Modernization of China through Language Reform:
Vernacular Language Reform Movement in the 1910-20s
and Mao’s Language Reform in the 1950s

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CHRONOLOGY

960-1279  Song Dynasty

1280-1368  Yuan Dynasty

1368-1644  Ming Dynasty

1644-1912  Qing Dynasty

1839-1860  Period of Opium Wars and unequal treaties: the “opening of China” (1842 Treaty of Nanking ending Opium War; 1858 Tientsin treaties; 1860 occupation of Peking by British and French forces)

1850-1881  Period of revolts and rebellions (1850-1864 Taiping rebellion; 1853-1868 Nien rebellion; also Shanghai, Muslim, and Miao revolts)

1877-1878  Establishment of Chinese legations in western capitals and Tokyo

1894-1895  China defeated by Japan

1897-1898  Scramble for concessions by Germany, England, Russia, and France

1900  Boxer uprising

1901-1911  The Decade of Conservative Reform: abolition of the examination system (1905); program instituted to send thousands of students abroad to study; preparation for constitutional monarchy

1904-1905  Russo-Japanese War, fought on Chinese territory

1905  Sun Yat-sen organizes Tongmenghui (Revolutionary League) among Chinese students in Tokyo

1911-1912  Republican revolution, abdication of the Manchus, and establishment of the Republic of China

1915  Japan presents Twenty-One Demands. “New Culture Movement” founded to promote values of science and democracy

1916-1926  Warlord period; failure of Republicanism

1921 Founding of the Chinese Communist Party
1923-1927 Nationalist-Communist united front
1925 May 30th anti-foreign movement
1927 Chiang Kai-shek crushes Communists in Shanghai and Nanjing; beginning of ten-year Nanjing phase of Nationalist government
1931 Jiangxi Soviet (Chinese Soviet Republic) established by Communist Party
1934 Chinese Communists forced by Nationalists to flee Jiangxi area; beginning of Long March
1935 New Communist base set up in Shanxi, at Yan’an
1937 War with Japan begins; second Nationalist-Communist united front
1945 End of war with Japan
1946 Beginning of civil war between Nationalists and Communists
1949 Establishment of People’s Republic of China
1950 Sino-Soviet Pact of Friendship and Alliance
1953 First five-year plan
1956 Nationalization of enterprises and collectivization of land
1957 Hundred Flowers period, followed by anti-rightist campaign
1958-1960 Great Leap Forward
1966-1968 Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution
1979 Mao Zedong dies

(Rozman xiv-xv)
INTRODUCTION

Although the Boxer Protocol signed in 1901 by the Qing Dynasty China and eight foreign powers is often considered as an unequal treaty, it nevertheless opened doors for China to interact with foreign nations, especially the West. One of the major consequences of the Boxer Protocol was that Chinese education became predominantly foreign oriented (Rozman 229). The highly institutionalized and Confucian examination system was abolished in 1905 and regulations declared in 1904 required all teachers in colleges and universities to be foreign educated or products of foreign-style research institutes. A rush of students went abroad to Japan, the United States, and Europe. Tsinghua University was established with remittance from the United States specifically for the purpose of preparing students to study in the United States.

Rozman notes that the development of Chinese nationalism is probably the single most important effect of the new travel and learning (230). As students abroad kept constant communication with fellow intellectuals in China through a wide circulation of many different publications, people rapidly became aware and conscientious of the national weakness and danger. The Qing Dynasty desperately tried to make reform in the government, but its biggest failure was lack of replacement with new values and system. The government would simply implement flimsy and unstable policies without any suggestion of solid solution. The growing dissatisfaction of the government led to student strikes and movements, and ultimately the fall of the last ruling dynasty of China.

When Qing Dynasty collapsed in 1911, China entered a swirl of political, social, and cultural unrest. As a ruling power over Asia for thousands of years, China had always considered itself as the “middle kingdom,” a direct translation of its own name in Chinese (中国, zhongguo).
However, since the defeat in the Opium War (1840-42), China put great effort into modernizing the country, and the Chinese language was one of the most urgent aspects for reform. Because of the difficulty to learn and use the language, China was suffering from a wide-spread illiteracy (Chen, "Modern Written Chinese" 505).

Then at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 after World War I, China's hopes of winning back its territories held by Germany were not met with much satisfaction. Rather, Qingdao, the major port of Shandong Province that had been a German naval base since 1897, was to be handed over to Japan. Upon hearing this outrageous news, many Chinese students organized themselves and rallied outside on May 4, 1919 in protest of China's treatment at Paris. This May Fourth Movement was actually just one part of a bigger movement called the New Culture Movement, which has been actively in presence for years. Started by a group of students of Peking University in the early 1910s, the main goal of the New Culture Movement was promoting cultural awakening and self-transformation. As many Chinese students who studied abroad in Japan and the West were exposed to new ideas, they saw the long-existing problems of China that had been keeping the nation from further development and advancement in the international world. Many agreed that China was in urgent need of modernization in order to compete with other parts of the world (Rozman 230). Language reform, specifically the vernacular language reform, was one major part of the reforms that the intellectuals pushed for on the grounds of modernizing the country. They adopted many loanwords from Europe and Japan, consequently expanding the amount of Chinese vocabulary and the scope of Chinese thoughts. Some even proposed complete abolishment of Chinese characters with replacement of Romanized Chinese script.
Then with Mao’s takeover of the Communist Party and implementation of a new language policy in the 1950s, China underwent another stage of language reform which consisted of three main components – simplification of Chinese characters, unification of the spoken language through the promotion of the standard national language called *Putonghua*, and popularization of a phonetic system called *pinyin*. This second language reform was more politically driven than the first one, which was mostly led by intellectuals. Whereas the Chinese intellectuals during the New Culture Movement used language reform as a way to attain cultural awakening and self-transformation, Mao Zedong (毛泽东, 1893-1979), the leader of the Communist government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), had a specific political agenda of achieving national integration and development through his language reform project.

In this paper, we will examine the relationship between language reform and the modernization of China. Before we go into any further details about the two different periods of language reform in the first half of the 20th century, it is important to first discuss the concept of modernization. What is modernization? What does being “modern” mean? The word modern comes from the Latin word *modernus*, which was used during the Middle Ages. As an adjective and noun, *modernus* was coined from the adverb *modo*, which means “recently, just now” (Calinescu 13). Therefore, a brief definition of the word “modern” would mean being of present and recent time, being contemporary and not antiquated. It may also mean being more advanced and developed than those in the past. Sometimes, the word even carries a tone of arrogance, especially when people compare the “modern” developed countries to third world countries. However, they would be surprised when looking at what Bernard of Chartres had to say about the progress of human beings. Such idea of Bernard is mentioned in John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon*, which is regarded by many scholars as the Twelfth Century “Renaissance”:
We frequently know more, not because we have moved ahead by our own natural ability, but because we are supported by the mental strength of others, and possess riches that we have inherited from our forefathers. Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to puny dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature (Calinescu 15).

According to Bernard, it is doubtful whether we can credit ourselves entirely for being more knowledgeable and advanced than our predecessors, for what we know and what we have accomplished are all built on top of what the predecessors knew and what they accomplished before us. We know more in absolute terms, but from a relative point of view, our contribution to learning is so small and insignificant.

After a brief period of the Renaissance during which the idea of self-confidence was prevalent, the baroque consciousness of universal illusion and mutability was kicked back into the scene in the late 16th century by Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne argued that the “moderns” might be more advanced than the “ancients” but they should not be proud of themselves because they did nothing prominent to get to where they were. The progress they achieved was strictly the consequence of the natural law rather than the result of personal endeavor, as Montaigne describes in the following passage:

Our opinions are grafted one upon the other. The first serves as a stock to the second, the second to the third. Thus, we mount stairwise from step to step. So it comes about that he who has mounted highest has often more honour than he deserves, for on the shoulders of the last but one he is only one barley corn higher (Calinescu 16).

When talking about the term “modernity,” it is important to note that modernity can mean two distinct ideas. One is a bourgeois idea of modernity, referring to a significant stage in the history of Western civilization such as the period of scientific and technological progress, industrial revolution, and economic and social changes caused by capitalism (Calinescu 41). The other idea of modernity is an aesthetic concept, which came into existence by being the avant-
gardes, displaying a radical antibourgeois attitude. Having its roots in romanticism, the aesthetic modernity’s outright rejection of bourgeois modernity comes in most diverse forms ranging from rebellion, anarchy, and apocalypticism to aristocratic self-exile. The modernization we talk about in this paper directly relates to the first type of modernity, as Calinescu gives a detailed description in the following passage:

With regard to the first, bourgeois idea of modernity, we may say that it has by and large continued the outstanding traditions of earlier periods in the history of the modern idea. The doctrine of progress, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, the concern with time (a measurable time, a time that can be bought and sold and therefore has, like any other commodity, a calculable equivalent in money), the cult of reason, and the ideal of freedom defined within the framework of an abstract humanism, but also the orientation toward pragmatism and the cult of action and success—all have been associated in various degrees with the battle for the modern and were kept alive and promoted as key values in the triumphant civilization established by the middle class (Calinescu 41).

In other words, modernization refers to a transformation in all aspects of society. This social change is often impacted by scientific and technological revolution. There are various types of social change that are regarded as essential features of society that is undergoing the process modernization, such as increased international dependence; relative growth in nonagricultural production, especially manufactures and services; a movement from high birth and death rates to low ones; sustained economic growth; more even distribution of income; specialization and proliferation of organizations and skills; bureaucratization; mass political participation; and an expansion of education at all levels (Rozman 3). One interesting aspect of modernization is that although many countries in the world have experienced modernization, the process of modernization for each country is distinctly unique and different. Starting from indigenous pre-modern conditions, historical and cultural background, international relations and to policies intended for aiding modernization of the country, these elements are never duplicates of the elements of another country’s modernization. Rozman distinguishes the first-comers, such
as England, France, and the United States, from the successful latecomers, such as Japan and Russia. He notes that the most prominent difference between these two types of modernizing countries is the length of modernization they went through. The first-comers usually underwent social transformation over a long period of time, whereas the latecomers heavily relied on borrowing foreign model and rapidly transformed the existing internal structures (Rozman 4).

Particularly with the latecomers, we often see a trend of subversive nature in the process of their modernization. Once modernization takes place in one country, its influence on other countries in the world is inevitable, especially now that globalization is taking place and more and more countries actively interact with each other. Countries that are latecomers in modernization often find themselves in a situation where their internal social structures are subverted by an enormous pressure or appeal of outside force or factors. The introduction of new patterns are most likely to radically influence and change the existing structures of society, thus expediting the process of modernization. Elements of old society persist and struggle to survive the radical changes that it is going through. Sometimes they succeed, but most of the times, they are subverted as many new elements are introduced.

Here, it is important not to equate modernization with “industrialization” or “westernization.” Because industrialization is a common occurrence in modernizing countries, it is easy to interchange the use of industrialization and modernization. However, industrialization specifically refers to the development of the manufacturing sector in society, including heavy and light manufacturing. While it certainly is one of the phenomena of modernization, it does not entirely represent modernization as a whole. Likewise, westernization simply means adopting characteristics of the West and no more. It is easy to put westernization in the place of modernization because of certain patterns of modernization that first developed in certain
countries, especially those in the West. These patterns, however, are not exclusive to the West, and not all western countries are highly modernized. Japan is one of the most highly modernized countries in the world, and many other countries are following Japan and China’s example in order to modernize themselves (Rozman 5).

When looking at modernization, it is also important to realize that modernization always takes on a multifaceted form. Leaders may pursue specific modernization programs, only to find that their modernization programs result in unanticipated changes in society or economy. For example, during the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, England achieved rapid industrial and economic growth, but at the same time, the working class suffered greatly from an unsanitary working environment and rampant unemployment, which consequently led to a great deal of social unrest throughout England. This is why Rozman emphasizes his interdisciplinary approach to the modernization of China. He examines China’s transformation from five different areas – international context, political structure, economic structure and growth, social integration, and knowledge and education (8). In this paper, however, we will only focus on language reform that took place in China in the early 1900s, which loosely correlates to the knowledge and education that Rozman examines. As he explains, advance of knowledge and its dissemination through education are important indicators of modernization (11). Any leader who intends to modernize the country should know that absorbing new knowledge, information, and technology is essential to the process of modernization. Literacy must be extended to the general public at minimum. In the early 20th century, the rate in China was a mere 10-20 percent (Ross 3). This was a great challenge for many Chinese leaders and intellectuals, who therefore turned to language reform as a possible method of reducing the illiteracy rate and thus expediting the process of modernization of their country.
More importantly, it is necessary to recognize the influence of language on the minds of the people and consequently on the formation of society. Many scholars have researched on the relationship between language and thought. Of those, the most extreme ones such as Benjamin Lee Whorf say that we think in the language in which we speak and write. If we don't have a language to use, then we cannot think and make sense out of the world:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds — and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way — an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, and implicit and unstated one, BUT ITS TERMS ARE ABSOLUTELY OBLIGATORY; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees (Ji 17).

Whorf argues that the language in which we speak and write determine our world view, and without our natural language we are not able to perceive the world that we live in. In other words, language controls how we think and shapes our mindset. Such a strong view of linguistic determinism is also shown in George Orwell’s 1984. In the novel, a totalitarian society called Oceania is led by Big Brother who believes that by controlling language in which people speak and write he will be able to control the minds of the people and how they perceive of the society in which they live. Everyone in Oceania is forced to speak, read, write, and hear only a specially contrived language called Newspeak, as explained in the following excerpt:

Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism. It was expected that Newspeak would finally have superseded Oldspeak (or Standard English, as we should call it) by about the year 2050. The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought — that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc — should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as
thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. To give a single example. The word *free* still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as “This dog is free from lice” or “This field is free from weeds.” It could not be used in its old sense of “politically free” or “intellectually free,” since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless (Ji 1-2).

This passage obviously has questionable claims about our thought being exclusively dependent on the language in which we speak and write, but it does give an interesting view of linguistic determinism. In reality, however, there are instances when our thought is independent of any particular language. One reason for this is that we often use different terms to refer to the same thing or person. The room in which I live can be first referred to as “the room” and subsequently as “it.” Words, which are variable, do not prohibit us from thinking because we think in terms of concept, which is constant. Another reason is the fact that languages can be satisfactorily, if not perfectly, translated. Even if languages conceptualize certain ideas in different ways, detailed explanations in one language can usually explain how the other language differs in its conceptualization. This certainly would not be possible if our thought were limited to the sounds, grammar, and the semantic structures of only one particular language (Ji 14).

So if language is not the medium in which we think, then what is? “The answer is that we think in concepts – concepts associated with particular patterns of neural activity. These concepts are mental representations of the things we think about,” says Ji (14). She emphasizes the fact that although concepts are frequently linked to words in languages, at the same time they frequently are not. There are many concepts for which we don’t have words. For example, we often don’t have enough words to describe our feelings, whether they are pain, joy, or love.
When we feel a particular kind of pain or joy or love, we sometimes fail to find words that would accurately describe how we exactly feel. Still, we have a very clear concept of it because we feel it.

Here, Ji clearly lays out the intricate relationship among languages, concepts and our thought processes (15). Although our thought processes are not entirely controlled by the language in which we speak and write, they are still heavily influenced by it because we think in concepts and we learn those concepts through language. People use language to explain different concepts, and we often continuously refine our concepts by reading or talking with others. Also, using language helps us differentiate concepts that are very similar to each other. When words such as “force,” “power,” and “momentum” are written out or said out loud, we are able to have a much clear idea of what these similar concepts symbolize. Because of this, language makes it easier for us to remember different concepts and allow us to manipulate them or put them to introspective examination. When we stabilize different concepts by language, we are then able to classify them, recombine them, and make logical inferences from them much more easily and clearly. Therefore, while language does not exclusively control our thought, it does greatly influence our minds and how we think.

For many people, a widely accepted definition of the word “language” would be a medium through which people communicate with each other. However, language is not merely a tool for communication but also a mirror that reflects a nation’s particular culture, beliefs, and customs. Language is the very medium through which people can understand the history and culture of a particular nation. Written language is an especially intriguing field of studies when considering it leaves clear traces of unique thoughts and beliefs of a nation as it develops and evolves according to the specific circumstance of the nation.
In China’s case, language reform did not simply mean a change in the language that people used. Language reform changed far more than simply the language itself. It influenced the thoughts and minds of the people and further impacted the formation of the modern Chinese society. Now, it is important to understand that language reform in China occurred in various ways and during different times. The target range of the reform included both spoken language and written language. However, the main focus of this paper will be on the reform of the Chinese written language. The vernacular language reform movement was specifically about reforming the written language which should be easily understood and written by all people. This later segued into a more systematic and extensive language reform directed by Mao Zedong. From this understanding come various questions on the relationship between language reform and modernization of China. How exactly did language exert its influence on the minds of the people? How did the idea of language reform come up among Chinese intellectuals and leaders? What was the specific role that the language reform played during the process of China’s modernization? In this paper, we will specifically focus on two distinctive time periods, the 1910s and the 1950s, during which language reform took place in China and consequently fostered the modernization of the country.
As the intellectuals who led the New Culture Movement saw that they were also the legacy of China’s old thought, they realized they would have to change themselves in order to change their nation. Such self-transformation took place in the form of vernacular language reform movement, also known as the baihua movement, which started in the mid-1910s and continued on in the early 1920s (Schwarcz 56). This baihua movement that swept the whole country originally started in the dormitories of American universities where many Chinese students were studying. In the year of 1915, Hu Shi (胡适, 1891-1962) was discussing with his classmate several options of resolving the “dead language” problem in China, because for more than 2000 years, people had been using the classical Chinese language wenyan, which was incapable of being spoken or verbally understood, as a means of written communication. It was also taught in all levels of educational institutions, from primary schools to universities. All the school texts were written in this dead language as well, and Hu Shi and other Chinese students in America saw this as a serious problem. Why couldn’t people instead use a “living language,” a language that can be spoken as well as be written? Using wenyan was like trying to use Latin as the main medium of written communication in America. Thus started was a series of publications of articles by Chinese students in America on the topic of language reform. A great amount of letters circulated around many cities such as Ithaca, New York City, Washington, D.C., and Poughkeepsie. Despite disagreements from his fellow students, Hu Shi strongly voiced his opinion on using the vernacular Chinese language baihua, which he described as “the vulgar tongue of the vast majority of the population,” as the national language for written communication (Hu 51). Because baihua was used by the vast majority of the population and
often was used in popular folk tales and songs, it made more sense to use it as the main medium for written communication and even elevate its status to the national language.

While experimenting with *baihua* in his own work of poetry called *A Book of Experiments*, Hu Shi soon discovered an important aspect of Chinese literature:

I found that every new form, every innovation in literature, had come never from the imitative classical writers of the upper classes, but always from the unlettered class of the countryside, the village inn, and the market-place. I found that it was always these new forms and patterns of the common people that, from time to time, furnished the new blood and fresh vigor to the literature of the literati, and rescued it from the perpetual danger of fossilization (Hu 52).

Hu argues here that the true history of great Chinese literature actually revolved around the *baihua* which the arrogant scholars in the upper class despised and disparaged. It is the popular folk songs and novels written in *baihua* that inspired the creation of great Chinese poetry and literature, such as the *Book of Poetry*, which brought about the first epoch of Chinese literature, and the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, one of China’s great classical literatures and a masterpiece of Chinese vernacular literature (Hu 60). Such argument of Hu failed to receive sympathetic response from his fellow students in American universities but surprisingly gained support from many people in Mainland China, one of whom was Chen Duxiu (陈独秀, 1879-1942), then the Dean of the College of Letters in the National University of Peking. As Peking University stood at the center of political struggle during the New Culture Movement and rose to a position of national leadership in the eyes of the students, many intellectuals and students from different localities published and exchanged various small periodicals, which amounted up to 400 and were all written in *baihua*, on the new literary and intellectual movement that was a huge part of the New Culture Movement during the second decade of the 20th century (Schwarcz 49). People were excited and eager to express themselves in the language they could understand.
and in which they could make themselves understood. Soon, the revolution in literature had swept the entire nation.

It is interesting to note the particular linguistic situation that existed before the vernacular langue reform movement. It is called “diglossia,” a term brought up by a linguist Charles Ferguson in 1959. Diglossia refers to a situation where “a language has two grammatically and lexically distinct varieties, one ‘high’ and one ‘low’” (Chen, “Modern Written Chinese” 509). In China’s case, wenyan, which was based on classical Chinese, was the high variety, and it was used by the literary, scholarly, and the educated population. Baihua, which was based on the contemporary vernacular, was thus the low variety, and it was the primary dialect of the people in their ordinary everyday lives. Diglossia existed in China for centuries up until 1920 and the New Culture Movement. As modern Western ideas began to flow into the country and nationalism became more intense, the New Culture Movement had three main objectives – the literary revolution, democracy, and science. For the common people to acquire modern knowledge and information, they needed easy access to education, which meant easy language to learn and use. Since wenyan was far from representing the actual spoken vernacular, baihua was chosen to replace the other one.

When the May Fourth Movement broke out in 1919 in protest of the injustice toward China at the end of World War I, an urgent need for radical domestic reforms came up as a necessity. Many people, including the intellectual community and the government, supported the replacement of wenyan with baihua. The government soon declared in 1920, though reluctantly, that guoyu, the new status of baihua as the national language, was to be taught in every school and it was to be used in every scholarly journal and newspaper (Chen, “Modern Chinese” 74). As a result, baihua became the de facto standard written language for everyday interaction in China.
The modern written Chinese has undergone many processes to become what is now used in China today. The most influence came from three sources, non-Northern Mandarin dialect, classical Chinese *wenyan*, and foreign languages. Currently, Mandarin Chinese is the major dialect spoken in China. However, Chinese language has many other dialects other than Mandarin. Of those, seven major dialects comprise the Chinese language: Mandarin, Wu, Xiang, Hakka, Gan, Min, and Cantonese. Among these, Mandarin itself divides into four more categories: Northern, Northwestern, Southwestern, and Jiang-Huai (Chen, “Modern Written Chinese” 510). Each of these can break into even smaller groups of dialects depending on phonological distinctions, but this is enough to see how diverse the Chinese language is.

*Baihua*, the written language for informal functions used since the Tang Dynasty, was mainly based on Northern Mandarin with the Beijing dialect at its core. Considering the existence of many different dialects in Chinese, it is quite surprising to see that the newly reformed written language has been able to last as one unifying language instead of diversifying into several distinct languages based on the many vernacular dialects that still exist throughout China today. This is mainly due to the deep influence of the exemplary *baihua* literary works (Chen, “Modern Written Chinese” 511). These *baihua* literary works had been familiar to all literates in the past, pressing speakers of different dialects to become familiar with the *baihua* style themselves if they wanted their own writings to be recognized across dialect barriers. For Chinese people, written works, instead of speech, provided the most norms and guide in writing. Therefore, the creation of standard written Chinese was also heavily based on written texts.

It is true Northern Mandarin exerted the heaviest influence on the formation of the modern written Chinese, but the influence of other dialects cannot be disregarded. The period of 1910-40, during which China was undergoing the reform of its written language and the concept
of standard written language was not solidified until later, especially allowed speakers of other dialects more freedom to experiment with different grammatical and lexical devices. In Mainland China, as a result of having most influential writers of Wu dialect in the 1920s-30s, Wu dialect became an important part of the modern written Chinese in Mainland China (Chen, “Modern Written Chinese” 511). Writers such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun used the Wu dialect in their works, displaying the unique characteristics of grammar and vocabulary of their native tongue. Because these writers gained much popularity from the readers, many Wu features naturally became part of the established norms of modern written Chinese. It is also interesting to briefly look at the four major Chinese communities, which are Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Even though Chinese is spoken and used in all these areas, because of geographical, social, and political differences, the written language also varies in terms of grammatical and lexical norms. Noting this, Ping Chen says that modern written Chinese in Taiwan and Singapore have been under the influence of the Min dialect, whereas in Hong Kong, Cantonese displayed a considerable amount of influence (“Modern Written Chinese” 512).

While baihua heavily influenced the formation of modern written Chinese, wenyan, though to a lesser degree than baihua, also exerted its influence on modern written Chinese. This is due to its three particular aspects. The first is a richer repertoire of morphemes, words, and expressions that baihua cannot offer simply because wenyan had been used for more than two millennia whereas baihua had come into use for a much shorter period of time. Writers of baihua themselves periodically turned to classical Chinese as a fountainhead of linguistic resources. The second aspect is the compact and terse nature of wenyan, which enables wenyan to convey more information than baihua in the same space, bringing out a highly refined style of the language. The third aspect is wenyan’s remoteness from actual speech, which helps to create a tone of
formality and an aura of authority (Chen, “Modern Written Chinese” 512). These three distinct aspects of wenyan allow classical Chinese to provide important part of the norms of modern written Chinese, such as succinctness, refinement, and formality.

Moreover, as Chinese borrowed many words from Japanese and European languages, foreign languages became an indispensable part of the development of modern written Chinese. This process started in the mid-1800s and continued on to the 1900s. It is remarkable to see the Europeanization of modern written Chinese, especially in terms of grammatical structure. Today, articles written in current newspapers and magazines can be translated into Russian or English almost in a word-for-word style, something that would not have been possible 90 years ago. This phenomenon is due to three reasons, Ping Chen explains (“Modern Written Chinese” 515). The first is that people desired to express in their scholarly and scientific writings more accurately and explicitly, especially because most of the terms in the growing fields of humanities, social sciences, modern sciences, and technology were from foreign languages. The second is that the majority of the intellectuals who led the New Culture Movement absolutely resisted against maintaining the traditional Chinese culture, of which the Chinese language was an important part. Some even insisted on replacing the Chinese characters with another language such as English or Esperanto. As a result, the Europeanization of baihua became an inevitable process. The third reason is the lack of professional translation from foreign language to Chinese. Because many translators were not trained professionals, they often resorted to direct translation rather than considering idiomatic usage of the traditional baihua. The resulting product was a highly Europeanized Chinese text with European syntax and grammatical structure. For example, just as English and other European languages emphasize the distinction between subject and predicate, Chinese also maintains this distinction, but very loosely. This distinction is mainly a
product of the study of European languages, and it is still questionable whether the distinction is adequate for the Chinese language (Wu 426). A more concrete example of the Europeanized Chinese would be the use of *bei* (被) (Chen, “Modern Chinese” 93). Traditionally, *bei*, a passive marker which is the equivalent of “by” in English, was almost always used for undesirable events as in the following:

老王昨天被老板训了一顿。
Lao Wang was scolded by the boss yesterday.

However, since the 1910s, the use of *bei* was extended to neutral or even desirable situations. *Bei* became a pure grammatical marker for passive voice, as shown in the following:

他被大家光荣地选为代表。
He was honorably elected by everyone as the representative.

Such extension of the use of *bei* originated from translating European texts, imitating the passive markers in European languages. As time went on, the extended use of *bei* became the norm for users of Modern written Chinese.

While the Chinese written language was undergoing such a significant stage of reform, a heated debate on the *baihua* movement was occurring at the same time. Despite the popular support from China’s leading intellectuals, there were also concerns and oppositions against the language reform. Even among the advocates there existed divided opinions on the degree and extent to which Chinese written language should be reformed. Hu Shi, for example, simply wanted a language that would allow people to write poetry and literature “more clearly, more pithily, more realistically” (Schwarcz 81). He looked at language reform from a literati’s point of view. Because he realized that the language used in poetry and literature did not match up with the spoken vernacular language of the people, he knew many literary works were not in touch with the reality of Chinese society. For him, language reform meant literary reform for the most
part. Soon, however, he quickly extended that view to include social reform, understanding the importance of language and its influence on people’s minds. Qian Xuantong (錢玄同, 1887-1939), another leading intellectual at that time, firmly believed the Chinese language as a major social problem of China, associating language with the development of the nation’s mentality and consciousness. He advocated complete abolishment of the Chinese language and replacement with a different writing system:

You, sir, have exerted yourself in the cause of overthrowing Confucianism, of reforming ethics. You believe that, if the problem of ethics is not dealt with in a fundamental way, this country of ours doesn’t have much hope at all.... I, personally, have this to add: If you want to get rid of Confucians, you cannot but get rid of the Chinese language. If you want to get rid of the naive, crude, rigid mentality of ordinary people, you cannot but first get rid of the Chinese language (Schwarcz 81).

Qian argued that language reform was essential in reforming the minds of the Chinese people. The discussion on the relationship between language and consciousness became popular among the Chinese intellectuals, especially through various articles published on the influential Chinese revolutionary magazine New Youth. One unknown author of an article advocating vernacular language reform movement said, “China in the present must pass through a stage of establishing the vernacular” (Feigon 123). The author suggested that if China were to change, its literature and language must also reflect this change, also supported by Chen Duxiu, the founder of New Youth. Chen published many translated works of Western writers such as Oscar Wilde, Tolstoy, and Turgenev. Chen even translated some of the Western works himself, including works of French writer Max O’Reill and the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore. He also printed some of the writings of Irish nationalist poets such as Joseph Plunkett, Thomas MacDonagh, and Patrick Pearse, who were executed by the British in 1916 (Feigon 123). By including many foreign works in New Youth, all translated in baihua, Chen aimed at influencing the minds of the Chinese youth. As those foreign works introduced new ideas to the Chinese people, new words
such as democracy were added to the Chinese vocabulary and Chinese people began to think and view the world in different perspectives. For example, Chen Duxiu says in his article “On Literary Revolution” that the Chinese concept of “revolution” and the European concept of “revolution” are very different:

In European languages, “revolution” means the elimination of the old and the changeover the new, not at all the same as the so-called dynastic cycles of our Middle Kingdom. Since the literary renaissance, therefore, there have been a revolution in politics, a revolution in religion, and a revolution in morality and ethics. Literary art as well has not been without revolution: there is no literary art that does not renew itself and advance itself with revolution. The history of contemporary European modernization can simply be called the history of revolutions. So I say that the awesome and brilliant Europe of today is the legacy of revolution (Chen 140).

Here, Chen emphasizes that modernization of a country is attained through many different revolutions, one of which is literary revolution. This resonates with Rozman’s explanation of the multifaceted nature of modernization previously discussed in the introduction. Chen clearly knew that in order for China to modernize, simply changing the one aspect of society was not enough. Various aspects of society had to be reformed, and that included language and literature. As already shown in Chen’s description of the word “revolution,” Chinese people’s understanding of their society and the world gradually transformed and broadened through the vernacular language reform movement.

Support for the baihua movement remained strong and active during the time of the New Culture Movement, but an increasing number of people voiced opposition in the following years.

Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白, 1899-1935), one of the main critics of the baihua movement, wrote:

The so-called vernacular language (baihua) of the May Fourth period...is a half-classical language which when read aloud does not resemble in the least the speech of living people; thus it is a half-dead language. Therefore, the question is hardly whether it is difficult but whether the language used is or is not Chinese – the speech of living Chinese people, the speech of China’s masses. (Schwarcz 210)
One of the main concerns about baihua was that the context of baihua was entirely foreign and not Chinese. The heavily European style of the sentence structures was incomprehensible even by the average literate Chinese, argued the critics. Baihua, when compared with wenyan, was the easier and more popular of the two languages, but if it could not be understood by the mass, then there was no use in promoting baihua as the mass language.

Such concern was raised in the 1930s because by that time, the baihua movement had become too political and distant from the original motive of the baihua movement leaders in the 1910s, which was awakening the minds of the people and working toward modernization of the country.

Yet at the time of the New Culture Movement, the baihua movement received enthusiastic support and warm welcome from many students and intellectuals, and it was certainly a period of the “Chinese Renaissance,” according to Hu Shi.

The Renaissance movement of the last two decades differs from all the early movements in being a fully conscious and studied movement. Its leaders know what they want, and they know what they must destroy in order to achieve what they want. They want a new language, a new literature, a new outlook on life and society, and a new scholarship. They want a new language, not only as an effective instrumentality for popular education, but also as the effective medium for the development of the literature of a new China...They want to instill into the people a new outlook on life which shall free them from the shackles of tradition and make them feel at home in the new world and its new civilization. They want a new scholarship which shall not only enable us to understand intelligently the cultural heritage of the past, but also prepare us for active participation in the work of research in the modern sciences. This, as I understand it, is the mission of the Chinese Renaissance (Hu 46-47).

Here, the core of Hu’s philosophy of the baihua movement is clearly illustrated. He knew exactly what the baihua movement meant for the Chinese people and China as the new modernizing country. As China entered the 20th century and opened its doors to other foreign countries, it faced many challenges and in the end felt an urgent need for a major internal transformation. Modernization was the best option for China in order to compete and further advance itself in the international world. As explained previously, modernization comes in many
forms and such multifaceted nature is what makes modernization an intricate subject to study. In China's case, modernization not only meant economic and industrial growth but also meant the transformation of the people's psyche. Because China had been so isolationist, unwilling to interact with other parts of the world for thousands of years, when it finally did open its doors, many people were surprised by the vast amount of information and knowledge that they had never heard of and were confounded with the norms and values that differed so greatly from their own. In order to keep up with the global competition, the people of China had to change the way they thought and the way they viewed the world, and this is what Hu meant by "a new outlook on life and society." More importantly, he knew that language has a tremendous impact on the way people think and form various norms and values, and thus language reform would also have a great influence on the process of China's modernization.

So how exactly does language influence the way people think, and how does that consequently influence the process of modernization? Language, according to Hayakawa, is an indispensable mechanism of human life, for it is through language, especially the written language, that we collect the information and knowledge of our predecessors, and it is with such information and knowledge that we mold, guide, and enrich our lives and increase our wisdom:

Dogs and cats and chimpanzees do not, so far as we can tell, increase their wisdom, their information, or their control over their environment from one generation to the next. But human beings do. The cultural accomplishments of the ages, the invention of cooking, of weapons, of writing, of printing, of methods of building, of games and amusements, of means of transportation, and the discoveries of all the arts and sciences come to us as *free gifts from the dead*. These gifts, which none of us has done anything to earn, offer us not only the opportunity for a richer life than any of our forebears enjoyed, but also the opportunity to add to the sum total of human achievement by our own contributions, however small (Hayakawa 20-21).

Every animal including Homo sapiens has its own language. Animals make certain noises whether they are yelping, chirping, or crying, and they communicate through such means of
spoken language. However, the characteristic that distinguishes communication by human beings from that by animals is the written language. Only human beings are capable of leaving clear traces of their lives and their accomplishments for the people of the next generation, who learn from their predecessors' experience and advance themselves and then record their own experience for the next coming generation. “Such cultural and intellectual cooperation is, or should be, the great principle of human life,” says Hayakawa (21). Therefore, a human being is not entirely dependent on his or her own experience for growth and development. If a physician, for example, is confronted by a rare disease and does not know how to treat his or her patient, the physician can refer to medical indexes or journals and reports of fellow colleagues. It is likely that the physician will find records of similar cases and possibly come up with some solution or at least gain more understanding of the patient’s medical condition. If a person is confronted with an ethical problem, he or she can refer to various works of different philosophers such as Confucius, Aristotle, Socrates, Jesus, and Spinoza (Hayakawa 18). By learning from those who have lived before us, we grow deeper in our consciousness and acquire a much more mature view on our society and the world. We learn from the mistakes of our predecessors and we still make numerous mistakes on our own, but amidst all this stumbling and faltering, we continue to walk forward, aspiring to reach as far as we can in our lifetime. That is progress, and language is what makes progress possible.

When looking back at the first quote of Hayakawa on page 25, we see that his argument creates an interesting parallel with the argument of Bernard of Chartres about modernity previously discussed in the introduction. Bernard says the exact same thing about modernity, that we are like dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants and that that is how we see more and farther than our predecessors. We deserve less credit than we often claim for ourselves, because
it is by the knowledge and wisdom our predecessors that we become “modern” or “modernized.” Thus it is no surprise that the vernacular language reform accounted for a large part of China’s modernization. It dramatically changed and broadened the Chinese view on the world and their understanding of other cultures. By acquiring more knowledge and having different points of view, people were able to reexamine their own culture. People were able to break away from the stagnant position in which China put itself for so many centuries and take a big step toward modernization.
The idea of language reform was not new to many Chinese in the 1950s. Before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Nationalist government had also tried to simplify 324 Chinese characters but failed to do so because of the opposition from the conservative forces in the government (Rohsenow 22). Various ideas of creating phonetic symbols had also been circulating among many Chinese intellectuals and government officials since the New Culture Movement. Qian Xuantong, for example, was one of those radical intellectuals who supported complete abolishment of Chinese characters and adoption of a phonetic script (Schwarcz 81).

Therefore, it is not surprising to see that one of the many projects the newly established government of the PRC heavily emphasized was reform of the Chinese language. As mentioned previously in the introduction, language reform in the 1950s targeted three main aspects of the Chinese language: simplification of Chinese characters, standardization of the national spoken language Putonghua and its promotion, and creation of a phonetic system called pinyin which would accurately and efficiently express standard modern Chinese.

On the same day of the formal proclamation of the founding of the PRC, October 10, 1949, the Chinese Script Reform Association was established for the purpose of simplifying Chinese characters. Then on December 24, 1954, it was succeeded by the Committee on Script Reform, in which about 200,000 people of varied educational levels discussed different issues of the language reform. In 1955, the committee, along with the Ministry of Education, held an important conference called the National Conference on Script Reform (Quanguo Wenzi Gaige Huiyi). At this meeting, the draft of the Scheme for Chinese Character Simplification (Hanzi...
Jianhua Fang’an Xiuzheng Cao’an) was passed as well as the draft of the List of the First Set of Variant Characters to be Standardized (Di Yi Yitzi Zhengli Biao Cao’an) (Rohsenow 23).

Trying to reduce the number of characters in variant forms, the committee included in the second draft the most commonly used variant forms in contemporary writings. After coming up with a list of 810 groups of characters in variant forms, the committee selected only one of the various forms in each group and discarded the rest as no longer usable. Abolished through this exercise were 1,053 characters, most of which were variants with the highest number of strokes and rare or obsolete forms (Chen, “Modern Chinese” 154). As a result, it became easier to write most of the characters, and the number of characters that have the same meaning was also reduced.

Before announcing the two drafts at the National Conference on Script Reform in 1955, the Committee on Script Reform and the Ministry of Education had gone through a careful scrutiny of simplified characters in the previous years. The Ministry of Education had prepared a list of more than 500 simplified characters in 1950 for widespread discussion. After the committee designed the draft of the Scheme for Chinese Character Simplification, 300,000 copies were distributed to various sectors of society for solicitation of comments and suggestions. During this period, some print media even adopted 141 simplified characters from the draft scheme for trial use. The response was generally positive except for some scholars (Chen, “Modern Chinese” 155).

On January 28, 1956, the State Council formally approved of the First Scheme for Chinese Character Simplification (Hanzi Jianhua Fang’an). This scheme was composed of three different lists. List 1 included 230 simplified characters and List 2 included 285 simplified characters, all representing 544 traditional characters. List 3 included 54 simplified pianpang, which are basic components of characters. Most of the characters in List 1 were the ones already
in extensive use in mass media, and they were to replace their complicated counterparts from the date of publication. Characters in List 2 and List 3 were for trial use, on the other hand, and were accepted as standard forms in the following years (Chen, “Modern Chinese” 154). Using the principles in the 1956 scheme, scholars later developed a complete list of 2,236 simplified characters and published it in the General List of Simplified Characters (Jianhuazi Zongbiao) in 1964.

In reality, 90 percent of the characters in the First Scheme had already been in popular use for a long time. Because of the difficulty to use the traditional complicated characters, many people had devised their own ways of simplifying them and put them to everyday use. What the promulgation of the First Scheme did was nothing more than granting official recognition to conventional practices. This was an important achievement nevertheless, for it alleviated the burden of learning and using the Chinese script. Comparative studies have shown that it is easier for adults to become literate in the simplified script than in the traditional script. It is also much easier for children to learn how to read and write simplified characters (Chen, “Modern Chinese” 157).

However, this created some problems as well. One of the major problems according to Chen was that simplified characters may have become easier to learn and write but that does not necessarily mean that they are easier to recognize (158). The strokes of simplified characters have been significantly reduced, but fewer strokes sometimes actually make it hard to differentiate similar looking characters. Some examples are: 彙 (she, “to plan”) and 没 (mei, “not have”); 儿 (er, “son”) and 几 (ji, several); 風 (feng, “wind”) and 凤 (feng, “phoenix”); and 己 (ji, “self”) and 已 (yi, “already”). However, this problem is not so serious in my opinion, considering that a lot of the problems with character recognition are easily solved when the characters are
read in context. Also, Chinese characters are often used with another character to form a word or a phrase. It is rare that only one character stands by itself to actually mean something unless it is used in poetry. For example, when people see the sentence, “His design does not have much creativity” (他的设计没有很多创造力), it is hard to mistake the character 设 in the word 设计, meaning “design,” for the character 没 in the phrase 没有, meaning “does not have.” Of course, this kind of thought process is possible only when one’s vocabulary is rich enough to know many different words. If one does not know the word “design” and is trying to figure out what 设计 means in the sentence, it is certainly possible to mistake 设 for 没.

Another problem that people had with simplified characters was that they believed simplified characters would play a divisive role between past and present and between Mainland China and other Chinese-speaking communities. Indeed, in places like Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, traditional characters are still the official written script today. Because almost all publications before 1956 were in the traditional complicated script, it was also hard to access writings from different times and places. Yet it is important to remember that simplified characters had already been in popular use long before the promulgation of the First Scheme in 1956. Because many people were experiencing difficulties with Chinese characters, they had devised their own way of simplifying the characters and used them in their everyday written communication. The idea and the practice of simplified characters were not new to people at all by the mid-20th century. Moreover, it is not so difficult for people who have been trained in simplified characters to learn how to read traditional characters, although it may take some time to get to the level of fluency. When people who were taught simplified characters do not
understand the classic works in ancient Chinese, it is not so much because they do not recognize the traditional characters but because they are unfamiliar with the different lexicon style and grammar usage of ancient Chinese.

In the meantime, the Committee on Script Reform was also busy working on the project of development and promotion of Putonghua. It held another important conference called the Symposium on the Standardization of Modern Chinese (Xiandai Hanyu Guifanhua Xueshu Huiyi) in October 1955. Refining the definition of Putonghua was the main objective of this conference. In order to promote national integration of the Chinese people who often spoke different dialects in different localities, the development of a national standard spoken language urgently needed. At the end of the meeting, it was concluded that Putonghua was to be based on the vocabulary and grammar of the Northern Mandarin dialects with Beijing pronunciation, and it was to be the standard national language for all Chinese people. In addition, Putonghua's written grammar was derived from works written in baihua. In order to coordinate a nationwide campaign of Putonghua, the Central Working Committee of the Promotion of Putonghua (Zhongyang Tuiguang Putonghua Gongzuo Weiyuanhui) was set up on January 28, 1956 (Rohsenow 24).

What was central to the promotion of Putonghua was the development of a phonetic system called pinyin, which would convey the pronunciation of spoken words and written characters in Putonghua. Before the creation of the pinyin system in 1958, there were four other phonetic schemes that had been developed and had been used for a brief period of time: Guanhua zimu or Mandarin phonetic alphabet, zhuyin zimu or national phonetic alphabet, guoyu luomazi or national language Romanization, and ladinghua xinwenzi or Latinized new writing.
Firstly, *guanhua zimu*, developed by Wang Zhao in 1900, contained 49 symbols for initials and 12 symbols for finals, representing the syllabic structure of characters with a method of double spelling. This scheme did not have separate symbols for the medial sound and instead integrated it with the initial, as shown in the following table:

**Table 1: Scheme of guanhua zimu**

| INITIALS |  
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [pl] | [pʰl] | [m] | [p] | [pʰ] | [m] | [f] | [f] | [l] | [l] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [h] |
| [pu] | [pʰu] | [m] | [m] | [p] | [pʰ] | [m] | [f] | [f] | [l] | [l] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [h] |
| [t] | [tʰ] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] |
| [t] | [tʰ] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] | [n] |
| [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] |
| [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] |
| [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] |
| [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] | [u] |

| FINALS |  
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] | [a] |
| [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] | [ai] |
| [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] | [an] |

(Chen, "Modern Chinese" 179)

These symbols were all derived from structural parts of characters, consequently taking a graphic form that is similar to that of the Japanese kana script. As for the tones, they were expressed with a dot in the four corners of the word. Because many people still had reverence toward the traditional Chinese characters at the time when *guanhua zimu* was developed, *guanhua zimu*’s resemblance to the character script gained popularity of the new phonetic script. *Guanhua zimu* mainly played an auxiliary role of assisting learning the character script, but it was also mean to be an independent writing system that was to be alternate option for those who did not have the time and energy to learn the character script. This would have created an
interesting situation of digraphia, a use of more than one writing systems for the same language, having the character script as a high writing system for the people with sufficient leisure and the phonetic script as a low writing system for the mundane, practical purposes of everyday life.

Secondly, *zhuyin zimu*, promulgated in 1918 by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China, was the first phonetic writing system that was sanctioned and promoted by the government. *Zhuyin zimu* was similar to *guanhua zimu* in the sense that it also derived its symbols from structural parts of the traditional characters. Yet it differed from *guanhua zimu* by including symbols for the medial sound, as shown in the following, thus adopting a method of triple spelling:

Table 2: Scheme of *zhuyin zimu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIALS</th>
<th>MEDIALS</th>
<th>FINALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(Chen, "Modern Chinese" 181)

In this scheme, tones were to be marked with four distinct diacritics which were superimposed on the word. At the time of the promulgation, *zhuyin zimu* was only to play an auxiliary role of annotating the pronunciation of characters. It was a much more conservative stance toward the traditional character script partly because of the nationalist nature of the government.
Thirdly, *guoyu luomazi*, promulgated in 1928, was the first Romanized system that was officially sanctioned by the government. In this scheme, tones were expressed in terms of spellings instead of by diacritical marks, thus making the system particularly complicated.

Table 3: Scheme of *guoyu luomazi*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIALS</th>
<th>FINALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b [p]</td>
<td>y [i]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d [t]</td>
<td>i [l]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g [k]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j [ts]</td>
<td>e [e]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ts [ts]</td>
<td>a [an]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t [t]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n [n]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m [m]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh [sh]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f [f]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v [v]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r [r]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s [s]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x [x]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| a before [i] or [y] |
| b before other sounds |

(Chen, "Modern Chinese" 183)

The role of *guoyu luomazi* was still limited to only supplementing the traditional character script. Not satisfied with such a stance of the conservative government, many liberal intellectuals began to actively discuss the roles of the character script and the phonetic script. They published many articles in various periodicals, and the majority of them held a radical view of replacing the character script with a phonetic script which would be easier to learn and use, just as Qian Xuantong had advocated during the vernacular language movement.

Fourthly, in 1929, several Chinese communist scholars in exile in the Soviet Union designed and published *Ladinghua xinwenzi* in collaboration with Soviet linguists. It was mainly
for the 100,000 Chinese living in the Soviet Union. What was unique about this scheme was that the tones were not expressed except in the case of ambiguity, like *maai*, meaning “to buy” and *mai*, meaning “to sell” (Chen “Modern Chinese” 178).

Table 4: Scheme of *Ladinghua xinwenzi*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIALS</th>
<th>FINALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b [p]</td>
<td>i [i]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d [t]</td>
<td>a [a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g [k]</td>
<td>o [o]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zh [ts]</td>
<td>e [e]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z [ts]</td>
<td>ai [ai]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p [pʰ]</td>
<td>ia [ia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t [tʰ]</td>
<td>uo [uo]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k [kʰ]</td>
<td>ia [ia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch [tsʰ]</td>
<td>u [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c [tsʰ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m [m]</td>
<td>u [ua]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n [n]</td>
<td>uo [uo]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ng [ŋ]</td>
<td>ia [ia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x [x]</td>
<td>i [i]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l [l]</td>
<td>e [e]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* a except before [l] or [y]*
* b before [l] or [y]*

(Chen, “Modern Written Chinese” 185)

While the three previously discussed schemes were based on the Northern Mandarin dialect, making it easier to annotate the pronunciation of characters in that dialect, *Ladinghua xinwenzi* was not. Designers of *Ladinghua xinwenzi* assumed an opposing position, saying that basing the phonetic scheme on such a specific regional dialect would put the non-Mandarin speakers at a linguistic disadvantage. They asserted that each of the important dialects should have a separate phonetic scheme, thus later publishing at least 13 schemes of *Ladinghua xinwenzi* for the major Chinese dialects.
Another radical notion of *Ladinghua xinwenzi* was that it was designed to supersede the character script. Advocates of this scheme argued that the Chinese characters, product of the old feudal society, were manipulated and used by the ruling class to oppress the laboring masses. They also asserted that the character script was a huge obstacle in obtaining higher literacy and thus prevented China from becoming a modern society.

Despite the development of these four different phonetic systems, it was still not enough to find the right one that would be put to use permanently. Because Chinese characters were logographic, having a phonetic system was essential to assisting literacy in Chinese characters, especially since the government of the PRC was fighting against the widespread illiteracy in China. “Our written language must be reformed,” said Mao in 1951, “It should take the direction of phoneticization common to all the languages of the world” (Lehmann 51). In the early 1950s, Mao said the phonetic symbols should be “national” in form, resembling the Chinese characters. Yet there were many others who thought adopting a “foreign” alphabet would be a more appropriate option. Through a series of meeting and discussions, the Committee on Script Reform finally came to a consensus of using the Latin alphabet in the Chinese phonetic system, and Mao expressed his approval in the end. On February 12, 1956, the Committee on Script Reform issued the draft of the Scheme for Chinese Phonetic Writing (*Hanyu Pinyin Fang’an*), as shown in the following, which was formally approved by the National People’s Congress in February, 1958 (Rohsenow 24).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Initials in pinyin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilabials</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Alveolars</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Dental sibilants</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Retroflexes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Palatals</strong></td>
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(Chen, "Modern Chinese" 35)
Unlike the *Ladinghua xinwenzi* approach of separate schemes for different dialects, *pinyin* is exclusively based on the Northern Mandarin dialect. The newly established central government of the PRC, faced with governing over a highly decentralized China, saw the need for national integration. One way to achieve that was to promote a national spoken language *Putonghua*, which was based on the Northern Mandarin dialect. Therefore, having a phonetic system that is also based on the same particular dialect seemed like a reasonable plan. Rather than allowing easy access to literacy for all major dialects by creating different schemes of phonetic system, the government took a different point of view and aimed for establishing uniformity of language and consequently uniformity of the country.

The *pinyin* system is still widely used today, and although it serves a mere auxiliary role in relation to the character script, it still plays a significant part in standardizing pronunciation, dictionary annotation, and basic education throughout China. It was also adopted by the International Standardization Organization in 1982 as the standard form for the transcription of Chinese words. Most notably, *pinyin* has played a significant role in facilitating the input/output
system in Chinese computer word processing. The pinyin-character conversion is the main input/output method for many Chinese word processors such as NJ star, Xia Li Ba Ren, and New Tianma (Chen, “Modern Chinese” 187).

All in all, it only took roughly ten years, from 1949 until 1958, to reform the language that had been in use for thousands of years in China. From simplification of characters to promotion of national spoken language and development of a phonetic system, Chinese language, especially the written language, has undergone an extensive amount of reform and it has changed dramatically. Although the idea of language reform had always been around throughout the early 20th century, it is still incredible to look at the swiftness and vigor of the process of Mao’s language reform, which accomplished so much in the short period of ten years. Of course, more alteration and revision were to take place later on, but this certainly established a firm foundation of the modern Chinese language that is still used today by the majority of Chinese people. Leading this entire language reform project, Mao paid careful attention to every aspect of it. Why was he so intent on the project? What did language reform mean to him and furthermore to the government of the PRC?

In order to stabilize the newly established government and consolidate its power throughout China, what Mao needed the most was controlling the media and setting up propaganda networks that comprised Party members, members of the New Democratic Youth Corps, model workers, and revolutionary activists. “Mao knew perfectly well that his was a discourse community, and if the discourse somehow eluded his control, the leakage and erosion of power would be great,” according to Apter and Saich (244). Here, “discourse community” refers to a community which has certain goals or purposes and uses communication, especially written communication in order to achieve those goals. This written communication often
displays organizational patterns, and it is seen as ‘belong[ing] to discourse communities’ and conversely, helping to define those communities” (Borg 398). It is through discourse that Mao was able to gain support from the Communist Party and consolidate his position in Yan’an, where the Communist Party had been in exile from 1935 until 1947. There, he made Yan’an a discourse community, uniting the members of the community through a special language that was systemically used and taught by educational institutions. Examples are shown in the following list:

- **juewu:** consciousness
- **renwu:** task, assignment
- **tuanjie:** unity; to unify
- **bu po bu li:** Without destruction there can be no construction (a direct quotation from Mao)
- **shijie zai dongdang zhong qianjin:** The world advances amidst turbulence

Also, carefully scripted stories about Mao’s emergence as guide and savior, the battle between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party, and Mao’s triumph over treacherous opponents within the party were repeatedly told and taught to the members, who would also study them through personal study and incessant discussions among themselves (Ji 48).

Moreover, the new recruits learned the language of Marxist philosophy such as “universals and particulars,” “ideas and representation,” “materialism and idealism,” “reflection and reality,” “concrete and abstract,” “theory and practice,” and “unity of opposites” (Apter 227-228).

Mao strongly believed that he could change people’s thoughts by making them learn and recite words, slogans, and scripts that expressed the revolutionary worldview. Such linguistic engineering by Mao was heavily influenced by Marx and Stalin. For Mao, words were revolutionary tools, as Stalin once said a writer was “an engineer of human souls” (Ji 46).

According to Marx, “Language is the immediate reality of thought,” and according to Stalin,
“Ideas cannot exist separate from language. The true nature of thought is that it is realized in and with language. Unless thought has been fixed and recorded in language it cannot exist. Pure ‘naked thought’ is non-existent” (Ji 47). Here, Marx and Stalin are saying exactly what Benjamin Whorf said about the relationship between language and thought, as previously explained in the introduction. We think in the language that we speak and write, or at least we cannot think without that language.

Therefore, it was of course a natural process for Mao to extend his discourse community from Yan’an to the entire nation by 1949 after he established the new government of the PRC. Controlling and manipulating language was fundamental to his rule. Through language, he gained power of the Communist Party and the nation, and through language he maintained that power. The first step to do that was securing dominance over the media, cultural productions, mass organizations, and the educational system. This apparatus of control enabled Mao to manipulate the public opinion at a national level. The second step then was carrying out language reform in action.

As Mao attempted to manipulate the minds of the people through his linguistic engineering, he soon ran into a huge obstacle, illiteracy (Ji 56). The widespread illiteracy not only among peasants but also among the cadres themselves often hindered effective communication. Instructions were not delivered correctly, the different local dialects kept many people from understanding radio broadcasts, and isolation of many villages even further pushed people away from Mao’s influence. Improving literacy was critical in extending Mao’s power nationwide, and that meant providing people with a language that is easier to read and write. Thus created was the grand project of language reform. It was a three-pronged attack on Chinese
language, aggressively tackling it in different aspects of simplification of Chinese characters, development of standard national spoken language, and creation of a phonetic system.

Such a strong move for language reform was supported by many with enthusiasm but was also met by much concern and opposition. During the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1957, a rare period of time when people were allowed to criticize the government and contend against national policy issues, objections to Mao’s language reform poured forth. Tang Lan, for example, said, “I consider the reform of Chinese writing to be one of the most important problems concerning the cultural life of 600 million people… the proposals for the ‘phonetic spelling of Chinese’ are not practical at the present time and that it would be dangerous to enforce its use rather than permit the Chinese characters to develop further” (Tang 95, 98). His main concern was the argument of some radicals about creating a whole new writing system and replacing the characters script with it. He doubted whether the change in “the fundamental nature of writing” could become a reality. He insisted that China should create its own phonetic symbols derived from the Chinese characters instead of adopting Roman letters. Asserting that “the tendency toward a phonetic system is common to writing in every country of the world, but the form of writing in each state or nation has its own history,” Tang expressed his view on maintaining the tradition of China by proposing a synthetic writing system where phonetic characters would simply be added to the traditional Chinese characters (101).

Going along the same line of argument, Chen Mengjia (陈梦家, 1911-1966) was opposed to the simplification of Chinese characters promulgated by the government in 1956:

I myself do not agree with the method of current promulgation; the decisions were made without paying attention to details and promulgation was too hasty… in certain respects they are not scientific; they do not follow the mass line. It can be said too that they are divorced from the historical foundations of Chinese characters; they have made scientific work political work (158).
He strongly insisted that the Committee on Script Reform take more time on researching and deliberating on the simplification of Chinese characters. He believed that they should consider the possibility of greatly improving and developing the structure of Chinese characters and methods of teaching it rather than simply deciding that Chinese characters cannot be used, as some radicals argued. In his article Chen lays out his own outline and examples of simplification of Chinese characters and suggests different ways to approach the topic. He also makes a point that it is the masses who are interested in Chinese writing. There should be more meetings in which representatives from different areas would be present. The committee set up by the government should not dictate the entire process of language reform. He further criticizes the government for not listening to the masses and what they are interested in:

Writing reform concerns all who use Chinese characters, and the masses have the right to speak out about it; what they say may not be expert, but it is not necessarily wrong, and those of us who manage periodicals should publish all of it as expeditiously as possible. The masses are the great majority of the readers of periodicals, and they have more right than the ‘specialist’ minority to use these periodicals to express their opposition and their doubts (Guan 165).

Although people were allowed to express their views during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, there was still pressure not to speak their minds openly. In fact, the Hundred Flowers Campaign lasted only a brief period of time and was immediately followed by the anti-rightist movement, during which opponents of the Communist Party were sent in large numbers to rural camps. Many of the intellectuals who were persuaded to voice criticisms during the Hundred Flowers Campaign were consequently purged by the sweeping anti-rightist movement in late 1957 (Rozman 360).

In 1958, Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩来, 1898-1976) gave a speech at the National Political Consultative Conference, encouraging people to continue supporting the language reform,
saying, “The immediate tasks in writing reform are simplifying the Chinese characters, spreading the use of the standard vernacular, and determining and spreading the use of phonetic spelling of Chinese” (228). In his speech, he does acknowledge that there had been some defective problems in the process of character simplification and that arbitrary and random simplification of characters must stop. He also emphasizes that Chinese characters will be preserved. They will not be eradicated but simply be assisted by the creation of *pinyin* system to help ease the burden of learning the characters. At the same time, Zhou makes a clear statement that the debate is over and there is no going back in language reform. Indeed, a widespread and vigorous promotional activity ensued in the following years, with teachers, publicists, and cadres attending numerous regional conferences.

While Mao’s central motive for carrying out language reform was consolidating his own power in the government, modernization of China was another key goal of his language reform project. In one his speeches, Mao directly mentions the importance of language reform in revolutionizing and modernizing China:

Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed essential, fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution. People engaged in revolutionary cultural work are the commanders at various levels on this cultural front. “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement”;¹ one can thus see how important the cultural movement is for the practical revolutionary movement...To attain this objective, written Chinese must be reformed (given the requisite conditions) and our spoken language brought closer to that of the people, for the people, it must be stressed, are the inexhaustible source of our revolutionary culture (Mao 432).

Revolution, a transformation of society, was always in the top priority list of Mao’s political agenda. He wanted to modernize China according to his goals and objectives. In this speech, Mao emphasizes the need of China for a “new-democratic” culture and argues that

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¹ V. I. Lenin, “What Is to Be Done?”
language reform is what would make such transformation of China possible. The same thought on language reform was also reflected in Zhou Enlai’s speech at the National Political Consultative Conference in 1958:

We hope that everyone will support writing reform positively; that they will expedite the forward advance, not ‘expedite the retreat,’ of this work; that they will enable Chinese writing to move forward boldly to achieve a positive reform, and thus meet the needs of 600 million people in getting rid of their backward cultural attitudes, and the need to develop socialism more, faster, better, and more economically (Zhou 243).

Not only Mao himself but also the government expressed a strong interest in modernizing the nation. People recognized that language reform was one effective way of transforming the Chinese society, thus bringing about the “new-democratic” culture of the Chinese nation.

More than half a century has passed since the start of Mao’s language reform, and it is interesting to see how Chinese people today view the language reform. In an article titled “Looking at Debate on Traditional and Simplified Characters from 17 Points of View,” published in the newspaper Nanfang Baowang, writer Pei Yu says that simplification of Chinese characters was not only restricted to China but also to other countries that used Chinese characters as their writing system. Korea, Japan, and several other Southeast Asian countries have simplified the Chinese characters one way or another according to their own custom and circumstance. Pei argues that such language reform is a natural phenomenon for nations that have a written language that is difficult to learn. In order to communicate more efficiently with the West and to lessen the difficulty of learning the writing system in general, Romanization and simplification of language was the only measure for these countries to take.

According to Pei, Japan is actually the first country to reform Chinese characters. In 1946, Japan, encouraged by some indigenous movement, pushed for the simplification of traditional Chinese characters that it had been using for centuries. Today, the simplified Chinese
characters known as kanji are still a big part of the Japanese writing system. In Korea, although Chinese characters were no longer the national written language since the creation of its own writing system called *Hangul* in 1446, traditional characters are still used as a reference in newspaper, books, and public signs in Korea. Moreover, Chinese people living in Southeast Asian countries maintain using traditional characters as a way of keeping themselves in touch with the culture and preserving the tradition.

However, it is important to remember that the situation in China and the situation in other countries that still use Chinese characters are different in many ways. First of all, China is the origin of the Chinese characters, and it was after thousands of years of use in China that the writing system was adopted by other neighboring countries in Asia. Here, we need to understand that the Chinese characters, after once entering Korea and Japan, were simply a tool for these countries to use in their writing system. Spoken languages in Korea and Japan are completely different languages from spoken Chinese language, and because they did not have their own writing system at the time, they were only borrowing the Chinese characters to use as their written language in the meantime. Until they devised their own writing system, Chinese characters were a temporary means of written communication, and the usage of the Chinese characters in terms of syntax and grammar greatly differed from that in China.

Indeed, Japan simplified the Chinese characters even before China did, but we should not consider the Japanese simplification of Chinese characters and the Chinese simplification of Chinese characters as the same. For Japan, it was simply to figure out the best way for the Japanese to reflect their spoken language in their written language. But for China, the spoken language and written language have always coexisted since the beginning of the nation. To simplify and reform the written language in such a meticulous and systematic way held a much
deeper meaning and implication, playing an intricate role in the modernization of China throughout the 20th century.
CONCLUSION

The idea of modernization had existed in China even before the Opium Wars. But it is after the defeat in the Opium Wars that China truly aspired for modernization and a collective action, whether by intellectual drive or political drive, took place. Once China realized that it was lagging behind the technological, scientific, social, and cultural development that other parts of the world had already achieved, it began to actively pursue modernization in various ways. One of them was language reform. Language reform in fact was always present throughout the first half of the 20th century, whether initiated by small independent groups or systematically carried out by the government. I have examined in this paper two distinctive periods of language reform that took place in China: Vernacular language reform movement in the 1910-20s and Mao’s language reform in the 1950s. Each of these had different motives to begin with, but in the end they directed themselves toward achieving the same goal, whether intended or not – modernization of China.

In the following, I quote Hu Shi again, for he not only reflects the very nature of the vernacular language reform movement but also implies what language reform meant to China in a broader perspective during the process of modernization:

...[Leaders] want to instill into the people a new outlook on life which shall free them from the shackles of tradition and make them feel at home in the new world and its new civilization. They want a new scholarship which shall not only enable us to understand intelligently the cultural heritage of the past, but also prepare us for active participation in the work of research in the modern sciences. This, as I understand it, is the mission of the Chinese Renaissance (Hu 46-47).

Hu Shi knew very well that modernization was crucial to China in order to further advance itself in the world. To modernize meant not only achieving scientific development but
also attaining "cultural awakening," the change in the minds of the people. Hu gives an example of changing people’s thought by interaction with other parts of the world, specifically the West:

For ten long centuries, by a peculiar perversion of aesthetic appreciation, the bound feet of Chinese women were regarded as beautiful; but it took only a few decades of contact with foreign peoples and ideas to make the Chinese people see the ugliness and inhumanity of this institution...Contact with strange civilizations brings new standards of value with which the native culture is re-examined and re-evaluated, and conscious reformation and regeneration are the natural outcome of such transvaluation of values (Hu 47).

Just as interaction with foreign cultures helped the Chinese reevaluate their own culture and seek improvement, the language reform would also help the Chinese attain “a new outlook on life and society” and thus aim for further development, argues Hu. Indeed, by replacing wenyan with baihua, many more people were able to have access to various written works and were able to communicate with each other much more smoothly. Reflecting the vernacular language of people in their daily lives, baihua played a significant part in connecting them together and expanding their knowledge as a whole. People were able to gain an understanding of other cultures by reading foreign literature translated in baihua and develop a more comprehensive view of the world. Most importantly, this allowed them to reevaluate and reexamine their own culture and thinking, discovering areas to improve. Change from within is one of the most important aspects of modernization, and the Chinese certainly achieved that through the vernacular language reform movement.

During Mao’s era, the widespread illiteracy was a major problem that Mao was so intent on resolving. Increased literacy meant effective communication with the people, and this consequently meant a much stronger linguistic engineering by which Mao maintained his discourse community in China. In addition to the goal of consolidating his position and power in China, Mao also had the desire to modernize the nation, which according to him was to be
obtained through language reform. He recognized the importance of modernization, and he knew his language reform project would help China modernize, enabling the nation to advance itself in the world and excel in the global competition. As a result of his extensive and vigorous language reform policies, simplified characters are used throughout Mainland China along with Putonghua and the pinyin system. Literacy in China as of 2010 is 91.6 percent, a big jump from 10-20 percent in the early 20th century ("China Literacy").

Furthermore, the pinyin system has greatly helped China with its use of computers and communications networks. In the present-day digital and information age, information technology is an extremely important area to develop in order to gather and organize the endless amount of information that floods the cyberspace. The input and output facilities of the computer are best coordinated with the phonographic writing, which makes use of a relatively small number of basic units which are combined in a systematic way to represent the language (Chen, "Modern Chinese 145). Unfortunately, the Chinese character script is logographic and is quite complicated to incorporate it into the computer's input and output programs. Although the Chinese government put a tremendous amount of effort in solving the problem by developing more than 700 input schemes for the Chinese script in the 1980s, it still could not find the satisfactory scheme that was to be widely adopted. So far, the pinyin-character conversion is the most widely used system for input and output facilities of the computer. Without the pinyin system, China would have been lost as to how to manage the vast amount of information in cyberspace and would have had to rely solely on English or other phonetic language to resolve of the problem.

As explained previously, modernization comes in many different forms through many different ways. In this paper, I specifically focused on language reform in China and examined it
in relation to the modernization of China. Language greatly influences the minds of people, and how people think and perceive the world is intricately related to the development of their culture and society. This paper is far from sufficient to present a comprehensive view on the modernization of China, but I hope it has achieved its purpose of looking at language reform as one of the driving forces behind China’s modernization in the early 20th century.
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