reconstituted as a Chinese nation-state. In the following section, I will outline how Mandarin was reconnected to a social collectivity newly imagined to be a national speech community. I will show that, while it was intended for the whole of China's multiethnic population, Mandarin ended up being more of a proxy for ethnic Han identity, not only because of its Han linguistic origins, but also in part because of how many of the minority groups were classified in the first great drive for ethnic classification under the Communist government in the 1950s: by language.

The Spread of Mandarin and the Reconstitution of the Han

Today, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) officially recognizes fifty-six ethnoracial groups, or *minzu* (民族), a Chinese term often translated as "nationality" or "ethnicity." The Han are by far the majority, constituting more than 91 percent of the country's population, or about 1.2 billion people—perhaps the largest such group in the world (T. S. Mullaney 2012, 1; Xu 2012, 113; F. Zhang et al. 2007; Y.-B. Zhao et al. 2015). The Han thus are many orders of magnitude larger than even the next largest state-recognized ethnic group, the Zhuang, who number only about 16.9 million (T. S. Mullaney 2012, 1). This lopsided configuration has led some observers to conclude that China is ethnically homogeneous, or nearly so—a prominent example being Eric Hobsbawm (1990, 66), whose offhand comment to that effect has made him a favorite target of criticism (Chow 2001, 47; Gladney 1994, 103, 2004, 6; T. S. Mullaney 2012, 2). China is, nevertheless, multiethnic, and there has arisen a significant body of work on ethnic *minorities* in China over the past forty years.[32] Only in about the last decade, however, has scholarly attention turned to what previously had seemed unremarkable: the country's ethnic majority.

The overwhelming size of the majority Han has made it tempting to equate Hanness with Chineseness. Historian Thomas Mullaney (2012, 3–11) has noted three of the most frequent ways in which ideas about what it means to be "Han" have been linked with varying notions of "China" or "Chinese": (1) as an ethnic, cultural, or civilizational entity equivalent to "Chinese civilization"; (2) as a racial category equated with "Chinese"; and (3) as a geographical expression linking Han or Chinese distinctiveness to its territorial and climatic origins. Indeed, identification of Hanness with Chineseness is so easily done that it becomes plausible to raise the question, "Is it possible to be Chinese without being Han?"—as Joël Thoraval did in his 1990 article, "Le concept chinois de nation est-il 'obscur'?"—in which he discussed the 1980s-era intellectual debates in China over the term *minzu,* a capacious term used almost casually to refer to, among other things, Chineseness, sub-Chinese ethnicity, differing relationships with the nation-state, and minoritarian and majoritarian statuses. In other words, the term *minzu* encompassed a collage of concepts that at times seemed to privilege Han as "a little more *minzu*" than the other ethnic categories officially recognized by the PRC (T. S. Mullaney 2012, 3; Thoraval 1990, 35). Nevertheless, the equation of "Han" with "Chinese" has always been demonstrably incorrect, as there are certainly people who are Chinese but not Han, though all Han in China are certainly Chinese. (However, "Han" is seldom seen as a useful ethnic identifier for people *outside* of China.)

Missing from these more recent studies of the Han has been any sustained, critical engagement with language. Language matters greatly to race and ethnicity. It functions as a crucial basis for ethnic boundarymaking, and sometimes it is even the sole criterion: many of the ethnic groups in China's extremely diverse southwest were classified by the Chinese government using language alone (T. S. Mullaney 2010, 43). In existing studies of the Han, however, language is either taken for granted, as Wimmer (2018, 137) has noted, or it is treated as an impossible basis of Han ethnic unity. For instance, Harrell (Harrell 2002, 5–15, 45) frequently uses the term "Han language," meaning Mandarin, China's national standard language, though its association with the Han ethnicity is debatable, given that it is meant to be a national lingua

[32] Some outstanding scholars from several disciplines have produced an admirable body of work on ethnicity and minorities: Pamela Crossley (1990a, 1990b, 2000), Mark Elliott (2001, 2006), Dru Gladney (1991, 1994, 2004), Susan Blum (2001), Xiaowei Zang (2015), and Thomas Mullaney (2010), just to name a few.

franca. On the other hand, historian Thomas Mullaney (2012, 1–2) has pointed out that the immense linguistic diversity of the Han throws into doubt its "coherence as a single, unified category."

What, then, makes someone Han? The simplest answer in the contemporary context to identifying who counts as Han is to treat it simply as a matter of state classification: all people the state considers Han have carried this designation on their national identification cards ever since these cards were issued in the early 1950s (T. S. Mullaney 2010, 122–23). All Han since then have acquired their Han designation by descent. In the case of the children of bi-ethnic couples, the state provides the option of choosing the mother's or the father's ethnic classification at the age of 18, though this cannot be changed past the age of 20 (Joniak-Lüthi 2015, 42). The current ethnic classification of the Chinese population originated in the early 1950s, under the new Communist regime that had come to power in mainland China in 1949. The Communist Party, founded in 1921, owed its survival in the turbulent war years of the 1930s and 1940s in no small part to the support of ethnic minorities in the remote south- and northwestern reaches of the country to which it had retreated (Gladney 1991, 87–91). The government therefore made a significant effort to determine the ethnic composition of its population, in part to represent them adequately in the legislature (T. S. Mullaney 2010, 18–19). The highly diverse southwest, Yunnan Province in particular, was an especially active field for government-appointed ethnologists, who in the end divided and classified the population their along linguistic lines (T. S. Mullaney 2010, 43).

But the Han could never have received a classification on that basis, given their considerable linguistic heterogeneity, as we have seen in the preceding section: indeed, the very point of language reform in early twentieth-century China was to bridge the huge linguistic differences among China's people, not least the Han. Once Mandarin had reached a form in the early 1930s that would be familiar to Mandarin speakers today, there still remained the challenge of spreading this language to China's enormous population. The difficulties of doing so were manifold: while in theory, any moderately educated native of Beijing could be a teacher of the new national language, in practice, language teachers required training. Moreover, presumably once trained, teachers still had to be persuaded that Mandarin—essentially a foreign language to most of the country—was worth their time to use in classrooms full of students who only spoke local dialects. For instance, evidence of these challenges survives in a series of elementary school classroom audits from 1932 in Shanghai, which speaks a dialect so different from Beijing dialect that it is classified in an altogether different "dialect family" that encompasses eastern coastal China. In the classroom audits, teachers were awarded letter grades (A, B, and C, or 甲, 乙, and 丙 in Chinese) for their ability to "avoid dialect" and speak with proper Mandarin pronunciation in class, which not every teacher was able to achieve (Shanghai Shi jiaoyuju 1932, 27–35).

The whole point of Mandarin in the classroom, moreover, was to help increase literacy rates, something that intellectual reformers saw as critical to the consolidation and strengthening of the nation (Cheng 2001). Mandarin as a national lingua franca was, as I described in the preceding section, in large part a standardization of the spoken language. At the same time, language reformers sought to bring the written language closer to the spoken language, something that had not been the case when Literary Chinese was the primary formal written medium. Mandarin, the modern standard language of China, was invented around the same time as China's vernacular literature movement was taking off, starting with the May Fourth movement in 1919, during which university students in Beijing protested the terms of the Treaty of Versailles that had concluded World War I and had given Germany's territorial concessions in eastern China to Japan. Intellectuals argued for a thorough renovation of Chinese culture, and the "vernacular" they advocated, which they called *baihua* (白話, "plain speech" in Chinese), was largely based on the spoken dialects of northern China, a set of dialects which included that of Beijing, on which Mandarin was eventually based. In so doing, these reformers formed part of a larger trend in the publication of writing in styles that were increasingly removed from what would be considered Literary Chinese at the at the end of the Qing dynasty. This trend began with the publication of *baihua* newspapers in the first several years of the twentieth century, which were venues for politically radical articles written in a highly unstandardized colloquial style attempting to reach a broad audience (Kaske 2008, 161–232). Even before the fractious debates over pronunciation had ceased later that decade, the Ministry of Education mandated on January 12, 1920, that language education in the first two years of elementary school be conducted in the vernacular (*baihua*), precipitating the publication of a wide range of textbooks written in the new style (Culp 2008, 4–5).

While some reformers like leading Chinese writer Hu Shi (胡適, 1891–1962) argued that *baihua* reflected the "living language" of the people (Hu S. 1917), subsequent scholarship has debated the extent to which this form of writing was actually distinct from Literary Chinese. Literary scholar Shang Wei has shown how very few texts could be termed purely Literary or purely vernacular—elements of each (vocabulary, grammar) permeate the other, and so the dividing line has never been clear (Shang 2014, 270–72). Rather, Shang persuasively argues that the construal of *baihua* to be "vernacular" writing, and the accompanying reclassification of popular works of entertainment written predominantly in this style as "classics" on par with the vernacular (i.e., non-Latin) literature of Europe, was a retrospective distinction made by intellectuals associated with the May Fourth Movement (Shang 2014, 254–55). He shows how *baihua* was based on *guanhua,* and since *guanhua* was for a transregional elite, *baihua* as its written manifestation could hardly be considered "vernacular" (local, of the people) (Shang 2002, 4, 2014, 260).

In effect, Shang has argued, the promotion of the vernacular at the expense of the Literary was the replacement of one elite form of writing with another (Shang 2002, 5, 2014, 257). Nevertheless, Chinese language reformers' prescriptive orientation to language has led in subsequent decades to greater linguistic uniformity across China (Weng 2018, 617–18). That is, although Mandarin speech and vernacular writing may not have *begun* as the language of the people, over the past century or so they have increasingly *become* the language of the people because of the efforts of the government to spread the use of Mandarin and to raise literacy rates through increased access to education. Since the 1930s, successive central governments have attempted to spread Mandarin, and the change of regime in 1949 was marked by a surprising amount of administrative and policy continuity—the language policies of the People's Republic promoting Mandarin differ with the predecessor regime primarily in the effectiveness of their implementation: the current government is much stronger. In the meantime, the identification of Mandarin with Han ethnic identity has only intensified. Since the 1950s, Mandarin as a spoken language has often been referred to specifically in China as *Hanyu,* i.e., "the language of the Han" (Zhou E. 1956; Norman 1988, 137). As an appellation for the modern standard written language, however, *Hanyu* would sound awkward, and so written Chinese is usually referred to simply as *Zhongwen*—i.e., "Chinese," thus eliding Hanness with Chineseness. The characters of which the written language is composed, however, are often referred to as *Hanzi,* or "Han characters," revealing another layer of specificity in their association with Hanness. The number of people who can "speak Mandarin," however, according to the PRC Ministry of Education began to outnumber those who could not only in 2007 (Reuters 2007); in 2013, the Ministry reported that the proportion of Mandarin speakers in China reached 70 percent (BBC 2013). Among those that the government is spreading Mandarin education are ethnic minorities, a source of tension in such regions as Tibet and Xinjiang (Blanchard 2010; Jacobs 2014); but this is even true in ostensibly Han areas, such as Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong (Bielecki 2019). In sum, Han formation in linguistic terms, ongoing since the early twentieth century, is a continuing process.

Conclusion

Language is one area of social practice that has continually flummoxed scholars of ethnicity. In some cases, it seems fundamental to ethnic identity and is a flashpoint for political controversy—Catalan-speakers in Spain and French-speakers in Canada are but two of many examples. In other cases, language is not salient at all—as in Switzerland. And because it is an acquired skill, but the acquisition of which becomes increasingly difficult with age, language seems at once permanent and ephemeral as a marker of ethnicity. Moreover, ethnic and national boundaries often follow language, but sometimes they do not. Multilingual nation-states and pluricentric languages attest to this wanton disregard by language of other symbolic and social boundaries. Whence this ambivalence about language?

Wimmer (2008) argues that language (or any other potential ethnic marker) varies in salience because the type and locations of ethnic boundaries depends on the nature of the social field in which the relevant actors are acting strategically. In the specific case of nation-building, social actors may attempt to shift a boundary to a more inclusive level through "incorporation" "amalgamation," or "emphasis-shifting" (Wimmer 2013, 50). In so doing, the factors that aid in the nation-building process are "organizational density, public goods capacity, and communicative homogeneity" (Wimmer 2018, 37). This last factor, what Wimmer terms "communicative" or "linguistic" homogeneity, is critical, because it lowers "communicative barriers," which allows "networks of political alliances between rulers and ruled to spread across a territory" (Wimmer 2018, 32)—an argument that draws on Deutsch (1966). An increase in linguistic homogeneity, in turn, is facilitated by the emergence of a centralized state prior to the nation-building process (Wimmer 2018, 32). Citing Eugen Weber (1976), Wimmer argues that the "centralized states of the 19th century" coopted local elites and created incentives for all to learn the "the language of the dominant groups" in order to further their interests with respect to the state (Wimmer 2018, 33).

The lowering of linguistic barriers does facilitate nation-building, but there still is the problem of why linguistic boundaries often do not align with ethnic boundaries. Wimmer references Benedict Anderson's (1991) two-part explanation, in which mass literacy in vernacular languages promotes a sense of being part of a larger "imagined community" in Europe, but the narrow horizons of colonial bureaucrats in Latin America and Africa prevented the formation of Spanish-speaker and French-speaking megastates in former colonial territories. Wimmer, however, advances an approach he considers more parsimonious, arguing that the "contours of political alliance networks will determine which communities will emerge as nations"—whether in accordance with or in spite of linguistic divisions (Wimmer 2018, 31). Indeed, it is precisely this approach emphasizing networks of political alliances that Wimmer mobilizes to explain nation-building in early twentieth-century China. He argues that China is a “rare” case in which “scriptural homogeneity can overcome the problems of linguistic heterogeneity” (Wimmer 2018, 30).

Wimmer rightly emphasizes the importance of communicative integration, and his use of the case of China, in contrast with that of Russia, to illustrate this is highly illustrative. I argue, however, that the theoretical advance that Wimmer presents us with would be strengthened with a reconsideration of what language itself is. Wimmer follows a long line of comparative theoretical work in sociology that treats language as a functional given. That is, language standardization is the process of one variety of language—that of the elites—winning out over other varieties. This is the approach taken by Deutsch (1966, 43), Bourdieu (1991), and Eugen Weber (1976). This functionalist approach treats language like a black box—that is, standard French is the speech of the Parisian elite, and whatever refinement of the language the Académie Française might attempt around the edges, the language itself is fundamentally beyond any deeper purposive modification.

In this chapter, I have shown that the revolution in Chinese language practices in the early twentieth century belies language’s seeming imperviousness to change. Language reform in China represented a radical break with the past and with existing language practices. Leading intellectuals essentially used existing elements to invent a new language, Mandarin, that was unintelligible to speakers of the languages on which it was based. They did so because they recognized that existing language practices—the use of Literary Chinese, the multitude of mutually unintelligible dialects—were impediments to nation-building in the aftermath of the Qing collapse. Literary Chinese was a written language unto itself: Chinese characters did not allow speakers of different languages to surmount language barriers, and so this abstruse lingua franca united only a relatively small transnational elite sufficiently privileged to be able to learn it. Thus, Chinese leaders feared fragmentation even among the Han themselves, because in an era of burgeoning nationalism, it was not enough that political elites were united. National unity required identification of people of all classes with the nation (Lie 2004, 115–34).

Thus, as I have demonstrated, language itself is subject to deep purposive change, not only in its function as a medium of communication, but also in the very composition of the symbolic elements that constitute language, both aural and visual. In China, we find a case in which reformers sought to create a national standard language that was more accessible to the people, thus facilitating the creation of a national polity united by language and empowered by literacy. China, then, is not so much a “rare” case of scriptural unity overcoming a diversity of spoken languages as it is an extreme case of linguistic nation-building, one that was rather more belated than many might imagine. Mandarin as a standardized spoken language is, after all, less than a hundred years old. While its linguistic antecedents date back centuries, the radical renovation of its form (its pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar), as well as the profound redefinition of its function (as a lingua franca for all nationals), represented an unprecedented break with the past. Moreover, the spread of this new national language, tentatively pursued during the republican era (1911–1949), and then more vigorously in the Communist period (after 1949), is an indication of the vastly increased infrastructural power of the state (Mann 1984). In fact, Wimmer suggests that the legacy of a centralized bureaucratic state dating back more than two thousand years “greatly facilitated” public goods provision for the Communist government (Wimmer 2018, 35). While he is correct in pointing out the antiquity of centralized bureaucratic rule in China, imperial rule never extended below the level of the county seat. Rule below this level was mediated by county magistrates in concert with local propertied elites. The Communists themselves greatly expanded the state’s reach to ordinary individuals; the

Communist government was the first in history to be able to tax individual households (Walder 2015, 48).

China, then, as Wimmer correctly argues, is most certainly a classic example of communicative integration in the service of nation-building. Moreover, it is a particularly extreme case. Language was reinvented under successive republican governments, and then aggressively spread among the population before, but especially after, 1949. Language, then, is not an autonomous social phenomenon that sometimes aligns with boundaries and sometimes does not, depending on the shape of elite political alliance networks—much in the way that mountain ranges sometimes align with territorial boundaries and sometimes do not. Rather, language as a symbolic system, and also as an indispensable medium of sociality, is malleable and subject to intentional modification, molded now and then to meet the exigencies of the day.

Conclusion

In many ways, John DeFrancis (1911–2009) set the intellectual agenda for English-language scholarship on language in China. The Italian-American son of a laborer and his illiterate wife, he graduated from Yale in 1933 and traveled widely through China over the next few years (DeFrancis 1993). His dissertation, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China,* researched and written during World War II and published as a book in 1950, identified what still remain the most pressing issues in the literature today: reform of the script; the politics of dialects; the standardization of speech; Western, Japanese, and Soviet influences; and the symbiotic relationship between language and nationalism (DeFrancis 1950). One theme to which he stuck indefatigably in his work was the necessity of an alphabetical script for Chinese writing. Chinese characters, in his eyes, were a needlessly cumbersome system that impeded the widespread acquisition of literacy. Alphabetic writing, while not meant to replace characters entirely, would ultimately make literacy "more accessible to the people as a whole" (DeFrancis 1984b, 65). For DeFrancis, "the primary defining feature of writing is the representation of speech", and an alphabetical system was simply better as a form of "visible speech" (DeFrancis 1989, 248). DeFrancis thus saw the utility of a system of writing as dependent on its fidelity to speech, a task that Chinese characters performed most awkwardly.

This was a frame of mind that had pervaded Western thinking on language for centuries. Phonocentrism—the privileging of speech (and not writing) as the ultimate reality of language—is a conceptual orientation that dates back to Plato, one that has been repeated for centuries by such writers as Hegel, Rousseau, Saussure, and Chomsky (Zhong 2019, 5). This orientation was the impetus behind the dozens of schemes proposed starting in the late nineteenth century to create writing systems that more closely represented some form of speech in China, none of which have ever been put into widespread practice, except perhaps for *pinyin* and *zhuyin* as auxiliaries for people learning how to read. Phonocentrism was perhaps most famously criticized by Derrida ([1967] 2016, 3), who branded it a form of Western ethnocentrism. This critique has been taken up more recently by Yurou Zhong (2019), who considers the Chinese case a unique rejoinder to the twentieth-century phonocentric onslaught from the West. One of the most inveterate problems of phonocentrism and alphabetic writing in China was the complex multilingual reality of Chinese life—an issue that had vexed people since at least the Ming-era Jesuit missions to China in the sixteenth century. That is, if writing were to be alphabetical and thus represent the sounds of speech, which language or dialect should it represent? Historian Gina Tam (2020, 1) has trenchantly highlighted the political implications of this conundrum by asking, "What language represents the Chinese nation?"

Two opposing impulses characterized debates over Chinese alphabetization in the early twentieth century: fidelity and accessibility. That is, how faithful (and thus complicated) should an alphabetic script be in representing the sounds of speech? And how accessible (and thus uncomplicated) should the script be to learn? Zhong names Yuen Ren Chao, inventor of National Romanization (Gwoyeu Romatzyh, GR), as an exemplar of fidelity. For the contrasting side, she names polymath and Communist leader Qu Qiubai (1899–1935), promoter of Latinxua Sinwenz (or Sin Wenz), as an exemplar of accessibility. GR was specifically designed to capture the four tones of Beijing-based Mandarin by spelling each syllable four different ways, one for each tone. In contrast, Sin Wenz, a forerunner of today's *pinyin,* dispensed with representing tones and was meant to be able to spell out more than one dialect. Qu criticized GR for being narrowly Beijing-based and overly complicated: in short, elitist and out of reach (Zhong 2019, 67–88). But the problem of representing dialects in an alphabetical script, which missionaries had been doing in Bible translations and religious tracts meant for popular dissemination since the nineteenth century, was that unstandardized languages do not exist within discrete boundaries. Rather, they form a continuum with neighboring languages (Milroy 2001, 540–41). Promoters of Sin Wenz resolved to get around this by deliberately keeping the orthography of dialect scripts vague, so as not to prefer one version of, say, Cantonese, to another (DeFrancis 1950, 233). Opponents of such a multiplicity of orthographies feared the national disintegration that might result, a fear that such left-leaning writers as Lu Xun thought was overblown: rather, to him and others, a "unity of outlook" was the key to national unity (DeFrancis 1950, 236). DeFrancis himself, not knowing the ultimate fate of the Soviet Union, felt that regional linguistic autonomy did was not a threat to national unity (DeFrancis 1950, 215). With the unfair advantage of hindsight, scholars have identified ethnic compartmentalization, in some cases deliberately fostered by Imperial and Soviet policy, as a reason for the polity's double collapse: first in 1917, and again in 1991 (Beissinger 2002, 49–75; Wimmer 2018, 140–70).

Common to the many disputes over Chinese language reform was the issue of practicality. DeFrancis noted that advocates of fidelity ("integralists" in his words) such as Li Jinxi thought it might be possible to achieve universal literacy in a unified standard language within a century—by 2030. Opponents of this view (advocates of accessibility, whom DeFrancis called "federalists") argued that a century was too optimistic if Chinese leaders insisted on everyone learning a new language for the sake of linguistic uniformity. In their view, a thousand years was more likely, and so to avoid suffering another millennium of mass illiteracy, people in China should be taught alphabetic literacy in their native dialects (DeFrancis 1950, 234–35). At the time he was writing in the late 1940s, DeFrancis could not have known how Chinese language policy would turn out, but in the next few decades his own hopes for mother-tongue education on a regional basis in China were to be dashed as the Communist government strongly pushed linguistic uniformity, a development he would criticize in his later writing (DeFrancis 1984a, 257–87). Vietnam, in stark contrast, was a near-ideal example of alphabetical language reform (DeFrancis 1977, 240–41). Nevertheless, with literacy rates exceeding 95 percent in China as of 2018, one would be hard-pressed to criticize current language policy for inefficacy (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2019a, 2019b). It seems it was possible, after all, to achieve mass literacy in China without alphabetization; mass schooling seems more important. Historian Thomas Mullaney (2016) has accused critics of Chinese characters of indulging in a latter-day orientalism. It is certainly believable that an alphabet of two dozen or so letters is easier to learn than a character set of several thousand. However, arguments that characters are so difficult as to impede mass literacy have been, with the benefit of hindsight, based on faulty assumptions about individual capacity and social conditions. In other words, characters were not so hard that ordinary people in China, even given the country's relative poverty throughout the twentieth century, were prevented from learning how to read.

Language is malleable. The form of a language can change, and so can its function in society. The Chinese case has demonstrated how a new language was invented to enable the creation of a new social order. In English-speaking contexts, too, we notice changes in language from generation to generation, as new expressions emerge, fashions change, and political sensibilities evolve. Over centuries, we see how usages can shift from unexceptional to unacceptable and back again. Singular "they," in use since Chaucer, became ungrammatical in prescriptive awakening of the eighteenth century, but the demands of contemporary gender politics have found the pronoun useful once again. In these senses, English-speakers—and, for that matter, speakers of Western European languages in general—are perfectly well acquainted with linguistic change. Change appears gradual and generational, in which language is molded and remolded by its speakers to fit new needs and new contexts. To take a broader view, long periods of time thus correspond with bigger shifts in language, such as the one from Latin to the vernaculars in Europe. In this context, the Bourdieusian contention that language is a symbolic system that helps structure social experience and reinforce social structures makes sense. The shift from Latin to the vernaculars is both consequence and reinforcement of a long-term transfer of power away from the aristocracy and clergy to the bourgeoisie. The language of the church, along with the rarefied scholarship it sponsored, gave way to the mass languages of commerce and propaganda.

Turning our gaze away from the West and examining language change in a wholly different context, as this dissertation has done, reveals the limitations of such a story. In less than a century, Japan, followed by China, Korea, and Vietnam, all moved away from a culture of elite literacy centered on Classical Chinese towards one of mass literacy based on newly created national vernaculars. In China, reformers created a national language that was closer to everyday practice than the Classical Chinese that had preceded it. They standardized the sounds of the new language along with its written form, and they sought to align this new creation with a reconceived notion of Chinese ethnicity. This new alignment of language, ethnicity, and nation was a deliberate project of national integration, one that sought to restructure a symbolic system—language—in order to reconfigure social boundaries—ethnicity and nationhood. Such change, as we have seen, has not been easy, and it comes at a cost: the ongoing repression of ethnic minorities in China's far west is but the latest manifestation of state-imposed uniformity.

But the disheartening and unedifying excesses of such polices should not blind us to flip side of state power: the complicity of the people. As Gramsci pointed out nearly a century ago, hegemony involves the cooperation of the dominated. But people are not simply cowed into compliance. They cooperate in large part because is in their own interest to do so. If we go back to the France of the Third Republic that Eugen Weber so famously recounted, we see that, "As time went on, and especially more and more people moved about, the advantages of knowing French became increasingly obvious. Recognition of the fact spurred the decay of local speech" as people moved into cities to work in the factories of an industrializing nation (E. Weber 1976, 86). This sort of compliance in furtherance of in one's own interest is not uniquely modern. Discussing a dispute over a parish church in England in the middle of the twelfth century, historian R.W. Southern remarked on the extensive reach of the power of the medieval papacy: "At a time when England was in a state of acute civil war, when relations with Normandy were severed, and when local powers were everywhere supreme, the pope could expect his orders to carried out two thousand miles from Rome, in a dispute about a property worth perhaps £10 a year" (Southern 1970, 116). Papal authority was dependent on its acceptability "to large numbers of influential people" (Southern 1970, 126).

In our more populist age, governments claiming to represent the people elicit the cooperation of the masses by making it worth the effort. We have seen the difficulty the republican state had, nearly a century ago, in enforcing its language policy in the elementary school classrooms and in the printing shops of the major publishers of Shanghai, a city close to the Nationalist capital Nanjing. If we look, however, to China today, nearly a century later, the contrast is remarkable. A visit to the southeastern province of Fujian in January 2017 underscored for me the extent of the transformation. Named Kengbian, which means "beside the ditch," the village to which I had traveled consisted of about five thousand households nestled along the rural coastline, about 100 kilometers south of the provincial capital Fuzhou. My father's parents had left it in 1946, shortly after getting married. In search of work, they made their way across the sea to Taiwan, which just the year before had been given up by Japan after its defeat in the war. The village they left behind consisted of an entire lineage of people surnamed Weng, and I found myself there among family members gathered to celebrate the Lunar New Year. I saw how people in my grandparents' generation, who were in their eighties and nineties and had lived in the village all their lives, spoke only the local dialect. Speaking only Mandarin, I could not understand a thing they said. People in my parents' generation, in their fifties and sixties, were most comfortable speaking dialect. Many had found work in other provinces, and so they could converse fairly easily in heavily accented Mandarin. People my age, millennials in their thirties and forties, could speak to their elders in dialect. They even taught me a few phrases in *Fuqinghua*, named for the nearby county seat. In general, though, these cousins, who had all moved out of the village for work, were more comfortable speaking Mandarin among themselves. Some of them had had children in the last few years, a few of whom were old enough to be in primary school. All of these children, unless purposely taught dialect, could speak only Mandarin.

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