

AN ARCHIVAL STUDY ON LINGUISTIC REFORMS IN PRE-MODERN EAST ASIA

(first draft 04/17/2016)

Hongyuan Dong

George Washington University

Abstract

This article first points out the shared linguistic resources in East Asia in countries including China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam, and how such commonalities have created similar challenges and tasks during the linguistic reforms in the period from the eighteenth century to early twentieth century. The challenges include diglossia, digraphia, mutually unintelligible dialects, lack of spoken standards, and etc. Correspondingly the tasks include reforms in the written language, the spoken language, the unification of the two, standardization, and etc. Then by using archival materials, mostly memorials to the throne in the Qing Dynasty of China, the rationale and arguments for the aforementioned linguistic reform tasks are examined via the views expressed by high-ranking officials in the imperial government, as an important link between the common intellectuals and the emperors. The archives show that high-ranking officials had a global view for the envisioned modern languages. They also carried out empirical trial runs and formulated comprehensive list of rationale and arguments for these linguistic reforms.

Key words: East Asian civilizations; linguistic reforms; language policy

Introduction: Defining East Asia

Imagine that you have never been to East Asia and now you are planning your first trip to one of the countries there. In order to be able to communicate with the local people to some extent, you want to learn the local languages. It is probably very straightforward for anyone what the object of study should be. You can literally pick up any textbook of the language, and be sure that you are learning the same language in these textbooks. Such modern forms of languages are usually what we call modern standard languages, which have been the achievements of linguistic reforms over a period of more than a hundred years, and they are constantly being regulated presently. However, records created by early European missionaries to East Asia in the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries tell us a quite different picture, where the object of learning, when it came to the study of languages, was not as straightforward as a modern learner can imagine (Brockey 2007). What was the linguistic situation back then and what kind of linguistic reforms were carried out that directly created the modern forms of languages in East Asia? What were some of the reform practices, and rationales? These are the central topics of this paper.

I will first illustrate what common challenges that the languages of East Asia faced during the linguistic reform era from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, especially at the turn of the twentieth century. Although many linguistic reform measures were not sufficiently implemented until the mid twentieth century, the main ideas were already in place by the early twentieth century. Thus the focus of this paper will be the origins of such linguistic reforms up until the early twentieth century. Then I will use archival materials, mostly memorials to the throne from the Qing Dynasty China, to study in more micro terms the rationale

and arguments behind the linguistic reforms. But before we set out on these two tasks, some terminological re-orientation is in order.

East Asia as a cultural sphere is defined differently from East Asia as a purely geographical notion. There is no doubt that China, Japan and Korea are countries in East Asia in any definition of the concept, and they have shared many cultural resources for thousands of years. However, Vietnam also shares many cultural resources with the other three countries just mentioned above, although geographically speaking, Vietnam belongs to Mainland Southeast Asia. Thus, let us define the “East Asia Cultural Sphere” as consisting of China, Japan, Korean and Vietnam (cf. Ramsey 2013). There are a few other terms that are more or less equivalent, e.g. Sinitic civilization (Kim-Renaud 2009, p. 1). In this article I will use the term “East Asia” in the sense of a cultural sphere.

Among the shared cultural and institutional resources in East Asia are or were common linguistic resources, philosophical traditions, religious practices, political institutions, and etc. (Reischauer 1974) The focus of this current study is on the linguistic, rather than the other aspects of cultures. More specifically, the writing systems in East Asia have had many similarities, and Literary Chinese has been an important linguistic resource in these countries.

However, when we are defining East Asia in terms of their shared linguistic properties, such a connection is to be understood in terms of contact, but not due to a known common origin. Actually all of the languages in these East Asian countries don't belong to the same language family at all. “Korean does not have a proven close linguistic relative. Many accept that it is related to Japanese and that both belong to the Tungusic branch of the Altaic family of languages, spoken mainly in Siberia and Mongolia.” (Kim-Renaud 2009, p. 1) Vietnamese belongs to the Austroasiatic language family, together with languages such as Khmer, while

Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, together with languages such as Tibetan and Burmese. The fact that all these East Asian languages belong to very different language families is an important aspect in the linguistic reforms. The intrinsic incompatibility between some of these languages and the shared linguistic resources was one of the major reasons for the challenges that East Asia faced during those reforms.

To sum up this section, the linguistic reform era refers to the eighteenth century to early twentieth century, especially at the turn of the twentieth century. The languages include Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese, i.e. the languages of the East Asia Cultural Sphere. These East Asian languages share many common resources due to close contact among them for thousands of years and their intrinsic linguistic differences are important factors for the challenges that the linguistic reforms faced.

Similar Challenges and Similar Reforms

The various linguistic reforms in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese have been quite abundantly documented and much research has been carried out, to varying extent, on the linguistic reforms in each language independently. Thus my discussion will draw on these previous studies, and my contribution here in this section is mainly the comparative perspective that brings all four languages into focus at the same time. I will argue that the shared cultural, especially linguistic, resources created similar challenges in these four linguistic communities in the pre-modern era, and such challenges engendered similar reform measures which ultimately led to the creation of modern standard languages in East Asia.

What was the linguistic situation before the linguistic reforms in these pre-modern East Asian countries? This is the starting point of the discussion.

One of the most obvious aspects is that Chinese characters have been a common source of writing in all of East Asia. All four languages either used to be written with Chinese characters in different ways and to varying degrees, or are still using Chinese characters now in their writing systems. The Chinese language has always been written using characters from at least the Oracle Bone script time in the late Shang Dynasty about 3200 years ago¹. The Chinese writing system consists of elements that represent either the semantic aspect or the phonetic aspect of the word, thus not being a purely phonetic system (Dong 2014, cf. DeFrancis 1984a). Even for the phonetic elements in Chinese characters, they were never reduced to a fixed number of symbols to represent the fixed number of sounds. Therefore even for the characters that contain phonetic elements, they can also be used *logographically* (Frellesvig 2010). Therefore such a logographic system can be used to write any language, even English.

In pre-modern East Asia, Chinese characters were widely used, and always adapted to local needs as necessary. However, because of the intrinsic linguistic differences among these languages, there were still certain aspects of the language that could not be effectively written down in characters. Moreover, learning Chinese characters were already quite a daunting task for the Chinese, and adding the linguistic barrier, such a learning task became multiply more challenging for the other three languages. Therefore local scripts, often phonetically based, were invented to either supplement the use of Chinese characters mostly in writing language-specific

¹ There was an attempt to write Chinese in a phonetic script called ‘Phags-pa in the Yuan Dynasty but it was never really in actual use even back then, and was soon forgotten after the Yuan Dynasty. On the other hand, there was a type of phonetic writing called *Nüshu* created to write a dialect in the Jiangyong prefecture, Hunan Province. Moreover, missionaries also created writing systems using the Latin alphabet for Chinese dialects. For example, the Pêh-ōe-jī for the Xiamen dialect, a Southern Min dialect. These were the only examples of Chinese written in a phonetic script. Therefore, on the whole, the Chinese language, especially Mandarin Chinese, has always been written in Chinese characters.

words, such as functional words and word shape changes, or used as an alternative form of writing for non-official purposes or by the common people. For example, hiragana and katagana syllabary scripts have been used in Japanese alongside *kanji* characters. The Vietnamese also invented Chữ Nôm, a logographic writing system similar to Chinese characters but more suitable for the Vietnamese language. For the Korean language, a phonetic script was created in 1443 by King Sejong the Great (reigned from 1418-1450) in order to make the common people more literate. This alphabetic script is now called the Hangeul script, the standard form of writing in use in Korea.

Thus it can be said that the same language was written in two different scripts, often the one being character-based, the other being phonetically based, in pre-modern East Asia, with the exception of Chinese. DeFrancis (1984b) appropriately called such a linguistic situation digraphia. Such a phenomenon was not only an answer to the challenges posed by Chinese characters to the non-Sinitic languages in East Asia, but also was a challenge to writing as a general concept in East Asia. The two types of writing were used in different social contexts. In official formal situations, the writing tended to use more Chinese characters, while in unofficial informal situations, the local scripts, often phonetically based, tended to be more popular because such scripts fitted the local languages better and they required much less effort to learn, thus being more effective in ameliorating literacy. However having two different scripts within the same linguistic community creates many problems, both practical and sociological. On the practical side, two scripts increased the amount of effort on learning to use both systems well enough. On the sociological side, such a division only re-enforced the hierarchical division in

society, thus perpetuating the authority of the male educated elite class over the “illiterate”² common people, or women of all social classes in many cases. Thus digraphia was a major linguistic challenge in pre-modern East Asia.

The use of Chinese characters is closely intertwined with the use of Literary Chinese in pre-modern East Asia. The term “Classical Chinese” is often used interchangeably with the term “Literary Chinese”. But there is a technical distinction. Classical Chinese is the language used in classical works such as the *Analects*. Thus it was the written record of the language spoken during the Old Chinese period (mostly first millennium BCE)³. After the Han Dynasty, i.e. from 220 CE on, Classical Chinese continued to be used as the written language in the form of Literary Chinese, while at the same time the spoken form started to diverge from Old Chinese gradually, and by the start of the Sui Dynasty (late sixth century), the spoken language was already very different, and it could be called Middle Chinese. At this point, the spoken form and the written form could be considered two different stages of the language. It would take a speaker of the Middle Chinese language a considerable amount of time to master the written language which was based on Old Chinese. Such a situation is a typical instance of diglossia.

² Even if the common people were literate in the local script, they could still be regarded as illiterate since they were not literate in the dominant form of writing.

³ There is no doubt that Classical Chinese texts were not a completely verbatim record of Old Chinese. There must have been modifications, e.g. omission and reduction, during the process of transcription from the spoken to the written. This, in combination with the problem of the so-called “disyllabification”, leads some scholars, e.g. Mair (1994), to conclude that Classical Chinese was always a written language, hence being “unsayable”, even during Old Chinese period. However, Mair (1994) also cites Tsu-Lin Mei’s arguments that Classical Chinese was “sayable” because of written forms for contracted words. There are other evidence for the “sayability” of Classical Chinese, e.g. existence of certain particles, existence of morphological changes, etc. Therefore I will still maintain the widely accepted view that Classical Chinese was the written record of Confucius spoken language.

Obviously we can talk about the degree of divergence between the two stages of the language in a diglossia situation as being proportional to the time depth of Old Chinese minus the time depth of the relevant stage of the spoken form. This degree of divergence was clearly quite daunting in the eighteenth century just before the linguistic reforms in East Asia.

Literary Chinese was also used as the official written language in Korea in the pre-modern times. For example, King Sejong's *Hunminjeongeum* ("The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People"), in which the Hangul script was introduced, was written in Literary Chinese. Moreover, according to Lee and Ramsey (2011, p. 287):

"In the middle of the nineteenth century, four different kinds of writing were used in Korea. Of the four, *Hanmun*, Classical Chinese, remained the most prestigious. It was the medium of choice for formal writing, at least among members of the elite"

Similarly in Vietnam, Literary Chinese was also used as a formal written language (DeFrancis 1977). Thus in a sense, this situation in pre-modern Korea and Vietnam was also a case of diglossia. The only difference is that the two languages here do not belong to different stages of the same language, but are two unrelated languages altogether.

Literary Chinese was also widely used and studied in pre-modern Japan in the form of *kanbun*. But the official written language was the Classical Japanese language, or *bungo*, which is based on Early Middle Japanese (of the Heian period 794-1185). By the eighteenth century, Classical Japanese had become quite different from the spoken Early Modern Japanese. The difference was great enough for the situation to be called "diglossia" (Frellesvig 2010).

In general, diglossia with a high degree of divergence creates many practical linguistic issues. It takes longer to master the written language, hence making literacy more challenging. It is also less suitable for expressing modern thoughts and ideas, especially when clarity and lucidity are important, such as in scientific and philosophical realms. Thus in pre-modern East Asia, diglossia was a major linguistic challenge.

The disadvantages of diglossia notwithstanding, there are indeed some practical advantages to the use of a different written language, especially when there are many mutually unintelligible forms of dialects. The uniform written language can facilitate cross-dialectal communication in the written form, and reduce the resources needed for educational and administrative aspects related to maintaining many different forms of writing for each dialect for educational and governmental uses.

The present linguistic situation in China is obviously very diverse, with both Sinitic languages and non-Sinitic language (Ramsey 1989). Even among the Sinitic languages, or the Chinese dialects⁴, not all spoken forms are mutually intelligible. For example, Cantonese, Taiwanese and Pekinese are not mutually intelligible unless speakers of one dialect have studied the other dialects. What about the dialects in the pre-modern times?

According to Dong (2015), an imperial edict issued by the Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty in 1728 can tell us exactly the kind of dialect situation back then, as follows:

⁴ Some scholars, e.g. Mair (1991), objects to the term “Chinese dialects” because the so-called dialects are often mutually unintelligible. He created the term “topolect” to better translate the Chinese concept of *fangyan*. To some extent, the Chinese term *fangyan* should just be rendered as “local speeches” which clearly captures the true meaning of the term. But in order to fully understand the term, it is important to know that *fangyan* is always mentioned in opposition to *tongyu* (“common language”). However I will still use the term “Chinese dialects” here because it has been the widely accepted standard terminology.

“Every time I receive subjects of different ranks, when they introduce themselves, only those from Fujian and Guangdong still use their own accents, which I cannot completely understand.”

It can be argued that with such diverse mutually unintelligible dialects, Literary Chinese as the common written language, could indeed have facilitated the written communication to some extent. Interestingly, Frellesvig (2010, p. 377) gives a similar account of the dialects in pre-modern Japan, which deserves a full quote:

“In the Edo period, geographical and social mobility was very low, and most people stayed all their life in the same place within provinces which were in effect isolated feudal states. This situation resulted in a large number of fairly small and self-contained speech communities. The linguistic diversity with lack of mutual intelligibility between many dialect which in Edo-period Japan is famous and is well illustrated by the following extract from Furukawa Koshōken’s *Tōyū zakki* (東遊雜記 ‘Notes from a journey to the east’), an account of a journey in 1788 to northern Honshu and Hokkaido, accompanying inspectors from the central government in Edo, where he describes experiences with the local dialects they encountered”

In one of the translated paragraphs provided by Frellesvig (2010, p. 377), it was said about the dialect in Nanbu (now Iwate prefecture) that “The language of both men and women was gibberish, with only two or three words out of ten being comprehensible.” This kind of social

and linguistic situation in 1788 Japan was so much comparable to the linguistic situation in 1728 China, as mentioned above.

Among the present-day dialects of Korean, only the Jeju dialect is not mutually intelligible with other dialects of Korean. It could be the case that in pre-modern Korea, there was a certain degree of mutual unintelligibility among the dialects although most of them were mutually intelligible. The dialects of modern Vietnamese are more or less mutually intelligible, and therefore it could also be the case that in pre-modern times, the Vietnamese dialects were also mutually intelligible.

Therefore we can say that before the linguistic reforms, there were many varieties of dialects in each linguistic community in East Asia, and in most of these linguistic communities, the dialects are not all mutually intelligible. Such diverse linguistic situations were clearly another challenging factor.

Alongside such linguistic diversity, the dialect spoken in the capital of these countries in pre-modern times was generally regarded as the common form of cross-dialectal communication. However, such a common form is not the same as a modern standard spoken variety that is codified by the government and taught in all schools. In pre-modern times, such a common spoken form “was more of an attitudinal stance on what was supposed to be the standard [spoken] language in polite society, or koine for practical purpose of inter-dialectal communication, rather than a reference to a specific speech form that was clearly used...” and “people in general did not feel the need for a proper instruction in pronunciation beyond the literary reading of characters” (Chen 1999, also cf. Mair 1994). Thus even though people could communicate using the dialect of the capital region, their linguistic performance was not uniform. Admittedly, for those who seldom had the need to leave their hometowns, they probably had no opportunity or

desire to learn the common spoken language at all. Therefore, we say that even though there was a common spoken language, there was however no explicit standardization or codification.

So far I have discussed four linguistic challenges in pre-modern East Asia: digraphia, diglossia, mutually unintelligible dialects and lack of spoken standards. These common challenges gave rise to common solutions.

First, linguistic reform on the writing system was systematically carried out in all of East Asia. One of the original goals for many reformers was to replace Chinese characters with a phonetically based script. Although Vietnamese used Chữ nôm to write the Vietnamese language, it was still not an efficient system compared to an alphabetical system. By the mid seventeenth century, a script based on the Latin alphabet, especially the Portuguese and French alphabets, had already been quite complete. Although this alphabet faced opposition for a long time, it was nonetheless established as the official script for Vietnamese in early twentieth century. For Korean, the Hangeul script was also established as the official script in the twentieth century, and Chinese characters are rarely seen nowadays in written Korean except for academic and legal books (Kim-Renaud 2009). For Japanese, there is more continuation since it still uses a mixed script with both *kanji* characters and the *kana* syllabaries, although the number of Chinese characters is more limited nowadays. For Chinese, we can also say that there is more continuation with tradition. Although the pinyin system was created in the 1950s based on earlier versions of Latin-based scripts⁵, it remains strictly an education tool and a Romanization standard. Although some may argue that it might be a new form of digraphia, e.g. the use of *ta* to

⁵ The Latin-based scripts can go as far back as the late Ming and early Qing dynasties when European missionaries studied Chinese with the help of the Latin alphabet, especially as used in Portuguese. But the first modern version is generally considered to be Lu Zhuangzhang's script invented in 1892 to write the Xiamen dialect. Mair (1994) also points out the religious connection of Lu Zhuangzhang.

avoid the gendered pronouns 他(him) / 她(her) written in Chinese characters, the language itself is still by and large written in Chinese characters.

Second in connection with the writing system reform was the reform of the written language. As I point out earlier, there was a situation of diglossia in pre-modern East Asia. There is one more aspect to add here in terms of the diglossia. Although the written language was based either on Literary Chinese or Classical Japanese, there was also a parallel system of vernacular writing in most of these countries where the local script was used more dominantly or in the case of vernacular Chinese, the same system of Chinese characters were used with some innovations to write down colloquial terms. Such vernacular writing was regarded as non-official, and non-elegant in most cases. Therefore there was quite a divide between the written form and the spoken form. One of the central themes of modern linguistic reform in East Asia was the uniformity between speech and writing, i.e. 言文一致. Such movements generally took place in the early twentieth century when Literary Chinese was gradually phased out, while at the same time, the traditional vernacular writing was modified to create the modern written language which is the written version of the modern language.

Third, with the diverse dialects in each country, there was a need to create a national language which would be taught in schools and used in all aspects of public life. This linguistic reform is the national language movement in East Asia. Alongside such a movement, there is also the need to officially codify and standardize the national language. With the promotion of the national language, the former dialects are being homogenized gradually. I will briefly illustrate these three aspects of the linguistic reforms in this paragraph.

To create a national language, a base dialect is needed in most cases. The natural choice is the dialect of the capital region. Modern Standard Korean is the most straightforward in

choosing the Seoul dialect as the national standard. According to Lee and Ramsey (2011, p. 292), “It is universally understood, the primary medium of communication everywhere; it is rapidly displacing all regional dialects and usages, especially among the young.” They further point out that the Pyongyang speech is essentially the same as Seoul, with slight differences.

In Japan, the situation was more complicated. According to Frellesvig (2010, p. 380), “Thus, in 1901, the Ministry of Education decreed that the Japanese language taught in schools should be that of Tokyo, whereby was meant *not* the language of the common people of the downtown area, but the language of the middle and upper classes of the Yamate area, in other words the descendant of the Edo-influenced variety of the common language.” He points out that the common language was based on the Kyoto speech. Therefore although the capital is Tokyo and the national language is based on Tokyo speech, this form is essentially the old Kyoto speech, thus there being a continuity with the common language in pre-modern Japan. With the spread of the national standard Tokyo speech, the dialects are also being homogenized.

Now moving on to Vietnamese, Pham (2008) points out that the Northern dialects, e.g. the Hanoi dialect, are often regarded as “standard” and “more correct”. On the other hand, Southern Dialects such as Saigon are often perceived as “less precise”, partly because the orthography favors the Northern Dialects, although “The Vietnamese writing system tries to capture all the different sounds found in any dialect of the language in its spelling system. However, there are some dialects which do not have certain difference in sounds.” (p. 24)

In Chinese, the situation is even more complicated because the dialects are all so different. During the 1911-1913 debate on the standard of the national language, scholars and representatives from major dialect regions argued for different standards and consequently a compromise was reached to use Beijing dialect as the base but incorporate major features from

other dialects, such as the entering tone, which still exist in all southern dialects, but long disappeared from most Mandarin dialects hundreds of years ago. This situation seems to resemble the orthography of Vietnamese. But in Chinese, the compromise continued to be debated and finally in 1932 it was decided that the national language should be solely based on the Beijing dialect. Now the national language called the Putonghua (“common speech”) in China is a continuation of the 1932 decision and it is regulated by the Ministry of Education constantly. With the spread of the national language, Chinese dialects are also being homogenized.

In this section, I first point out the similar challenges that linguistic reforms faced in pre-modern East Asia. These include digraphia, diglossia, mutually unintelligible dialects, lack of spoken standard, and then I describe the solutions in the linguistic reform movements to counter these challenges in creating a new national language, establishing a national standard, stopping the use of the Classical languages in favor of the vernacular written languages, and reforming the writing systems. The shared linguistic reality in pre-modern East Asia entailed similar solutions, which resulted in the standard versions of modern languages in both the spoken form and the written form, and with the spread of such standard national languages, dialects are being homogenized.

Rationale and Arguments: What can the archives tell us?

As I have pointed out earlier, the linguistic reforms have been well documented and relatively adequately researched in the broad themes in each language independently. The same facts and quotes are often cited and quoted among different scholars. Most studies sketch the major themes without really looking into any microhistorical details. Therefore I am more

interested in more textual analyses based on original documents in order to discover the inner thoughts of the people, rather than of the institution, which can be grasped by looking at the readily available official documents. This quest led me to doing archival research at the First Historical Archives of China housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing. Since many of the linguistic reforms were conceived during the late Qing Dynasty, the archives here are particularly interesting and due to the sheer size of the archive, not only is there still a large quantity of documents to be studied, but also many sections of the archives were not open to the public and some were only newly open to the public in a digital form available only on site.

One type of such archives is the memorial to the throne. These are direct correspondences from high-ranking officials to the emperor. In many cases, policy making started from such correspondences. The emperor would add his opinion on the reported issue and let relevant ministries know about them and work out the policy details. Previous studies mostly focus on major intellectuals in the linguistic reforms, e.g. Lu Zhuangzhang, Qian Xuanton, Wu Rulun, and etc. These intellectuals were at the forefront advocating for various aspects of the reforms mentioned in the previous section. However, unless such reforms were adopted by the government, their advocacy might not yield any tangible results. The high-ranking officials who communicated via the written memorial directly with the emperor had substantial policy-making persuasion power. Thus they could act as a bridge to facilitate the flow of ideas from the forefront of the linguistic reform movements to the decision making side on top of which was the emperor. Therefore archival studies of such memorials to the throne can reveal a great deal about the real rationale and arguments for the ultimate linguistic reform policies.

Another consideration to keep in mind is that I am only confining my research to the Chinese linguistic reforms here, hoping that such research can also be transferrable to some

extent to the reforms in other areas in East Asia, due to the similarities pointed out in the previous section.

The following table shows all the archived memorials to the throne related to the linguistic reforms in the Qing Dynasty since the eighteenth century until early twentieth century.

Table 1. Qing Archives of Memorials to the Throne related to linguistic reforms

Year	From Loc	From Whom	Topic
1734 (YZ12)	Fujian	Yang Bing, Provincial Education Commissioner	Recruiting Mandarin teachers
1735 (YZ13)	Fujian	Hao Yulin, Viceroy of Fujian	Promoting Mandarin in the military
1737 (QL2)	Fujian	Wang Shiren, Provincial Administration Commissioner	Sending Mandarin teachers to local towns
1737 (QL2)	Fujian	Hao Yulin, Viceroy of Min-Zhe	Discussing Wang's memorial
1749 (QL14)	Fujian	Tao Shiguang, Provincial Surveillance Commissioner	Promoting Mandarin in all Fujian
1750 (QL14)	Fujian	Ka'erjishan, Viceroy of Min-Zhe	Discussing Tao's memorial
1772 (QL37)	Fujian	Zhong Yin, Viceroy of Min-Zhe; Yu Wenyi, Provincial Governor	Investigating the Mandarin schools
1774 (QL39)	Fujian	Wang Xin, Provincial Education Commissioner	Revamping the Mandarin campaign
1906 (GX32)	Jiangning (Nanjing)	Zhou Fu, Viceroy of Liangjiang	Promoting Mandarin in Anhui and Jiangsu
1911 (XT2)	Beijing (?)	Yipu, title unknown	Linguistic problems in the frontier provinces and Mongolia
1911 (XT3)	Italy (?)	Wu Zonglian, Ambassador to Italy	Teaching the spoken national language in schools

The first column shows the year in which these correspondences were made. The notation in parentheses indicates the year and reign of the emperors. For example, YZ12 represents the twelfth year in the reign of the Yongzheng Emperor. QL2 represents the second year in the reign of the Qianlong Emperor. GX32 is the thirty-second year of the reign of the Guangxu Emperor, and XT2 is the second year of the reign of the Xuanton Emperor. In 1911, the Qing Dynasty was overturned and the Republic of China was founded in 1912. Many official documents were first drafted and distributed in the new Republic of China, but the major ideas had started years before in the late Qing Dynasty. Some of the high-ranking officials in the Qing Dynasty also assumed high offices in the new Republic of China. Therefore these memorials are still valuable documents without regard to the ultimate policy making outcomes.

A major feature of Table 1 is that there are two separate periods, the first one from 1734 to 1774, and then there was a long period without any documents. The second period starts from 1906 until 1911. I will call the first period the Mandarin Campaign period, and the second the National Language Movement period. As I have mentioned earlier in the previous section, in 1728 the Yongzheng Emperor issued an imperial edict to mandate teaching Mandarin (based on Beijing) in Fujian and Guangdong because he could not understand the officials from these provinces. This should be regarded as the origin of modern linguistic reform in China since it was the first time that government tried to teach the common spoken language in school, contrasting with earlier more laissez-faire approaches to the acquisition of such a lingua franca. Dong (2015) points out that the Mandarin Campaign failed partially due to lack of correct teaching methods, as shown by some of the memorials that mentioned that the Mandarin teachers mostly only taught reading ancient classics with literary pronunciations while not teaching

conversation in Mandarin. In contrast, in the National Language Movement period, we found that correct methods could be very effective. According to the report from Zhou Fu, Viceroy of Liangjiang in 1906, they experimented with a phonetically based script to teach people to speak Mandarin and it was very effective, shown as follows:

“In order to promote education, the writing system must be simple. In order to unify the different speeches, it is necessary to teach Mandarin. To approach Mandarin from the local vernaculars, phonetic letters are the simplest method. In order to make the common people benefit from this, a half-day classroom is especially appropriate. There are books and newspapers published in Mandarin using a phonetic script in the capital city, the letters used are very easy. For those who do not know how to read characters, learning this phonetic script can immediately make them write and convey their ideas. For those who do not know how to speak Mandarin, learning the phonetic script can make them speak Mandarin. This method is simple to learn, and it is indeed a good method to enlighten the people.....Last year we also opened such a half-day classroom in the provincial capital city Jiangning, and took in poor kids. Because all the local vernaculars in the south are among the most varied, it is the most difficult for people there to learn Mandarin. The original texts of the Mandarin publications were modified as necessary, and they could help students, on the basis of their own dialects, learn Mandarin. Such classroom programs were offered for months and it has been very effective, and several classes have graduated.”

In this paragraph, the first half clearly lays out the policy goals and how to achieve them. Basically the goal is to teach the common people Mandarin and promote education. The method is to use a phonetic script to teach training sessions. The second half shows empirical evidence for the effectiveness of such proposal methods. They have taught several classes of students to read the Mandarin publications and it can be inferred that with the new phonetic letters students could continue to learn how to read and speak Mandarin using the publications in the phonetic script that was taught to them.

Compared to the failed Mandarin Campaign in the eighteenth century, there are two major improvements to the methods here. First, they used a phonetic script here to teach students. In the Mandarin Campaign, there was no such phonetic script available. So the students would not have been able to remember much after their classes without phonetic letters to help them retain what they learned. Second, there were publications using the phonetic script now and these were more timely reading materials such as newspapers. Students could apply their reading knowledge to such texts and presumably newspaper articles contained more vernacular elements than ancient classics. No wonder the Mandarin Campaign failed while there were reported success stories here in the National Language Movement. Although the advantages seem more obvious for the non-Sinitic speakers in East Asia to use a phonetically based script to learn their own languages, we see that even for native Chinese speakers, such phonetic scripts are still quite effective. Nowadays, the pinyin system is used as an important teaching tool for both native speakers and learners of the Chinese language.

Apart from such phonetic scripts, there were other methods to promote education and Mandarin. According to a memorial to the throne written by Wu Zonglian in 1911 when he was the Imperial Commissioner to Italy, he proposed further measure.

“I propose to have an order issued by the Ministry of Education to all schools, private or government-sponsored, to add a course in the national language From the start when a student enters the school to learn how to read, ask the teacher to teach the student Mandarin pronunciation, and forbid him from using local speech. Moreover relevant government departments should be entrusted with the task of compiling textbooks, and ask them to submit their textbooks to the Ministry of Education for approval.”

The Ministry of Education, 學部, in the late Qing Dynasty was established in 1905 as part of the overall reform measures. Although it only existed for six years before the Qing Dynasty was overturned, it was a milestone in the education reform in China. Many educational policies can be traced to this period. However the archives related to the Ministry of Education of the Qing Dynasty were not open as of my visit.

Now in this memorial, Wu Zonglian laid out many policy points including curriculum building and textbook compilation. After the Qing Dynasty was overturned, Wu Zonglian continued to hold high offices. The Republic of China government eventually compiled national language textbooks and created a course in the national language. What is also worth noting here is that he advocated for a strict Mandarin-only policy. This policy is still being enforced in many schools in China, where a student could be punished scholastically, e.g. getting reduction of grade points, if caught speaking a local dialect.

So far we have seen that by 1911, the major policy points for creating modern standard Chinese were already in the pipeline, as proposed by high-ranking officials to the emperor. Such

measures include creating and using a phonetic script, creating a course in the National Language, and compiling textbooks. On the other hand, the various rationale for carrying out such linguistic reforms is also quite systematically formulated in many places.

For example, in the same memorial from Wu Zonglian, he listed three problems with the mutually unintelligible dialects. First, without a common spoken language, education is definitely to be hindered. If someone has a question about something, he does not necessarily find the answer among the teachers in his local place. If he asks people from outside, they might not completely understand each other. Second, public debates and speeches can also be affected by possible misunderstanding due to linguistic issues. Third, for building the commercial and industrial sectors, a national language is also necessary for achieving success.

If the rationale made here by Wu Zonglian still sounds unsystematic, the arguments made by Yipu Suludai in a long memorial in 1911 summarized almost all of the major arguments for the importance of a national language. Although Yipu Suludai's exact identity and position in government are still quite unclear, it can be assumed that he could have been among the privileged few that could communicate with the emperor.

First Yipu had a global perspective. According to this memorial:

“The current time is one of the five major continents of the world interacting with each other, and with respect to foreign languages, our country has a specialized program for making communication clear and convenient...Upon a survey of the situation of various countries, once they acquired a new territory, they would order the local people to learn the capital city speech of their own country, and these measures were very effective.”

Although we don't know what countries he surveyed, it seems to suggest that he was referring to the colonial language policy in many parts of the world, and he realized that for an empire with vastly disparate languages, it has always been a common practice to have a common language. In this respect he included the non-Sinitic languages in the discussion. For example, he especially discussed Mongolia as an important frontier region and its close connection with the Qing Empire. He argued that due to the different languages, the Sinitic culture could not be sufficiently assimilated by the Mongols, and consequently they were not as developed. Thus Yipu considered a common language the key to education, and then to closer connections, and to a more secure frontier.

Such a view is indeed quite refreshing, because most previous suggestions only focused on the various Chinese dialects while ignoring the non-Sinitic languages. In this memorial, probably due to his own identity of being a Manchu nobleman, he viewed Qing China as a multi-ethnic empire which was in need of a defining national language in order to secure the national frontiers. It is interesting to note here that familiarity with overseas linguistic situations was a key factor during the reform movement across East Asia. Lee and Ramsey (2011, p. 288) point out that when the mixed script replaced Literary Chinese in Korean in the early twentieth century, "One of the most important works in bringing about this reform was Yu Kilchun's travel diary, *Söyu kyönmun* 西遊見聞 ('Observations on a Journey to the West'), a work he published in 1895" about his travels in Europe and America.

The second point that Yipu raised is regarding the newly envisioned constitutional monarchy as he reasoned:

“People from all the provinces must regularly convene to discuss issues, and when they try to negotiate or debate, they might not convey their ideas clearly, or there might be misunderstandings, and even to the point of not knowing what it was all about. In such a situation, how would an agreement be reached? If people can use the common language, then when they discuss issues, their ideas are clear. They won’t talk past each other, and the actions can be carried out without frustration.”

This is another important point that had not been raised by others, although Wu Zonglian alluded to this point by referring to public debating and speeches. Here for the first time, Yipu associated a national language with the advancement of democracy.

The third point that Yipu made is regarding government administration and legal matters. He pointed out that:

“People from the north could go to the south to hold a government office, and vice versa. When hearing a legal case, the government official and the people could not understand each other, and they would have to use a local interpreter to communicate between them, which would lead to problems. Therefore if the language of the legal court is Mandarin, then such problems can be immediately removed.”

This is also a new point that no one before him had raised either.

The fourth point is regarding the military. He pointed out that the soldiers and the officers in the military were from different areas and if they could not communicate effectively, it could be a big problem. Therefore all people in the military should learn Mandarin, and this would not only make them communicate with each other clearly, but also make them feel closer to each other like relatives.

Actually as early as 1735 in a memorial to the throne written by Hao Yulin, Viceroy of Fujian (see Table 1), he had already listed many concerns with the mutually unintelligible dialects in the army. Teaching Mandarin was already on the minds of major officials during the Mandarin Campaign period. However there is no record of these concerns being addressed back then. Here again, Yipu addressed this same question as part of a treatise on the importance of teaching Mandarin in all of China.

To summarize the points made by Wu Zonglian and Yipu Suludai, they listed a wealth of reasons and arguments for the teaching of Beijing Mandarin in all walks of life and in all of Qing China. The national language would ameliorate education and literacy; promote communication among people; facilitate economic development; secure frontiers and national security; strengthen the military; facilitate parliamentary politics and democracy; facilitate government administration and legal affairs. These are quite convincing and well argued points. Adding to this the effectiveness of the phonetic script reported by Zhou Fu in 1906, and the various proposals of curriculum reform and textbook compilations, it seems now the major linguistic reform ideas and measures are in place, awaiting for the final decision from the government and the implementation of these measures. Generally after the 1920s, many linguistic reforms were carried out step by step in East Asia, which resulted in the current modern standard languages.

Conclusion: A Deeper Connection

So far I have shown how East Asia has shared many cultural, especial linguistic resources, for thousands of years, which also posed some challenges unique to East Asia during the process of creating modern languages. The measures that each language took were also very similar. Then I focused on archives from the Qing Dynasty to show how policy makers viewed such linguistic reforms. Because of the similar tasks of linguistic reforms, I would argue that the same rationale and arguments found in the archival studies here were also true to East Asia as a whole, to different extents, and in varying degrees depending on the specific local contexts.

The making of modern standard languages in East Asia has been a process which is comparable to the same coin that has two opposing sides: one being the goal of Europeanization, the other being that of turning away from the shared cultural traditions, which were the defining characteristics of East Asia Cultural Sphere. Therefore the making of modern East Asia is also the unmaking of East Asia as a cultural sphere. In some sense, without the shared cultural and institutional traditions, East Asia is just defined geographically, and with the globalizing trends going on up to now for decades, this area is losing its definition both as a cultural sphere and as a geographically well-defined notion, because of the disappearing notion of the local vs. the global. Scholars continue to talk about East Asia as a cultural sphere, but now the question is: Can we still say that East Asia is a cultural sphere? Or does any such statement have to be framed in the past tense? I do not have an answer to this. However, I would like to point out certain bonding factors that are still at work at a deeper level.

First, all of the languages in East Asia share a large percentage of vocabulary. Even when the different scripts, e.g. the Hangul script, and the Vietnamese script, can disguise such similarity to some extent, people from different countries can still discover the similarities upon

a cursory auditory exercise. Students of East Asian languages are often amazed by how much the vocabulary sounds alike, and they are more often than not happy about such a shared resource that can definitely help with their language acquisition process. On the other hand, such shared linguistic resources, albeit at a deeper level, can facilitate the cultural flows and exchanges within the area, compared to outside the area.

Second, there is no doubt that Chinese characters are still quite the essential symbol of Chinese culture within China. Although the original proponents of simplification of Chinese characters envisaged the simplification as a transition period towards alphabetical writing, e.g. using pinyin as the writing system of Chinese, nowadays no one is even considering elevating the status of pinyin at all, and even more interestingly, there are quite many people who are using both traditional and simplified forms of Chinese characters in different sociolinguistic contexts. Outside China, there is still a minority of people who are still interested in their own traditions and Chinese characters, even in areas where they have stopped using them. Lee and Ramsey (2011, p. 289) report that there was a small resurgence in popularity of Chinese characters during the first decade of the twentieth century. Some mixed script advocates continued to emphasize the importance of Chinese-character in education. Although they conclude by saying that it is unlikely for Korean to switch back to a mixed script, it can still be argued that without a good understanding of Chinese characters, it is not possible to fully understand East Asia.

References:

- Brockey, Liam Matthew. 2007. *Journey to the East: the Jesuit mission to China, 1579-1724*. Belknap Press.
- Chen, Ping. 1999. *Modern Chinese: History and Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press

- DeFrancis, John. 1977. Colonialism and language policy in Viet Nam, Mouton.
- DeFrancis, John. 1984a. Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy. University of Hawai'i Press.
- DeFrancis, John. 1984b. Digraphia. *Word* 35: 59–66.
- DeFrancis, John. 1989. Visible speech: The diverse oneness of writing systems. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Deng, Hongbo 邓洪波. 1994. Mandarin Academies and the Mandarin Campaign in the Qing Dynasty (正音书院与清代的官话运动). *Journal of East China Normal University* 3: 79-86. Shanghai, China.
- Dong, Hongyuan. 2014. *A history of the Chinese language*. New York, NY, USA and Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Dong, Hongyuan. 2015. Mandatory Mandarin: An Archival Study of Qing Dynasty Language Policy, public lecture given at Western Michigan University on January 15, 2015, sponsored by the Timothy Light Center for Chinese Studies. Kalamazoo, Michigan.
- Fogel, Joshua A. 1997. The Sinic World. In Embree, Ainslie Thomas; Gluck, Carol, *Asia in western and world history: A guide for teaching*, M.E. Sharpe, pp. 683–689.
- Frellesvig, Bjarke. 2010. A history of the Japanese language. Cambridge University Press.
- Hannas, William. C. 1997. *Asia's orthographic Dilemma*. University of Hawaii Press
- Hashimoto, Mantaro. 1978. The current state of Sino-Vietnamese studies. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 6, 1–26
- Ji, Fengyuan. 2004. Linguistic engineering: language and politics in Mao's China. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kim-Renaud, Young-Key. 2009. Korean: An Essential Grammar (Routledge Essential Grammars). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Kornicki, Peter Francis. 2011. A transnational approach to East Asian book history. In Chakravorty, Swapan; Gupta, Abhijit, *New Word Order: Transnational Themes in Book History*, Worldview Publications, pp. 65–79.
- Lam, Mariam Beevi. 2006. The cultural politics of Vietnamese language pedagogy. *Journal of Southeast Asian Language Teaching*, Vol 12:2. pp.1-19.
- Lee, Iksop and Ramsey, S. Robert. 2000. *The Korean language*. SUNY Press.
- Lee, Ki-Moon, and Ramsey, S. Robert. 2011. *A history of the Korean language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mair, Victor H. 1991. What is a Chinese dialect/topolect. *Sino-Platonic Papers*. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- Mair, Victor H. 1994. Buddhism and the rise of the written vernacular in East Asia: The making of national languages. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 53.3. pp. 707-751
- McAuley, T. E. (ed.) 2001. *Language change in East Asia*. Routledge.
- Miller, Roy Andrew. 1967. *The Japanese language*. University of Chicago Press
- Norman, Jerry. 1988. *Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Pham, Andrea Hoa. 2008. The Non-Issue of Dialect in Teaching Vietnamese. *Journal of Southeast Asian Language Teaching*. Vol. 14, pp. 22-39.
- Ramsey, S. Robert. 1989. *The languages of China*. Princeton University Press.
- Ramsey, S. Rober. 2013. The languages of East Asia: What does it mean to be East Asian? Lecture given at the George Washington University on October 18, 2013.
- Reischauer, Edwin O. 1974. The Sinic world in perspective. *Foreign Affairs* 52 (2): 341–348.
- Swale, Alistair. 2009. *Meiji Restoration : monarchism, mass communication and conservative revolution*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Twine, Nanette. 1991. *Language and the modern state: The reform of written Japanese*. Taylor and Francis.
- Unger, J. Marshall. 2004. *Ideogram : Chinese characters and the myth of disembodied meaning*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Wang, Hui. 2002. "Modernity" and "Asia" in Chinese history. In Fuchs, Eckhardt; Stuchtey, Benedikt, *Across cultural borders: historiography in global perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 309–333.
- Wu, Yongbin 吴永斌. 2008. A Preliminary Analysis of the Mandarin Campaign in the Yongzheng-Qianlong era (试析雍乾年间的官话运动). *Journal of Research on Education of Ethnic Minorities (民族教育研究)* 2:113-116. Beijing, China.
- Zhao, Shouhui, and Baldauf, Richard B. Jr. 2008. *Planning Chinese characters: reaction, evolution or revolution?* Springer.
- Zhou, Minglang, and Sun, Hongkai (eds.) 2004. *Language policy in the People's Republic of China: theory and practice since 1949*. Springer.