

Chapter 2

The Standard Language

What is the historical linguistic background that preceded Wei Jiangong's activity? What existing concepts of standard language could he rely on? How can his activities be seen in a greater context? This chapter provides general information before we begin discussing Wei's own writings and concepts.

2.1 General Development

Recent scholarship has questioned some widespread views on the Chinese language situation of the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, Shang Wei deconstructed the diglossic opposition of classical and vernacular languages presented by the May Fourth language reformers.¹ Simmons doubted that the Beijing dialect was always the reference point for the standard language. He pointed out that a mixed standard still enjoyed popularity until the 1940s in the form of Latinxua Sinwenz. In the Qing dynasty, the *koiné* of the imperial officials was based on the Mandarin dialects of the Jiangnan 江南 region.² While all the technical terms and details will be discussed below, I will describe a few general developments in seven steps. In this way, I can set the scene for Wei Jiangong and his colleagues' construction of Northern Mandarin as a standard language.

The first step is the nation-building project and the need to make China competitive in a modern world. Language is seen as a key criterion for national unity, which is jeopardized by many centrifugal forces in the late Qing and the Republican era. This would include wars, the warlords, supporters of a federation, and the ethnic pluralism. The perceived lack of both a standard language and a phonetic script was seen as an impediment for achieving modernity or even the cause

1 Shang, Wei, "Writing and Speech: Rethinking the Issue of Vernaculars in Early Modern China", in: *Rethinking East Asian Languages, Vernaculars, and Literacies, 1000–1919*, ed. by Elman, Benjamin A., Leiden: Brill, 2014, 254–301.

2 Simmons, Richard VanNess, "Whence Came Mandarin? Qing Guānhuà, the Běijīng Dialect, and the National Language Standard in Early Republican China", in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 137 (2017), 63–88, see 65.

for China's looming annihilation. These issues can be seen as "imported" from the West: modernity, nationalism, or the prejudice that Chinese is somehow unfit for modern times.

The second step is the *baihua* 白話 vernacular literature project. As outlined by Jeffrey Weng, the intellectuals involved envisaged a new kind of society where "all the nation's people would have access to the new official language".³ This democratic concept of language as universally understandable, however, yielded only a written and not an actual spoken standard. This is where Wei Jianguo enters the language discussion.

The third step is Mandarin (*guanhua* 官話), itself a challenging term: it denotes not only several distinct language varieties but also Modern Standard Chinese.⁴ The term itself shows its constructed legacy as the language of the officials (*guan* 官), the Mandarins. That Mandarin was a supra-regional standard language and evidence of this in the form of rhyme books and foreign language glossaries make Mandarin seem like the ideal solution. Yet, this standard was only loosely defined, and it is unclear if it was really a spoken *koiné* of all people or just a *lingua franca* of the small group of scholar-officials. Furthermore, as Coblin already argues, the standard shifted from a southern to a northern pronunciation,⁵ and Simmons has pointed to the example of the 1805 *Lishi yinjian* 李氏音鑑 (Mr. Li's discriminating appraisal of pronunciations) that a mixed phonology of several Mandarin dialects might have been rather widespread.⁶

The fourth step is the introduction of the Beijing dialect as the standard.⁷ Step three and four should be examined synchronously, since the concept of Mandarin played the main role as a legitimizing argument for the Beijing dialect. While the linguists and language reformers saw the potential of the Beijing dialect as one of many Mandarin varieties with many native speakers and several mutually intelligible sister dialects, their argument went rather directly from the old, eclectic *guoyu* to the Beijing dialect, and Mandarin as a legitimizing link gained preva-

3 Weng, Jeffrey, "What is Mandarin? The Social Project of Language Standardization in Early Republican China", in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 77.3 (2018), 611–633, see 611.

4 On the different dimensions of "Mandarin", such as a local variety, a dialect family, a common language of the scholar-officials and standard language, see: Sanders, Robert M., "The Four Languages of 'Mandarin'", in: *Sino-Platonic Papers* 4 (1987), 1–14. and below. On the differences between the standard language in the PRC and in Taiwan, see: Klöter, Henning, "Tāiwān/PRC Divide and the Linguistic Consequences", in: *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Sybesma, Rint, et al., vol. 4, Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017, 260–263.

5 Coblin, W. South, "A Brief History of Mandarin", in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120.4 (2000), 537–552.

6 Simmons, Richard VanNess, "Whence Came Mandarin? Qīng Guānhuà, the Běijīng Dialect, and the National Language Standard in Early Republican China" (2017), 64, 68ff.

7 To be exact, even before the introduction of the pronunciation of a Beijing-pronunciation-based Mandarin as official standard language, reformers like Wang Zhao 王照 (1859–1933) saw the Beijing dialect as standard Mandarin pronunciation. Wang Zhao proposed a transcription for the Beijing pronunciation called "Mandarin syllabary" *Guanhua* [hesheng] *zimu* 官話 [合聲] 字母. Cf. Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 132–134. For a table of Wang's characters see Zhou Youguang 周有光, *Hanzi gaige gailun* 漢字改革概論 [Introduction to the reform of the Chinese characters], Aomen 澳門: Erya she 爾雅社, 1978, 59. and for Wang's adventurous biography, see De Francis, John, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (1957), 40ff.

lence in their legitimization reasoning afterwards. The advocacy of the Beijing dialect, however, proved rather difficult: the Republic was subject to all kinds of centrifugal forces and political unrest, and many intellectuals still harbored disdain for the Manchu rulers, who were associated with their capital, Beijing. Some of these intellectuals were actually southerners, and the Beijing dialect was a foreign tongue to them.

This leads us to step five: providing the Beijing dialect with historical legitimacy. Wei Jiāngōng's main activities in language planning can be subsumed under this step. He and the other linguists constructed a historical legitimacy for the Beijing dialect and argued why only Beijing Mandarin is a feasible national standard language. They use tradition and traditional methods to legitimize Beijing Mandarin, such as presenting its historical pedigree. At the same time, they used modern linguistics for legitimization by demonstrating its suitability as a standard.

Step six is the implementation of the Beijing-based standard with a notable number of traditional tools. A successful implementation in turn provided the language reform endeavors with additional legitimacy, as I demonstrate in the Chapter on Taiwan.

The seventh and last step is the change of rhetoric in the PRC: While at its core, *putonghua* is the same language as *guoyu*, the legitimization strategies had to be cleansed of all Republican-era nationalist rhetoric and fully integrated into the Marxist narrative of class struggle. This not only provided legitimacy for the PRC language policies but also delegitimized the ROC.

2.2 Background

The main part of this dissertation deals with Wei Jiāngōng's involvement in the planning of the “national language” *guoyu* 國語. At the time, *guoyu* referred to the standard language of the Republic of China (ROC) and is still the name of the standard language in Taiwan. Wei Jiāngōng was involved in its planning and promotion during the Republican era on the Chinese Mainland and in Taiwan from 1946 to 1948. His activities during his stay in Taiwan will be discussed in the next chapter. While the Republic of China in Taiwan still refers to their standard language as *guoyu*, Wei Jiāngōng returned to the Mainland in 1948 and continued living in the People's Republic of China, where the standard language was to be called *putonghua* (common speech).

The establishment of *guoyu*, however, was neither fast nor easy. During its long history as an empire, China was in a state of diglossia: the educated elite expressed themselves in the prestigious classical literary language *wenyan* 文言, while the spoken language of the rest of the population was divided into many dialects.⁸ To understand each other, the scholar-officials, who were usually in

⁸ According to Ferguson, the prestigious language variety is usually referred to as “High” = H, the less prestigious regiolects as “Low” = L. Ferguson, Charles A., “Diglossia”, in: *Word* 15 (1959), 325–40. The extent of diglossia as a suitable description for the Chinese language landscape is disputed;

positions far away from their hometowns, reportedly spoke “Mandarin” *guanhua* 官話” as a sort of *koiné*.¹⁰ I use the term *koiné* instead of *lingua franca*. The former refers to one supra-regional language variety that is part of the main language in a given speaker community, while the latter can also denote a language that is not related at all to the prevalent languages and is a third language used by two speakers of mutually unintelligible languages to communicate.

This is just a coarse, broad-brush description of the Chinese language situation before the 20th century that excludes many important details. However, it would be helpful to explain why China faced the “language question” (*questione della lingua*)¹¹ at the turn of the century and debated it extensively during the New Culture Movement.

As early as 1898, Qiu Tingliang 裘廷梁 (1856–1943) expressed the view that the fact that the European nations each used their own vernacular dialect in writing and no longer relied on Latin or Greek enabled their entire populace to become educated and dominate the world.¹² He coined the euphemism “plain speech” (*baihua*) to refer to the vernacular that was formerly called “vulgar speech” (*suhua* 俗話) in his 1898 article “Baihua is the root of modernization” (Lun Baihua wei weixin zhi ben 論白話為微信之本).¹³ Shocked by the might of the Western powers and rapidly modernizing Japan, previously regarded as a tributary state of Chinese empires, Chinese intellectuals also wanted to modernize quickly and find an answer to the question of national language. In particular, the victory of Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) was seen as an outcome of the general education system that was recently implemented. Therefore, Chinese reformers wanted to introduce mass education to strengthen China and its position in the world. They began to debate if and how the Chinese language could serve such an education system.¹⁴

Shortly after the establishment of the Republic of China (Zhonghua minguo 民國) in 1913, the Conference for the unification of reading pronunciations (Duyin tongyi weiyuanhui 讀音統一委員會) convened and decided that an amalgam of

it may be more accurate to speak of different styles. Cf. Vetrov, Viatcheslav, “Zur Dekonstruktion des Un/Gesunden in philologischen Taxonomien: Westlich-chinesischer Renaissance-Diskurs”, in: *Oriens extremus* 51 (2012), 231–268. Rosner, Erhard, *Schriftsprache: Studien zur Diglossie des modernen Chinesisch* (Chinathemen 74), Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1993. Sun Dejin 孙德金, *Xiandai shumian Hanyu zhong de wenyan yufa chengfen yanjiu* 现代书面汉语中的文言语法成分研究 [Research of the *wenyan* grammatical components in modern written Chinese], Beijing 北京: Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 2012.

9 Wilkinson, Endymion, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) / London 5: Harvard University Press, 2018, 25.

10 An explanation and discussion of the term as well as scholarship and the development of *koinés* is covered by Siegel, Jeff, “Koinés and koineization”, in: *Language in Society*, 14.3 (1985), 357–378.

11 The *questione della lingua* was a topic in Italy during the Renaissance. See: Hall Jr., Robert A., “The Significance of the Italian ‘Questione della Lingua’”, in: *Studies in Philology* 39.1 (1942), 1–10.

12 Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 77.

13 Qiu Tingliang 裘廷梁, “Lun Baihua wei weixin zhi ben” 論白話為維新之本 [Baihua is the root of modernization], in: *Zhongguo guanyin baihuabao* 中國官音白話報 [China Mandarin pronunciation vernacular journal] 20 (1898), 1–4. Qiu’s article is discussed by Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 106.

14 Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 77.

the pronunciation habits of many dialects should be the standard. While school curricula gradually included more and more of the national language (first the written standard *guowen* 國文, then, the spoken standard, *guoyu*), this heterogeneous pronunciation faced criticism. This first national pronunciation standard came to be known as “old national pronunciation” *lao guoyin* (or blue-green Mandarin, see 4.1.1, page 99). In the 1920s then, it was replaced by the “new national pronunciation” *xin guoyin*, which was modeled on the Beijing dialect. While this decision is similar to the *questione della lingua* in that the issue was solved by adopting the Chinese equivalent of Tuscan, namely the Beijing dialect as one of the many Chinese dialects, it was actually, as perceived by Wei Jiangong, a little bit more than that: the Beijing-based *guoyu* also incorporates, according to Wei Jiangong and other linguists, a certain history as court language and as a *koiné*.

Using the example of Wei Jiangong’s writings, this dissertation will demonstrate that the Beijing dialect was constructed as an inevitable standard language. Wei argued that Beijing not only served as the political center of the last three dynasties but also as the linguistic center with a long-standing pronunciation standard. The Beijing dialect is framed by Wei Jiangong as the representative form of the Mandarin dialect group and a product of the city’s melting-pot nature. He argued that the Beijing dialect provided the pronunciation standard for a Chinese *koiné* spoken among the scholar-officials: Mandarin, *guanhua*. However, it remains to be seen which exact kind of pronunciation standard was intended by that. More detailed explanations are provided below.

The first intellectual movement for the vernacular was the so-called *baihuawen yundong* 白話文運動, the movement for a *written* vernacular language, led by the famous Hu Shi. But what about the actual *pronunciation*? This is exactly the question Wei Jiangong addresses in his capacity as historical phonologist and dialectologist. For Wei and the other participants of the national language movement (*guoyu yundong*), such as Li Jinxi, the following statement by Yuen Ren Chao (Zhao Yuanren) is true:

The phonological aspects of Mandarin have always been the main concern of those who have taken part in the unification of the language.¹⁵

Phonology (*yinyunxue* or *shengyunxue*; the study of sounds and rhymes, or the study of initials and rhymes) is one of the three main disciplines of the traditional Chinese philology, the “minor studies” *xiaoxue*. Wei Jiangong and his colleagues, well-versed in classical Chinese scholarship, and eager learners of scientific methods recently developed in the West, transformed this auxiliary science for the exegesis of the Confucian classics into a tool for modern-day language planning. Apart from the linguistic main aspect, nationalism and the struggle for universal education provided the political and social framework.

As stated in the introduction, in the beginning of the 20th century, the Chinese intellectuals found themselves in an identity crisis. Levenson described in his three-volume *Confucian China and its Modern Fate* how Confucianism as the

15 Chao, Yuen Ren, “Some Contrastive Aspects of the Chinese National Language Movement”, in: *Aspects of Chinese Sociolinguistics*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976, 97–106, see 101.

traditional Chinese frame of reference had eroded away. In the late 19th century, Confucianism was gradually no longer being practiced and had lost its influence on society as a result of the promotion of “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application” (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong* 中學為體，西學為用).¹⁶ This was subsequently paired with the iconoclastic rejection of traditional Chinese beliefs.¹⁷ Some modernizers, such as Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), went so far as to call for the suppression of everything that was considered impractical.¹⁸

An element perceived as impractical and an impediment to modernization, and therefore necessary universal education, was the Chinese language and script. They were even seen as inferior to those of the West. The new goal was a national standard language like any other full-fledged “nation”. This endeavor can be seen in connection with all the other pursuits of transforming the former Qing Empire into a modern nation-state.

Therefore, it is quite unsurprising that language planning endeavors during the Republican era are framed in nationalist narrative, which include the struggle for progress of China and raising the populace’s level of education. National cohesion and international competitiveness represent the master discourse. Also present, but in an increasingly subversive manner, was the socialist inspiration.¹⁹ It was to gain the upper hand with the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, and class struggle was established as master narrative of the simplification of the script, which I discuss in the last chapter.

Three interdependent levels can be distinguished in Wei Jianguong’s activities: description, standardization and promotion of *guoyu*. In less abstract terms, these activities consist of research, contestation and teaching, or more general, prescription. In these activities themselves, or in the texts about them, he presents his concepts of language and linguistics. They form the basis of this discussion and are always examined against a political background.

The following chapter 3 (page 51) describes Wei Jianguong’s journey from activist to language planner. He started as a Peking University student who took

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- 16 Levenson, Joseph R., *Confucian China and its Modern Fate – Volume Two: The Problem of Monarchical Decay*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, 114.
- 17 Levenson, Joseph R., *Confucian China and its Modern Fate – Volume One: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, xiii.
- 18 Levenson, Joseph R., *Confucian China and its Modern Fate – Volume One: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (1958), 125. While Chen and leftist circles in the 1920s and 30s did indeed see the old education as “poison left over from feudalism”, they also perceived the anti-traditional critiques of liberal intellectuals such as Hu Shi or Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940) as surrender to Western “cultural aggression” and imperialism. See Levenson, Joseph R., *Confucian China and its Modern Fate – Volume One: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (1958), 126, 141.
- 19 Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 205. Yurou Zhong shows, how the Republicans of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang [Guomindang] 國民黨, KMT) and the Communists of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhongguo gongchandang 中國共產黨, CCP) pursued different alphabetic spelling schemes Zhong, Yurou, *Chinese Grammatology: Script Revolution and Literary Modernity, 1916–1958* (2019), 67ff. A further examination of the different political ideologies and especially the important role of anarchism and internationalism of the language reformers can be found in: Müller, Gotelind, *China, Kropotkin und der Anarchismus*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001.

part in the New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動), and criticized traditional culture and the classical written language (*wenyan*). The young Wei Jiāngōng can be called “reformist” or even “revolutionary”: he rejected values that were passed down, advocating for changes in language, script and society. During the 1920s, 30s and 40s and in the course of this chapter, his promotion of *guoyu* became more and more institutionalized. This resulted in Wei Jiāngōng’s official appointment as leader of the Taiwan Committee for the Promotion of the National Language (Taiwan sheng Guoyu tuixing weiyuanhui; described in Chapter 5.1 on page 139). Parallel to the growing level of institutionalization and the official legitimization of Wei Jiāngōng’s language planning efforts was a gradual shift from description to prescription. His normative approach, standing at the basis of language planning (which is telling people how they should speak) is founded on language description. In other words, he started with researching language, and his norms are based on his findings. This is also what I mean by language reforms being based on certain concepts of language and linguistics.

In more general terms, the following chapters discuss Wei Jiāngōng’s involvement in the *guoyu* movement as well as texts about *guoyu* in Mainland China. Following a chronological order, I will present his texts about *guoyu* within the historical context of the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. To explain Wei Jiāngōng’s mindset as a May Fourth student and a social activist with broad interest, I will outline some of his relevant activities as a student.

Wei Jiāngōng became involved in the national language movement (*guoyu yundong*) in his last year as a Peking University student. His first texts about *guoyu* that I was able to locate date from 1925, the year he started to work for the “National Language Weekly” (*Guoyu zhoukan* 國語週刊) magazine. We will see that he was a fierce fighter for *guoyu*. Wei Jiāngōng assumed his first official position as a member of the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language (Guoyu tongyi choubuihui) in 1928 after spending a year in Korea to teach Chinese. He then dove deeply into what would later provide him with the most scholarly recognition: phonological reconstruction. Here, he gave the Beijing pronunciation a historical basis. He traced the modern standard language back to what is today often termed Old Mandarin. The question of the entering tone will be discussed, as well as the historical rhyme books that formed the basis of *guoyu*. Another subsection then presents Wei Jiāngōng’s involvement in the official pronunciation dictionary *Zhonghua xinyun* 中華新韻. Following this, Wei Jiāngōng’s teacher training will be covered. Didactics are an important foothold of the promotion of *guoyu*, playing a role in Wei Jiāngōng’s career as early as 1920. At this point, he was involved in teaching in evening schools. The first part of this *guoyu* chapter then ends with presenting the “Principles” of the *guoyu* movement.

2.3 The *Guoyu* 國語 Movement

The advocates of a national language (*guoyu*) of the 1920s were already well aware that they were part of a “movement”. While Wei Jiangong was a student at Peking University (1919–1925), some of his teachers were among the most important actors within the movement, especially Qian Xuantong and Li Jinxi. In addition to their awareness of their “movement”, they were also conscious that the “national language movement” (*guoyu yundong*) already looked back on a certain history. The term “national language movement” as well as the first account of the movement’s history, was first coined by Hu Shi in 1921.²⁰ In his speech, Hu Shi described how the movement started with the motivation to educate the uneducated by promoting vernacular journalism and a phonetic script, accompanied by growing institutionalization and publication of teaching material, until the intellectuals finally realized that they also needed to adopt *guoyu* as their own language and to create a “national language literature”. Finally, the “phase of a coordinated movement for the national language” was reached; “the vernacular language, the phonetic alphabet, national language textbooks, and a national language literature [...] were promoted in concert.”²¹

Ever since China’s perceived state of diglossia was first criticized as an impediment to the education of the people and progress of the nation, along with the “congruence of speech and writing” *yan wen yizhi* 言文一致 (Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲, 1848–1905) and the advocacy of script reform (Lu Zhuangzhang) in the late 19th century until the beginning of the 1920s, important changes already took place. In 1913, the Conference for the Unification of Reading Pronunciations (Duyin tongyi hui) was established; the Republic of China Association for the study of the national language (Zhonghua minguo guoyu yanjiuhui 中華民國國語研究會) was founded in 1916. In 1919, the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language (Guoyu tongyi choubai hui) was created. In 1920, *guoyu* replaced the national literary language (*guowen* 國文) in the primary school curricula for grades 1 and 2.²² Both terms, *guowen* as “national written language” (in the schools a “modernized and simplified classical style” was preferred)²³ and *guoyu*, were imported from Japan.²⁴

20 Hu Shi 胡適, “Guoyu yundong de lishi” 國語運動的歷史 [The history of the national language movement], in: *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育雜誌 [Education magazine] 13.11 (1921), 8–9.

21 Hu Shi 胡適, “Guoyu yundong de lishi” (1921). English translations from Kaske, Elisabeth, “National Language Movement”, in: *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Sybesma, Rint, et al., Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017, 139–144, see 140.

22 Kaske, Elisabeth, “National Language Movement” (2017), 141–142.

23 Kaske, Elisabeth, “Mandarin, Vernacular and National Language – China’s Emerging Concept of a National Language In the Early Twentieth Century”, in: *Mapping Meanings: The Field of New Learning in Late Qing China*, ed. by Lackner, Michael and Vittinghoff, Natascha, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 265–304, see 291.

24 *Kokubun* 國文 and *kokugo* 國語, see Kaske, Elisabeth, “Mandarin, Vernacular and National Language – China’s Emerging Concept of a National Language In the Early Twentieth Century” (2004), 286–287, 291.

2.3.1 *Baihua* 白話

The *guoyu* movement was preceded and influenced by the movement for a vernacular literature, or *baihua* movement, *baihuawen yundong* 白話文運動. Interestingly, while *baihua* is the better known movement, these two movements are notably interlinked in terms of aims, concepts and spokespersons. The term *baihua* (clear or plain speech) is complicated, since it has been used with several different meanings. Elisabeth Kaske defines it as follows in the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*:

Báihuà 白話 (Vernacular Written Chinese)

Báihuà 白話, lit. ‘clear speech’ or ‘unadorned speech’ refers to Vernacular Chinese, a written language that is opposed to *wényán* 文言, lit. ‘literary speech’ or ‘ornate speech’, Literary Chinese or Classical Chinese. The term *báihuà* mainly denominates:

1. A non-standard vernacular style found in written sources from the Táng until the Qīng dynasty which is thought to have been closer to the spoken language than the dominant literary standard at the time (*wényán*). In this sense, the meaning of *báihuà* overlaps with ‘Early Modern Chinese’ (*Jīndài Hànyǔ* 近代漢語).
2. A written language close to the spoken language, also called *báihuàwén* 白話文, that has become the literary standard of modern Chinese since the May Fourth Movement of 1919. In this sense the term overlaps with ‘Modern Chinese’ (*Xiàndài Hànyǔ* 現代漢語).²⁵

The fact that two possible definitions of *baihua* exist are proof that the term can be stretched to mean different things. Shang Wei demonstrated how May Fourth scholars defined it as “a written language based on the spoken language used by ‘the people (*renmin*)’” to promote their agenda of “progressive culture” with a “living language (*huo de yuyan*)”, opposed to the classical *wenyan* as “a dead language (*si de yuyan*)”. They projected this into their reading of pre-modern literature.²⁶

Linguistically speaking, the literary vernacular is the written evidence we have from Early Modern Chinese. Many of the spoken language varieties forming the foundation of this written vernacular survived until today as “dialects”.²⁷ The dichotomy between *baihua* and *wenyan* is the invention of May Fourth intellectuals, such as Hu Shi, who learned about the decline of Latin and the rise of the different national languages in the Europe of the Renaissance. They identified Latin with *wenyan* and *baihua* (Written Early Modern Chinese) with languages such as Italian or French. In this fashion, *baihua* acquired the meaning of “vernacular” in addition to its original meaning, “plain speech”.²⁸ Promoting *baihua*

25 Kaske, Elisabeth, “Báihuà 白話 (Vernacular Written Chinese)”, in: *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Sybesma, Rint, et al., Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017, 266–269, see 266.

26 Shang, Wei, “*Baihua*, *Guanhua*, *Fangyan* and the May Fourth Reading of *Rulin waishi*”, in: *Sino-Platonic Papers* 117 (2002), 1–10, see 2.

27 While the term “dialects” can be perceived as a pejorative term, no value judgement is intended from my side. Instead, Söderblom Saarela suggests the use of “varieties”. Söderblom Saarela, Márten, “Manchu and the Study of Language in China (1607–1911)” (2015), 40.

28 Söderblom Saarela, Márten, “Manchu and the Study of Language in China (1607–1911)” (2015), 49–50.

and creating a more accessible literature came to be known as the “Literary Revolution” or “Literary Renaissance”.²⁹

The import of the European concept of the “vernacular” into the Chinese context was carried out by missionaries, beginning with Francisco Varo (1627–1687) and his *Arte de la lengua mandarina* (“Grammar of the Mandarin Language, 1703), where he uses the term “romance” to describe colloquial Chinese expressions and his own language, Castilian. Both are rendered as “vernacular” in the English translation by Coblin and Levi,³⁰ introducing us to Ibero-Romance language development and the rise of the European vernaculars.³¹ Some aspects about Varo’s explanation are fascinating in the light of *baihua* research. He juggles with Spanish (i.e. the Castilian vernacular of the time) and Latin *without* imposing this dichotomy onto the Chinese language situation, where he attests three “modes of speaking”: 1. “high and elegant, [...] spoken in the way that it is written”, 2. “medium [...] understood by the great majority” and 3. “coarse and vulgar and is used to preach to women and to peasants”.³² Varo leaves out the first mode: classical Chinese. Varo presents the “vernacular novels” *siào xuě* [*xiaoshuo*] 小說 as a corpus of the latter two modes (especially the second, since he equates it to Cicero and Virgil).³³ The second mode is used to communicate with the officials, the mandarins.³⁴ With these facts, we are already halfway to the May Fourth intellectuals’ definitions and to the next important language concept that will be described below: Mandarin as the language of the officials.

The influence of Western missionaries remained important. Carstairs Douglas (Du Jiade 杜嘉德, 1830–1877), a Presbyterian from Scotland,³⁵ identified “the regional [spoken] “languages” as “vernaculars” similar to the European national languages”. Douglas perceived the entire written language as “dead”, a view which was not accepted by the Chinese elites, but Qiu Tingliang “singled out classical Chinese as his target and went on to endorse the use of *baihua* writing

29 Hu Shi, *The Chinese Renaissance*, New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1963, 48. This is a collection of Hu Shi’s lectures at University of Chicago during the summer of 1933 when he was appointed as a Haskell lecturer.

30 Coblin, W. South, and Joseph A. Levi, *Francisco Varo’s Grammar of the Mandarin Language (1703). An English Translation of ‘Arte de la Lengua Mandarina’*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000, 75, 79.

31 On Romance as vernacular and on the development of the term “romance” into the French (and later German) word for “novel”, see Lee, Christine S., “The Meanings of Romance: Rethinking Early Modern Fiction”, in: *Modern Philology* 112.2 (2014), 287–311. At a conceptual level, this interestingly can be linked to the *baihua* novels. The other interesting aspect connecting the Chinese and the Spanish situations is that the term “Romance” was first used to describe “new ways of writing” and not of speaking, see Valle, José del (ed.), “The prehistory of written Spanish and the thirteenth-century nationalist zeitgeist”, in: *A political history of Spanish. The making of a language*, ed. by Valle, José del, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 31–43, see 31.

32 Coblin, W. South, and Joseph A. Levi, *Francisco Varo’s Grammar of the Mandarin Language (1703)* (2000), 17–19.

33 Coblin, W. South, and Joseph A. Levi, *Francisco Varo’s Grammar of the Mandarin Language (1703)* (2000), 4–7.

34 Coblin, W. South, and Joseph A. Levi, *Francisco Varo’s Grammar of the Mandarin Language (1703)* (2000), 61, 191, 211.

35 Klöter, Henning, “Missionary Linguistics”, in: *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Sybesma, Rint, et al., Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017, 41–46.

in light of the replacement of Latin by the European vernaculars”.³⁶ As Shang Wei has pointed out, however, introducing *baihua* instead of *wenyan* simply replaced one elitist form of *writing* with another, and the strict dichotomy between the two was essentially fabricated by the May Fourth reformers.³⁷ But the question of a national language addressed by Wei Jiangong and his peers remained: how should it be *pronounced*?

The May Fourth scholars added a spoken dimension to the written vernacular *baihua(wen)*. After all, it was a literary language that needed to be studied. The scholars connected it to *guanhua* (Mandarin = language of the officials), the *koiné* since Ming 明 times (1368–1644) that facilitated oral communication between the groups of the population that traveled. It was therefore “transregional” and “cosmopolitan”, rather different from the European vernaculars.³⁸ Their approach was also not far from that taken by Varo. This is how *baihua* as written vernacular came to be associated to a certain pronunciation. Concerning grammar and vocabulary, there was a considerable overlap with spoken Northern Vernacular.³⁹

2.3.2 *Guanhua* 官話

The Chinese linguists, especially Wei Jiangong, named “Mandarin” *guanhua* 官話 as the direct predecessor of *baihua*, and claimed that it was based on the Beijing dialect. Their debate and their reasoning will be covered below. However, before I begin, I will outline the difficulties about this claim.

First of all, the English term “Mandarin” can mean different languages today. Robert Sanders provides a list:

1. Idealized Mandarin: Today’s standard language, *putonghua* in the PRC, *guoyu* in Taiwan.⁴⁰ Wei Jiangong was one of the linguists who participated in describing, constructing and legitimizing this idealized standard language.
2. Imperial Mandarin: Spoken by the scholar-officials of imperial China. Sanders admits that it cannot have been thoroughly standardized.⁴¹ There is also a certain debate about its pronunciation during specific time periods. Since the concept of Imperial Mandarin fueled the legitimization strategies of Wei Jiangong and the linguists, this is an important question.
3. Geographical Mandarin: Nowadays known as “Mandarin dialects” (*guanhua fangyan* 官話方言), it is spoken by the majority of people in China. It is grouped together along phonetic features, ignoring lexical and syntac-

36 Shang, Wei, “Writing and Speech: Rethinking the Issue of Vernaculars in Early Modern China” (2014), 259. On Qiu, see also Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 77, 106ff.

37 Emphasis was placed on “writing” since original utterances were altered when written down in *baihua*. Shang, Wei, “Writing and Speech: Rethinking the Issue of Vernaculars in Early Modern China” (2014), 260, 284–285, *passim*.

38 Shang, Wei, “Writing and Speech: Rethinking the Issue of Vernaculars in Early Modern China” (2014), 260.

39 Söderblom Saarela, Mårten, “Manchu and the Study of Language in China (1607–1911)” (2015), 50.

40 Sanders, Robert M., “The Four Languages of ‘Mandarin’” (1987), 2.

41 Sanders, Robert M., “The Four Languages of ‘Mandarin’” (1987), 5–6.

tical disparities.⁴² As they are mostly spoken in the North, they can also be referred to as *beifang fangyan* 北方方言.⁴³ Wei Jianguo called the area *guoyu quyu* 國語區域 (see 4.2.1 on page 120).

4. Local Mandarin: the speech of a local community, such as Beijing (also the Beijing dialect will play an important role). Sanders emphasizes that there are native Mandarin speakers in places where the language has developed naturally, as opposed to those speakers, especially in the South, that were subject to language planning.⁴⁴

The Western term “Mandarin” was coined by European missionaries and literally refers to its second meaning, the language spoken by the imperial scholar-officials. According to Victor H. Mair, it was adapted to English from the Portuguese word “mandarim”, which was influenced by “mandar”, “to command”, “to order”. Its origins are found in the Malay word *mantri*, which in turn was borrowed from Hindi-Urdu; it can be traced back to the Sanskrit word *mantrin*, “counsellor”. *Guanhua* can be understood not only as language of the officials but also as official language.⁴⁵ Wei Jianguo was to make this point as well.

So what did Mandarin sound like? As we will see in the course of this dissertation, Wei Jianguo and his peers legitimized a national language based on the Beijing dialect by claiming that Imperial Mandarin had already been modeled on it since the city became the capital. Coblin, Kaske and Simmons, however, pointed out that this is a stark simplification, if not a misconception. “Southern pronunciation” (*nanyin* 南音) modeled on Nanjing phonetics and encompassing five tones was the prestige pronunciation until the middle of the 19th century. Only after that did the “northern pronunciation” (*beiyin* 北音) with four tones slowly gain prestige. Variant literary readings (e.g. *shai* vs. *se* 色) that have survived until to the present day are derived from the southern pronunciation.⁴⁶ Simmons proposes that this shift of prestige did not only happen because of the location of the Qing court in Beijing but also due to Western and Japanese envoys coming to the capital to learn the local Mandarin variety.⁴⁷

In the early 20th century, the Beijing pronunciation still did not gain enough prestige to be regarded as undisputed reference point for a standard Mandarin pronunciation. Many intellectuals were southerners, and the Qing court was perceived as an alien regime. Therefore, the first version of the “national pronunciation” (*guoyin* 國音) promulgated by the Conference for the unification of

42 Sanders, Robert M., “The Four Languages of ‘Mandarin’” (1987), 6–7.

43 Coblin, W. South, “A Brief History of Mandarin” (2000), 537.

44 Sanders, Robert M., “The Four Languages of ‘Mandarin’” (1987), 9–10.

45 Mair, Victor H., “What is a Chinese ‘Dialect/Topolect’?”, in: *Sino-Platonic Papers* 29 (1991), 1–31, see 11–12.

46 Simmons, Richard VanNess, “Whence Came Mandarin? Qīng Guānhuà, the Běijīng Dialect, and the National Language Standard in Early Republican China” (2017), 66–67. Simmons’ discussion is based on Coblin and Kaske: Coblin, W. South, “A Brief History of Mandarin” (2000). Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008).

47 Simmons, Richard VanNess, “Chinese and Western understanding of China’s standard language in the late 19th century”, unpublished manuscript presented at the conference “Language Diversity in the Sinophone World: Policies, Effects and Tradition”, Göttingen University, June 12, 2015.

reading pronunciations (Duyin tongyi hui) was an amalgam of several dialects and rather close to that Nanjing Mandarin.

Gradually, due to the efforts of Li Jinxi in particular, the preference shifted towards the Beijing-based *guanhua* in the 1920s, and a “new national pronunciation” was promulgated (see below). Also Wei Jianguo assigned the prominent role to the Beijing pronunciation, such as in his article “Historical draft of Chinese phonology” (*Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang* 中國聲韻學史綱). He claimed that there are three systems (*san ge xitong* 三個系統) within the standard language (*biao zhun yu* 標準語):

1. 正則官話——北平音系
2. 藍青官話——南京音系
3. 變蛻官話——杭州音系⁴⁸
1. Proper Mandarin — Beiping [= Beijing]⁴⁹ pronunciation system
2. Blue-green Mandarin — Nanjing pronunciation system
3. Variable Mandarin — Hangzhou pronunciation system⁵⁰

This blue-green Mandarin is also the term that critics used to designate the “old national pronunciation” (*lao guoyin* 老國音). What is striking here is that by associating blue-green Mandarin with the Nanjing pronunciation system, Wei also associates the mix of regional pronunciations promulgated as the national pronunciation by the 1913 Conference for the unification of reading pronunciations (Duyin tongyi hui) with the Mandarin variety that served as *lingua franca* or *koiné* before Beijing or Northern Mandarin gained prevalence. In this fashion, Wei acknowledges the phonetic similarities of the two.⁵¹

The conceptual interdependency between northern dialects, Mandarin, and standard language (explicitly as “*guoyu*” and, in the PRC, “*putonghua*”) has also been summarized by the phonologist Zhu Jianing of Taiwan. He also stresses Li Jinxi’s role as advocate of the Beijing pronunciation.⁵²

As I will describe below, Wei Jianguo also perceived the Beijing pronunciation as the most suitable for a standard, because of Beijing’s role as the capi-

48 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “*Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang*” 中國聲韻學史綱 [Historical draft of Chinese phonology], in: *Wei Jianguo wenji* 魏建功文集 [Collected works of Wei Jianguo], ed. by Ye Xiaochun 叶笑春, Rong Wenmin 戎文敏, Zhou Fang 周方 and Ma Zhenxing 马镇, vol. 2, Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe 江苏教育出版社, 2001, 73–225, see 134–35.

49 During the Nanjing Decade (1927–1937), Nanjing was the capital of the Republic of China; Beijing was then called Beiping.

50 The Hangzhou dialect classification is indeed tricky, as it has characteristics of Mandarin and Wu 吳 dialects. See Simmons, Richard VanNess, *Chinese Dialect Classification. A comparative approach to Hanyou, Old Jintarn, and Common Northern Wu* (Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science 188), Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999, 1.

51 As Kaske demonstrates, this was also obvious to the participants of the conference. Quoting K. Hemeling, she states that by 1907, the Nanjing Mandarin variety was “no longer a serious rival for supremacy of that of Peking”. Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 415.

52 Zhu Jianing 竺家寧, *Shengyunxue* 聲韻學 [Phonology], Taipei 臺北: Wunan tushu chubanshe 五南圖書出版公司, 2012, 67–78.

tal, political center, and melting pot. According to Wei, the Beijing dialect was “koineized”: it mixed with other regional varieties.⁵³

The view that accepting the Chinese culture is the only precondition to become a member of the Chinese empire and a subject of the emperor is also held by Wei Jianguo.⁵⁴ The definition of “Chinese” was not an ethnic one. Everyone who accepted the supremacy of the Chinese emperor (who was a Manchu during the Qing dynasty) could become part of his empire. The emperor had the claim of ruling over “all under heaven” *tianxia* 天下. This concept changed when China was confronted with the threat of the Western powers, who introduced a modern concept of “nation” and of “diplomacy”. These Western concepts were very different from the tributary system that shaped the exchange with foreigners in imperial times. What was formerly a Chinese empire had to transform itself into a “nation” and acquire the required features, such as a more or less homogenous national language. Homogeneity of the citizens’ language (as representative of their ethnicity) provided legitimization to a state with a determined border and clearly defined citizenship.⁵⁵

All these concepts were used by Wei Jianguo and his contemporaries as legitimization for a national language, *guoyu*, that would exist in a written and in a spoken dimension and to realize the “congruence of language and writing” (*yan wen yizhi* 言文一致, sometimes also called *yan wen heyi* 言文合一).⁵⁶ Similar

- 53 Siegel summarizes that “the original *koiné* comprised features of several regional varieties, although it was based primarily on one of them. However, it was reduced and simplified in comparison.” This variety of Greek became the “lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic and Roman periods”. Siegel, Jeff, “Koinés and koineization” (1985), 358. Since the term can be used for every “de-regionalized” variety that has established itself as the standard language within a system of different regional varieties, it more accurately describes the role of Mandarin in China, rather than *lingua franca*, which does not have to be a genetically related language. Cf. Bußmann, Hadumod, “Koiné”, in: *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2008, 344–345. See also: Bußmann, Hadumod, “Lingua Franca”, in: *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2008, 408–409.
- 54 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “‘Guoyu yundong zai Taiwan de yiyi’ shenjie” [‘國語運動在臺灣的意義’] 申解 [Thorough explanation of ‘The purpose of the national language movement in Taiwan’], in: *Wei Jianguo wenji* 魏建功文集 [Collected works of Wei Jianguo], ed. by Ye Xiaochun 叶笑春, Rong Wenmin 戎文敏, Zhou Fang 周方 and Ma Zhenxing 马镇, vol. 4, Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe 江苏教育出版社, 2001, 306–16, see 306–7.
- 55 The challenges of nationalism for China merit much more discussion. For more information, see Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso, 2006. and Matten, Marc Andre, *Die Grenzen des Chinesischen: Nationale Identitätstiftung im China des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Veröffentlichungen des Ostasien-Instituts der Ruhr-Universität, Bochum 54), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2009.
- 56 Huang Zunxian introduced the concept in 1898 from Japan in his “Description of Japan” (*Ribenben guo zhi* 日本國志), see Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 91. For Wei Jianguo, the slogan meant not only overcoming the perceived state of diglossia but also making the script a more faithful representation of the spoken language, both of which should be standardized. See Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “‘Guoyu yundong zai Taiwan de yiyi’ shenjie” (2001), 313–14. and Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Wenzi gaige wenti he zhengzifa (wenzi guifan) wenti” 文字改革問題和正字法 (文字規範) 問題 [The question of script reform and the question of making the characters correct (script planning)], in: *Wei Jianguo wenji* 魏建功文集 [Collected works of Wei Jianguo], ed. by Ye Xiaochun 叶笑春, Rong Wenmin 戎文敏, Zhou Fang 周方 and Ma Zhenxing 马镇兴, vol. 4, Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe 江苏教育出版社, 2001, 612–638, see 614.

to *guoyu*, this slogan reached China from Japan.⁵⁷ However, when Wei Jiangong joined the *guoyu* movement in the 1920s, the movement was in crisis.

⁵⁷ Kaske, Elisabeth, “Mandarin, Vernacular and National Language – China’s Emerging Concept of a National Language In the Early Twentieth Century” (2004), 286–87.

