

## Chapter 7

# The Script Reform in the Republic

The famous character simplification took place in the PRC in the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s. Hence, the simplified or abbreviated characters (*jiantizi* 簡體字 - 简体字 or *jianhuazi* 簡化字 - 简化字) are usually associated with the Communist government today. However, the basics were already laid out during the Republican era. As previously discussed (see for example page 68), many intellectuals debated the abolition of the script and its replacement by an alphabetic or syllabic spelling, or even the abolition of the language altogether and an introduction of English or Esperanto instead. This was, however, not the whole story. The simplification or partial reform of the characters was an idea that was already floated in the Republic. Even earlier in the late Qing dynasty, the idea to write simpler non-standard characters was formulated. This brings me to the first claim I wish to substantiate in this part on the “shape” of language, i.e. the script: whether it may be non-standard characters or (semi-)cursive forms, the choice of historic character variants shows that the script reform was deeply rooted in Chinese philological tradition.

Wei may have begun with advocating the complete abolition of the Chinese characters. As a second claim, he viewed the development of the script as a progressive development towards a phonetic script (see page 66). Like his teacher Qian Xuantong, he originally anticipated a replacement of the characters by a phonetic script or even a dissolution into such a phonetic script.<sup>1</sup> Yurou Zhong has called this view “phonocentrism” and the pursuits of the linguists and writers a “script revolution”.<sup>2</sup> By not abolishing the characters in the end, this revolution

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1 The idea to replace the characters with a phonetic (alphabetic or syllabic) spelling has been extensively discussed elsewhere. An absolute standard work is: De Francis, John, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (1957).

2 Zhong, Yurou, *Chinese Grammarology: Script Revolution and Literary Modernity, 1916–1958* (2019). Zhong speaks of “romanization” when speaking of KMT-endorsed Gwoyeu Romatzyh) and of “latinization” when discussing the Communist Latinxua Sinwenz.

was “contained”, and the affirmative action towards the Chinese script can be counted as emancipation from Western norms.

The script reform debates were also part of Wei’s development. After originally envisaging the total dissolution of the original shape of the characters to purely serve the sound, he would gradually grow fond of the ideas to “partially reform the script”. This would include abbreviating or simplifying it according to millennia-old structural principles. While his Republican views of possible simplified characters merely focus on the graphical aspects, the final chapter on the PRC reforms (chapter 8, page 213) will show a synthesis of conserving graphical principles and reintroducing phonetic aspects into the script. This brings me to my third claim: according to Wei Jiangong’s language concept, sound is the key to meaning. The script reform abided by this principle and made the characters more phonetic again. The methods for implementation included the adoption of existing and creation of new phono-semantic compound characters (*xingshengzi* 形聲字).

While the Republican and PRC periods are highly coherent from the perspective of linguistic science, the political perspective presents a different picture. This brings me to my fourth claim: while Wei’s legitimization of the language policy in the PRC looks different from that of the Republic, he only changed the rhetoric. His basic language concept remained unchanged.

## 7.1 Wei’s Early Views on Script Reform

In the following subsections, I explain how Wei Jiangong began to formulate his views on the Chinese script and the possibility to reform it. He set out asking the general question how spoken and written language interact and grew increasingly fond of phonographic spelling. As early as in 1925, he claimed that a development towards a phonographic spelling was the inevitable evolution all scripts of the world would undergo. If we compare this to the conceptions underlying the simplification of the characters in the PRC, we realize that this idea would have proven to be persuasive. Nevertheless it should be noted that Wei was by far not the only linguist to promote this idea. Another important foundational concept formulated at the time was that it was generally possible to reform any given script.

### 7.1.1 1920–1925: Folk Songs and Script Evolution

Wei Jiangong’s starting point of inquiring into the nature of the Chinese script are folk songs (*geyao* 歌謠). Wei inquired about the relationship that sound (*yin* 音) and shape (*xing* 形) of characters have with meaning (*yi* 義). How should researchers represent a morpheme used in folk songs that clearly do not have a written form? For the singers of these songs, they are not represented by a character. Wei Jiangong addressed this question in a letter to Gu Jiegang in 1920. The term Wei Jiangong uses to refer to dialect words that do not have a clear equiva-

lent is “popular” or “non-standard characters”: *suzi* 俗字. Wei Jiāngōng also used another key concept in this early letter: “evolution” *jinhua* 進化. The evolution of language resulted in a change of the pronunciation. Some dialects still conserve historical states of the language. Therefore, in this letter of 1920, Wei advocated the representation of these dialect words or *suzi* by characters whose historical pronunciation coincides with the pronunciation in that particular folk song. Wei Jiāngōng argued explicitly against Shen Jiānshì, who said that these words with sound but no character (*you yin wu zi* 有音無字) should only be represented by Zhuyin fuhao.<sup>3</sup>

Wei Jiāngōng discussed this letter again five years later on October 27, 1925, in his “Reporting [on my own offense] that ‘sound’ does not serve ‘shape’” (Jianju bu “yi ‘sheng’ wei ‘xing’ yi” 檢舉不“以‘聲’為‘形’役”). Here, Wei declared that he has changed his mind completely and that he was wrong. He now believed that phonographic spelling *biaoyin* 標音 is the only reasonable method to graphically represent these words that seem to exist only in the dimension of sound.<sup>4</sup>

### 7.1.2 1925: Script Reform for Evolution

About four months before his vow to employ phonographic spelling, Wei Jiāngōng advocated abolishing Chinese characters altogether. In his article “Arguing from the tendency of the Chinese script that the characters – square characters – need to be abolished” (Cong Zhongguo wenzi de qushi lun hanzi – fangkuaizi de yinggai feichu 從中國文字的趨勢上論漢字（方塊字）的應該廢除, published in *Guoyu zhoukan* vol. 8 on August 26, 1925, and written on June 26, 1925,<sup>5</sup> Wei Jiāngōng not only criticized the characteristics of the Chinese script but also explains his views on its development.

His first article on the topic of script reform (*wenzi gaige* 文字改革) focuses on the concept of evolution and progress. He explains his concept of language and script and of their development over time. He claims that this historical change of the script proves the existence of evolution and subsequently illustrates where this evolution will lead and what role language planning could play. Wei Jiāngōng opens his discussion with the radical, iconoclastic call to “throw the Chinese characters in the pile of antiquities” (*guidao gudong dui li qu* 歸到古董堆裏去).

The first paradigm of script development Wei establishes is the people’s struggle for the simple and convenient; this is his explanation why people who write have a tendency to scribble unintelligible things. The characters are simply too complicated and the writer wanted to save time.

3 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “Guanyu geyao zhong zheng su zi wenti gei Gu Jiegang xiansheng de yi feng xin” (2001), 2.

4 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “Jianju bu “yi ‘sheng’ wei ‘xing’ yi”” 檢舉不“以‘聲’為‘形’役” [Reporting [on my own offense] that ‘sound’ does not serve ‘shape’], in: *Wei Jiāngōng wenji* 魏建功文集, ed. by Ye Xiaochun 叶笑春, Rong Wenmin 戎文敏, Zhou Fang 周方 and Ma Zhenxing 馬鎮, vol. 3, Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe 江苏教育出版社, 2001, 72–74.

5 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “Cong Zhongguo wenzi de qushi shang lun hanzi – fangkuaizi – de yinggai feichu” (1925), 4.

On the nature of language, he calls it a “sign” or “symbol” *fu hao* 符號.<sup>6</sup> This symbol is used by a person to express his/her will. Wei identifies it as the most distinctive feature of humankind. Script then is a sign of signs, since it is the spoken sign written down on paper. Both language and script develop incessantly; this “tendency” (*qushi*) cannot be stopped. He implies that someone in the society is trying to petrify the state of the script. While phonetic loan characters (*jiajiezi* 假借字) were already documented in the *Shuowen jiezi*, people today are not allowed to write phonetic loans (*jinren bu xu xie jiajiezi* 今人不許寫假借字, i.e. create new phonetic loans).<sup>7</sup> The script itself, however, has the natural tendency to develop and to evolve. Hence, a script reform introducing phonographic spelling would hasten the natural development.

Wei calls the current state of the evolution of the Chinese script “form development” or “shape evolution” *yanxing* 衍形.<sup>8</sup> For Wei, this means the shape of the characters is the distinctive feature of a semantic unit. We find this expression in Liang Qichao’s “On renovating the citizen” *Xin min shuo* 新民說 from 1902, and it is very probable that Wei deliberately borrowed from him.<sup>9</sup>

列國文字，皆起於衍形。及其進也，則變而衍聲。夫人類之語言，遞相差異，經千數百年後，而必大遠於其朔者，勢使然也。故衍聲之國，言文常可以相合；衍形之國，言文必日以相離。<sup>10</sup>

The script of any given country originated from the development of shape, and the more it developed, the more it changed to a development of sound. The languages of humankind are all very different, and after many thousands of years have passed, they have become very different from what they were before; the circumstances cause this. In the countries in which [script] changes according to the sound, language and writing coincide. In countries in which [script] follows the shape, language and writing drift ever more apart.

This statement of Liang Qichao resonates with the aim of the *guoyu* movement adherents that a congruency of language and writing (*yan wen yizhi*) should be accomplished. Liang continues that a disparity between spoken and written language is detrimental for a country and that the Chinese characters are just too many and too hard to learn.<sup>11</sup>

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6 More information about the “sign” follows in section 7.1.2 on page 199.

7 Wei Jiangong 魏建功, “Cong Zhongguo wenzi de qushi shang lun hanzi – fangkuaizi – de yinggai feichu” (1925), 2.

8 *Yan* 衍 could also be read as a synonym of or a loan for *yan* 演. While also 演 has the meaning of “developing” or “evolving”, the phrase could also be translated as “displaying the shape”.

9 However, Wei Jiangong is immersed in a discourse in which the other linguists participate as well. The same key words (*yanxing*, *yansheng*) are used in: Li Jinxi 黎錦熙, “Quanguo guoyu yundong dahui xuanyan” (1925), 2.

10 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Xin min shuo: di shiyi jie: Lun jinbu” 新民說：第十一節：論進步 [On renovating the citizen: section 11: About progress], in: *Xin min congbao* 新民叢報 [New citizen] 11 (1902), 8–20. The punctuation follows: Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Xin min shuo” 新民說 [On renovating the citizen], in: *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集 [Complete works of Liang Qichao], ed. by Zhang Pinxing 張品興, vol. 3: Beijing chubanshe 北京出版社, 1999, 655–735, see 684.

11 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Xin min shuo” (1999), 684.

Wei Jiāngōng explains this concept of *yanxing*: the Chinese script developed from a state of “script picture” *wenzihua* 文字畫<sup>12</sup>, and its following stages were the different “six scripts” *liushu* 六書 (or six different types of characters). These “six traditionally recognized types of Chinese character structures or usages”<sup>13</sup> are often attributed to Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 58–ca. 148) and his *Shuowen jiezi*. However, they are not only attested earlier, and it is also not certain that Xu Shen himself wrote the postface to his dictionary.<sup>14</sup> They are:

1. *zhishi* 指事 (literally, indicate matters; indicative): *shang* 上 (up) and *xia* 下 (down)
2. *xiangxing* 象形 (literally, resembling form; pictographic): *ri* 日 (sun) and *yue* 月 (moon)
3. *xingsheng* 形聲 (form and sound, i.e. signific-phonetic): *jiang* 江 (river), *he* 河 (river)
4. *huiyi* 會意 (literally, combine meanings; associative): *wu* 武 (military), *xin* 信 (trust)
5. *zhuanzhu* 轉注 (literally, turned and annotated; notative): *kao* 考 (old) and *lao* 老 (old)
6. *jiajie* 假借 (literally, false borrowing; borrowed or rebus characters): *ling* 令 (order), *zhang* 長 (far back)<sup>15</sup>

Wei Jiāngōng presents the six categories in the following order: “pictographic” (*xiangxing*), “indicative” (*zhishi*), “associative” (*huiyi*). For him, these is evidence of the “shape development” (*yanxing*) of the script. He then continues with the signific-phonetic compound characters (*xingsheng*) followed by the borrowed characters (*jiajie*; he does not mention *zhuanzhu*). With this sequence, he argues that the *liushu* show a development from a pictographic to a phonographic writing, with *xingshengzi* and especially *jiajiezi* as the closest the Chinese script could come to such a phonographic writing. Wei Jiāngōng believed that the *jiajiezi* illustrated how the script already entered a half-phonographic period (*ban yinfu de shidai* 半音符的時代). Only a small step to the state of “sound development” *yan-sheng* 衍聲 would be needed, and the natural evolution points to that direction. That characters are often mixed up in everyday usage indicates the introduction of a phonographic spelling would be the logical consequence. Wei then ends with an enthusiastic call for the abolition of the Chinese characters (*hanzi* 漢字). Such a reform would simply speed up the natural evolution that is taking place.<sup>16</sup>

12 I decided not to call it “pictogram” because that term is the following state of development.

13 Boltz, William G., “Liù shū 六書 (Six Scripts)”, in: *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Sybesma, Rint, et al., Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017, 616–624, see 616.

14 Boltz, William G., “Liù shū 六書 (Six Scripts)” (2017), 617.

15 Wilkinson, Endymion, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (2013), 35.

16 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “Cong Zhongguo wenzi de qushi shang lun hanzi – fangkuaizi – de yinggai feichu” (1925).

The alternative writing schemes Wei Jiāngōng presents are Zhuyin and Wade-Giles,<sup>17</sup> giving preference to the former.<sup>18</sup> As I pointed out in my first discussion of the article above (section 3.2.2, page 66) Wei believed sound is the crucial means for transporting meaning. The fact that there are many homophonic characters does not bother him – he sees the misspellings (“scholar” *shi* 士 instead of “to be” *shi* 是, as an example) as proof that sound and context matter for the identification of a semantic unit.<sup>19</sup>

Another text that advocates language engineering going hand in hand with script evolution is Wei Jiāngōng’s “New historical materials and old mentality” (Xin shiliao yu jiu xinli 新史料與舊心理), published in the weekly magazine of the National Learning (*guoxue*) department of Peking University in 1926. In it, Wei Jiāngōng elaborates on his concept of language change as a process of evolution. He states that the change (*bianqian* 變遷) of language and script is not degeneration or retrogression (*tuihua* 退化), but evolution or progress (*jinhua* 進化).<sup>20</sup> These two terms, especially in juxtaposition, imply a teleological concept of evolution, one of advancement (*jin* 進), while the alternative development would be retreat (*tui* 退).

Darwinism came to China in the late 19th century. The concept of evolution prevalent in early 20th century China encompassed not only the idea that evolution was some sort of progress constantly leading to a somehow improved state but also struggle for survival. It was “submerged in extrascientific discourse about the nature of historical progress and China’s ability to compete with other nation-states.”<sup>21</sup> The first step in the reception of evolutionary theory was Yan Fu’s *Tiānyān lùn* 天演論, an interpretational translation or paraphrase of T. H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* (1896–1898). A translation of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (originally published in 1859) only appeared in parts in 1903

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17 The Wade-Giles romanization was created by Sir Thomas Francis Wade (1818–1895) and improved and popularized by Herbert Allen Giles (1845–1835) in the 19th century. It was the standard transcription for most Western countries for the most of the 20th century. See: Wippermann, Dorothea, “Transcription Systems: Wade-Giles (English)”, in: *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Sybesma, Rint, et al., Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017, 432–436.

18 I deduce the inclination towards Zhuyin because it is employed significantly more often in his writings. The fact that Zhuyin represents the Chinese syllable structure (initial, medial, rhyme/final, see 46 on page 58) may also be a reason why the phonologist Wei preferred it. Cf. Wippermann, Dorothea, *Das Phonetische Alphabet Zhuyin Zimu – Entstehung und Verbreitung im Zuge der Nationalsprachlichen Bewegung in der Republik China 1912–1949* (1985), 18ff. See also page 79.

19 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “Cong Zhongguo wenzi de qushi shang lun hanzi – fangkuai – de yinggai feichu” (1925).

20 See: Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “Xin shiliao yu jiu xinli” 新史料與舊心理 [New historical materials and old mentality], in: *Beijing daxue yanjiusuo guoxuemen zhoukan* 北京大學研究所國學們週刊 [Weekly review of the Institute of Sinology of Peking University] 2.15/16 (1926), 19–31, see 25. See also: Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “Xin shiliao yu jiu xinli” 新史料與舊心理 [New historical materials and old mentality], in: *Wei Jiāngōng wenji* 魏建功文集 [Collected works of Wei Jiāngōng], 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, 127–140, see 133.

21 Schneider, Laurence, *Biology and Revolution in Twentieth-Century China*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003, 42–43.

and 1904, and then completely in 1920 by Ma Junwu 馬君武 (1881–1940) with the title *Wuzhong yuanshi* 物種原始.<sup>22</sup>

In the article “New historical materials and old mentality”, Wei Jianguo also reiterates his basic concepts of language and script:

語言是用聲音表現的大家公認而實行傳達意志的符號。運用繪畫的方法將語言拿有形的符號記載下來就是文字；文字就成了符號的符號。符號是人造的，不是一成不變古今如一的；所以語言文字便有了變遷。語言文字的變遷並不是退化的，是進化的；因為符號怎樣用的方便便怎樣的用，所以規定非常活動，隨時可以修改。修改次數越多，簡便的程度越深，這就是進化的標準。<sup>23</sup>

Language is a commonly recognized symbol that finds its expression in sound, thereby realizing the transmission of intention. Applying the technique of drawing to express the language in writing is script. In this fashion, script is a sign of a sign. Signs are man-made; they are not unalterable and uniform in ancient times and today. Therefore, language and script have changed. The change of language and script is not a retrogression but progress. Because signs are used in a way that is convenient, their rules are very flexible, and they can be altered any time. The more they have been altered, the more they become simple and convenient. This is the standard of progress.

By stating that regulations are flexible and they can be changed anytime, Wei goes one step further than the previous article. He argues more outspokenly that language engineering is possible and worthwhile. Since one can interfere with natural development, and this interference is recommended, it will lead to speeding up evolution. This will culminate in progress.

The term “sign” reminds readers of today of Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotics (he called it *sémiologie*). However, secondary literature points out that de Saussure’s ideas did not arrive in China until the 1930s.<sup>24</sup> Hence, it is not likely that Wei Jianguo has read de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916).<sup>25</sup> Therefore, I think that both “sign” and “symbol” can be suitable translations for *fuhao*, since Wei Jianguo uses the term in its general meaning. Still, Wei Jianguo’s concept of this “sign” resonates with Saussure’s *l’arbitraire du signe* (the

22 Yang, Haiyan, “Encountering Darwin and Creating Darwinism in China” (2013).

23 From Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Xin shiliao yu jiu xinli” (1926), 25. and Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Xin shiliao yu jiu xinli” (2001), 133.

24 See: Zhang, Yanfei, and Shaojie Zhang, “How and Why Saussure is Misread in China: A Historical Study”, in: *Language and History* 57.2 (2014), 149–67, see 150. See also: He Jiuying 何九盈, *Zhongguo xiandai yuyanxue shi* 中国现代语言学史 [History of Modern Linguistics in China], Zhaoqing 肇庆: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe 广东教育出版社, 1994, 177. The term *fuhaoxue* 符號學 today that denotes semiotics was presented in 1926 by Zhao Yuanren to mean symbolics or symbology. See: Zhao Yuanren 趙元任, “Fuhaoxue dagang” 符號學大綱 [Outline of symbolics], in: Kexue [Science] 5 (1926), 571–591. Zhao published a continuation of his article in volume 11.

25 A Japanese translation was made only in 1928. Toyama, Tomonori, “Semiotics in Japan”, in: *The Semiotic Sphere*, ed. by Sebeok, Thomas A., and Jean Umiker-Sebeok, New York / London: Plenum Press, 1986, 328.

arbitrariness of the sign). However, Wei Jiāngōng does not make Saussure's clear distinction between *langue* and *parole*.<sup>26</sup>

These early texts can be considered as preparation for Wei Jiāngōng's involvement in the script reform. Below, I will argue that Wei Jiāngōng was especially fond of increasing the phonetic information in the Chinese characters. This matches his concept that the script evolves in the direction of a phonographic writing, and that the purpose of reform is to ensure the script reaches this stage faster.

### 7.1.3 1935: Science and Script Reform

In 1935, Wei Jiāngōng explained his views on the relationship between science and script reform, using the example of the history of phonology as a scholarly discipline. He connects the “script reform movement” (*wenzi gaige yundong* 文字改革運動) with the import of Western linguistics.

In the first part of his “Historical draft of Chinese phonology” (*Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang*), he gave an overview of the different disciplines researching language and script and explains their objective. Then, he explained how “philology” *xiaoxue* came to be linguistics and assigned the script reform movement a role in this history and established its connection with the import of Western linguistic's phonetics:

近代國勢的凌替，引起了文字改革運動。由文字改革運動的需要，音標文字的創制發軔了。往日由外來文字的方法上引申出的分析字音的方法更加滋長，脫了文字的牽絆。純粹語言的科學很增加了許多新的色彩。這是與文字改革運動同時起的科學文明的影響。清儒成就的意義已進了“語學”範圍，今後由“語音學”的輸入洗滌了前此的韻學中的玄學霧霧，再加“語言學”的培養，可以更進一步建設起科學的中國語言學來了。<sup>27</sup>

The decline of national strength nowadays led to the script reform movement. Out of the demand for the script reform movement began the creation of a phonetic script. In former days, the reception of the methods of foreign script led to an increase of methods for the analysis of the sound of characters. This took away the impediment of the script/characters. Pure language science increased by many colors. This is the influence of science and civilization that came up simultaneously with the script reform movement. The significance of the Qing scholars' achievements already entered the scope of “*yuxue*”.<sup>28</sup> From then on, the import of “phonetics” (*yuyinxue*) cleansed phonology (*yunxue*) from the formerly existing mist of spiritualism.<sup>29</sup> A for-

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26 Compare: Bußmann, Hadumod, “Zeichen”, in: *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2008, 806. Compare also: Bußmann, Hadumod, “Bezeichnendes vs. Bezeichnetes”, in: *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2008, 89.

27 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, “*Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang*” (2001), 131.

28 *Yuxue* 語學 is an earlier term for linguistics that was most likely transmitted to Wei Jiāngōng from Japan (Japanese: *gogaku*) via Zhang Binglin (who was in Japan at the time of publication): Zhang Shixue 章氏學 [Binglin 炳麟], “Wenxue shuo li (xu di wu hao)” 文學說例 (續第五號) [Explaining examples from literature (continuing number five)], in: *Xin min congbao* 新民叢報 [New Citizen] 9 (1902), 7–12, see 65. Here, Wei uses the term in a sense of proto-linguistics.

29 Maybe even “esotericism”.



mation in “linguistics” (*yuyanxue*) was added. This led to a step forward towards the establishment of Chinese linguistics (*Zhongguo yuyanxue*) as a science.

This explanation is followed by a further explanation of foreign influence on Chinese language study. He especially mentions the Indian influence.<sup>30</sup> Apart from an influence on language study, the contact with foreign languages and scripts also lead to the development of phonetic spellings:

先由中外交通引起語言文字的接觸，接觸上的困難需要解決，就產生了幫助漢字注音的方法；

中外交通以後，國族的危亡問題引起愛國保種的運動，就首先發生開通民智從改革文字著手的主張。

前一句話是外來的要求，後一句話是自我的覺悟。從這兩個方面演成國音字母的兩套音標：注音符號與國語羅馬字。<sup>31</sup>

Communication between China and other countries led to a contact with [their] language and script; difficulties in communication had to be solved, and this is why the method of using a phonetic transcription for the Chinese characters as a help was created;

Since China had begun to interact with others, the problem of the Chinese race being in peril led to the patriotic protection movement, and the first endeavor was to strive to remove all obstacles for the intelligence of the people through script reform.

The first statement describes a demand from outside; the second describes a self-realization. These two aspects led to the two different tables of national phonetic script: Zhuyin fuhao and Gwoyeu Romatzyh).

These transcription systems did not materialize from thin air. Wei Jianguo takes the reader back to the earliest Latin transcriptions developed by Western missionaries, and focuses especially on Nicholas Trigault's (Jin Nige 金尼閣, 1577–1628) work *Xi ru er mu zi* 西儒耳目資 (Aid to the ear and eye of the Western scholar). Wei explains how it was indeed an aid to either ear or eye: it enabled the reader to find a character according to the sound (*yi yin qiu zi* 依音求字) or a sound according to the character (*yi zi qiu yin* 依字求音).<sup>32</sup> It was, however, based on Western orthographic practice. Wei proceeds chronologically and mentions the developers of indigenous transcription systems, beginning with Lu Zhuangzhang who developed the “phonetic writing” *qieyinzi* 切音字 that can be traced to the *fanqie* principle of spelling according to initials and rhymes, which goes back to respecting the Chinese syllable structure.<sup>33</sup> Wang Zhao's “Mandarin alphabet” *guanhua zimu* 官話字母 then followed; its author was inspired by the Japanese *kana* scripts<sup>34</sup> that graphically draw, in a similar fashion to later Chinese tran-

30 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang” (2001), 133.

31 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang” (2001), 173.

32 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang” (2001), 176.

33 Kaske, Elisabeth, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919* (2008), 97.

34 Wippermann, Dorothea, *Das Phonetische Alphabet Zhuyin Zimu – Entstehung und Verbreitung im Zuge der Nationalsprachlichen Bewegung in der Republik China 1912–1949* (1985), 13.

scriptions, from Chinese characters or their components.<sup>35</sup> Wei then focuses on Lao Naixuan's 勞乃宣 (1843–1921) “Simple characters” *jianzi* 簡字,<sup>36</sup> which are an extension of Wang's *guanhua zimu*. This development culminates in the invention of *guoyin zimu* 國音字母, “national phonetic alphabet”, later known known as Zhuyin Zimu/Fuhao.

Despite Wei's preference for Zhuyin – he employs it as a baseline of national pronunciation – his goal was not to discuss the perks of each of the systems. In *Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang*, he wanted to outline the language or pronunciation they represent. I have already described in Part I how the phonological research into the development of the Mandarin dialects was employed to legitimize a Beijing-pronunciation-based standard language. Relating to a possible reform or even replacement of the script, or at least with an auxiliary spelling, the question of a pronunciation standard is more significant if the script aims at unambiguously representing sound. While Western transcriptions were indeed the crucial impetus, Wei and many of his colleagues preferred looking to the traditional inventory to tackle script reform.

## 7.2 Simplified Characters with a Historical Basis

Looking into traditional philological inventory during Republican times provided reformers the basics for the upcoming script reform. The following subsections discuss Wei Jiangong's perception that simplified characters had a long history, the role played by “vulgar characters” (*suzi*) and the simplification ideas that saw the light of day.

### 7.2.1 Vulgar Characters, Simplified Characters

Wei Jiangong may have been most famous as a phonologist, but his role as a paleographer cannot be overlooked either. In his lecture on the historical evolution of the Chinese characters' shape (*Hanzi xingtí biānqiānshǐ* 漢字形體變遷史) at the Southwestern United University (Xinan lianhe daxue, dated 1937 or later), Wei makes reference to the current “trend” (*chaoliu* 潮流) of simplified characters (*jiántǐzì* 簡體字).<sup>37</sup> This “vogue” had begun with Qian Xuantong's idea in 1920 that his students would increase the speed of their note taking if they adopted (*caiqǔ* 採取) the following eight simplification ideas (Qian numbered them a-h):

1. old characters (*guzi* 古字): *xiong* 胸 - 匈 (chest)
2. non-standard characters (*suzi*): *sheng* 聲 - 声 (sound)
3. cursive script characters (*caoshu* 草書): *dong* 東 - 东 (East)<sup>38</sup>

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35 Müller-Yokota, Wolfram, “Schrift und Schriftgeschichte”, in: *Sprache und Schrift Japans*, ed. by Lewin, Bruno, Leiden: Brill, 185–221, see 195, 199.

36 Wei Jiangong 魏建功, “Zhongguo shengyunxue shigang” (2001), 202ff.

37 Wei Jiangong 魏建功, “Hanzi xingtí biānqiānshǐ” (2001), 42. Bökset also writes of a “vogue”: Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 11.

38 Qian Xuantong 錢玄同, “Jiansheng hanzi bihua de tiyi” 減省漢字筆畫底提議 [Proposition to reduce the strokes of Chinese characters], in: *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [*La Jeunesse*] 7.3 (1920), 111–116, see 112.

4. homophonic loan characters from old books (*gu shu shang de tongyin jiajiezi* 古書上的同音假借字): *gong* 供 (*gōng* = supply, *gòng* = confess, offer sacrifices) - *gòng* 共 (share, common, together)
5. popular homophonic loan characters (*tongsu de tongyin jiajiezi* 通俗的同音假借字): *jiang* 薑 - 姜 (ginger, also a surname)
6. newly drafted homophonic loan characters (*xin ni de tongyin jiajiezi* 新擬的同音假借字): *fan* 範 - 范 (pattern, model, scope, also a surname)<sup>39</sup>
7. newly drafted semantic loan characters (*xin ni de jie yi zi* 新擬的借義字): *nao* 腦 (brain) - *xin* 囟 (fontanel)<sup>40</sup>
8. newly drafted reduced stroke characters (*xin ni de jiansheng bihua zi* 新擬的減省筆畫字): *li* 歷 - 历 (history)<sup>41</sup>

This list shows the basic principles of the creation of simplified characters or even their rediscovery. Adoption of existing non-standard variants was called for even earlier, namely by Lufei Kui in 1909, whose views on the *sutizi* 俗體字 I discuss below in section 8.2 on page 227. In general, analysis of Qian's eight approaches to simplifying the Chinese script shows the following: the fundamental construction principles that would lead to the simplified characters of the PRC were not only known in the Republic; they are deeply rooted in the Chinese script tradition. In terms of structural principles, some of Qian's categories overlap. Numbers 1, 2, 4 and 7 are characterized by an omission of components. The following will show how Wei Jianguo navigated this background.

Concluding his previous lectures, Wei presents the two tendencies in the history of the script, namely “avoiding complexity” (*bi fan* 避繁) and “eliminating the strange” (*qu guai* 去怪). As well, he discusses the two extremes between which the script development oscillated, namely “restriction” (*ju* 拘) and “liberation” (*fang* 放).<sup>42</sup>

“Avoiding complexity”, however, did not necessarily mean that the characters lost their complexity. Wei Jianguo indicates how the “vulgar” or “popular characters” (*suzi*) are not simpler or contain fewer strokes than the standard forms. Since many *suzi* were created with more explicit phonetics or include clearer semantic components, some of them may be more complex. Still, for the most part of the use in daily life, Wei argues, *suzi* tended towards simplification.

For these reasons, Wei continues, the recently proposed *jiantizi* are by no means only informed by *suzi*. He presents another method of simplifying the characters: the replacement of components with their cursive (*caoshu*) forms, i.e. replacing a complex element with a simple one. Since clarity and recognizability are key, these *jiantizi* were often written in regular (or standard) script form (*kaishu zhi tishi* 楷書之體勢).<sup>43</sup>

39 In numbers 4, 5 and 6 we see a convergence of different characters.

40 Qian Xuantong 錢玄同, “Jiansheng hanzi bihua de tiyi” (1920), 113.

41 Qian Xuantong 錢玄同, “Jiansheng hanzi bihua de tiyi” (1920), 114.

42 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi xingtí bianqianshi” (2001), 42.

43 See Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi xingtí bianqianshi” (2001), 42. See also section 7.2.2 on page 207.

While in the future Wei sees no constraint (*jushu* 拘束) for the creation (or appearance, *shengzhang* 生長) of *jiantizi*, given their long history,<sup>44</sup> he also acknowledges that official intervention in this development is desirable. For him, the circulation of “handwritten characters” *shoutouzi* 手头字<sup>45</sup> circulating in Shanghai news and culture magazines<sup>46</sup> and the official publication of the “List of simplified characters” (*Jiantizi biao* 簡體字表)<sup>47</sup> by the KMT government (both circulated in 1935) were important steps in the right direction. The idea behind the *shoutouzi* was to turn widely used handwritten short forms into a font for printing. It must be pointed out that both lists already contain a large amount of characters that would later be made official in the PRC reforms. Many of the proposed simplified characters on the two lists were created by omitting or contracting one or several components of the characters.

Both the list of *shoutouzi* and the *Jiantizi biao* not only show a considerable overlap but also a large number of characters that would later be officially adopted in the PRC. The main approach used during the Republican era was to decrease complexity in a graphical way: components are omitted, contracted or replaced by components with lesser strokes. The vast majority, however, are not newly created characters but existing variants. A list of examples can be found at the end of this chapter (see 7.2.3 on page 209). All of the listed characters would then be made official in the PRC reforms.

This approach to the simplification of the characters makes it evident that this reform approach is very different from the call to replace the characters with phonetic spelling (be it Latin/Western or based on the Chinese characters). This was important for Wei Jianguo. Wei stresses that simplified characters have significant components to them (*zhu yi* 注義, literally: to annotate meaning). Different from *jianzi* or Zhuyin as a phonetic transcription, reformed characters will constitute a new system of shape and sound (*xin xing sheng xitong* 新形聲系統).<sup>48</sup>

44 Wei claims that they can be traced back to the Han dynasty. For the vast majority, this is true. Bökset, however, presents the earliest appearance of *jiantizi* created by omitting a part as early as some time between 770 and 476 BC (Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 174.). He also points out that Huang Lizhou 黄梨洲 (1610–1695, given name Zhongyi 宗義) already advocated the use of *suzi* with lesser strokes. Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi xingti bianqianshi” (2001), 42.

45 Or “simplified handy characters (for daily usage)”, as translated by Zhang Liqing 张立青. Zhou Youguang 周有光 [translated by Zhang Liqing 张立青], *Zhongguo yuwen de shidai yanjin* (2003), 61.

46 The mission statement of the initiators (*faqiren* 發起人, among them Ba Jin, Ye Shengtao and Lao She 老舍 (1899–1966), but not Wei Jianguo) and a first list of *shoutouzi* was published in several magazines, such as *Shenghuo jiaoyu* 生活教育 (Life and Education) and *Xinsheng zhoukan* 新生週刊 (New Life Weekly). See also: Ding Shujing 丁淑靜 et al., “Tuixing shoutouzi yuanqi” 推行手头字緣起 [Mission statement of the promotion of handwritten characters], in: *Taibai* 太白 [Venus] 1.21 (1935). *Venus* (*taibai* lit.: great white) refers to the star.

47 The “List” is based on Qian Xuantong’s work on the “Table of simplified characters” (*Jiantizi pu* 簡體字譜) from the same year. Apart from Qian, other notable linguists who participated in the drafting of the “List” included Li Jinxi, Wang Yi, and Zhao Yuanren. He Jiuying 何九盈, *Zhongguo xiandai yuyanxue shi* (1994), 484.

48 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi xingti bianqianshi” (2001), 43.

### 7.2.2 The Partial Reform of the Chinese Characters

In 1937, Wei Jianguo published his view on a possible “partial” (*jubu* 局部) transformation/reform (*gaizao* 改造) and his comments on the current reform propositions and graphemic research.<sup>49</sup> He first outlines his general concerns and then comments on the *Jiantizi biao*, the “Dictionary of simplified characters” (*Jiantizi zidian* 簡體字典) by Rong Geng 容庚 (1894–1983) and Huang Zhongming’s 黃仲明 research on the semi-cursive script (*xingshu* 行書).<sup>50</sup>

Wei describes the current state of the script debate and presents the three approaches to reforming the Chinese writing:

1. abolish the characters altogether (*genben feichu* 根本廢除)
2. partially reform the characters (*jubu gaizao* 局部改造)
3. add help to the characters (*fujia bangzhu* 附加幫助)<sup>51</sup>

The first option, the abolition of the characters, is still the preferred prospect for Wei. However, he regards it as unrealistic. The majority of the population would not be able to accept an abolition for two reasons: the ability of the characters to hold the Chinese nation together, and the difficult separation between the spoken language and the script. Thus it would cause the abolition of the characters to be confused with the abolition of the Chinese language altogether. The third option is the addition of a phonetic spelling like *Zhuyin fuhao* to the characters. In this article, he concentrates on the second option: the partial reform of the characters.<sup>52</sup>

As Wei stated (and has already said so on different occasions), partial reforms must be based on natural linguistic development, which is characterized by the gradual, involuntary change of speech and script. Script is merely a tool to represent the spoken language on paper; both language and script change incessantly. Wei describes how “our people” (*women de minzhong* 我們的民眾) is ingenious in using and adapting the script. He illustrates how people use and adapt the script, employing one specific figure of speech that appears all over his text. This figure of speech also encapsulates his beliefs on the principle for reform: *you jing you quan* 有經有權. It can be translated rather literally: the people “had the classics

49 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti – jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biao zhun xingshu shuping” 漢字局部改造的問題 – 簡體字表, 簡體字典和標準行書書評 [The question of a partial reform of the Chinese characters – commentary on the List of simplified characters, the Simplified character dictionary and the standard semi-cursive script], 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, 169–187. Originally published in the journal *Yishibao: Dushu zhoukan* 益世報·讀書周刊 (*Social Welfare Daily: Reading Weekly* (supplement)) volumes 93 and 94. The English translation of the journal title is from Fung, Edmund S. K., *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity* (2010), 181.

50 Huang Zhongming 黃仲明, “Biaozhun xingshu zhi yanjiu” 標準行書之研究 [Research on a standardized semi-cursive script], in: *Dongfang Zazhi* 東方雜誌 [*Eastern Miscellany*] 33.7 (1936), 195–211. *Xingshu* is sometimes also called “running script” or “cursive”. By calling it “semi-cursive”, I follow Wilkinson, see Wilkinson, Endymion, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (2018), 34.

51 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti – jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biao zhun xingshu shuping” (2001), 169.

52 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti – jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biao zhun xingshu shuping” (2001), 169.

and the insight into the ideal moment”,<sup>53</sup> but the general philosophical concept called *jing quan shuo* 經權說 and *jing quan lun* 經權論 actually goes back well into pre-Imperial times.<sup>54</sup> In philosophical terms, it describes how the *Dao* 道 is laid out in principle and how it adapts to the circumstances. In more general terms, it also states a traditional fixed rule may have to be disregarded to suit one particular situation.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, Wei explains, *jing* 經<sup>56</sup> is some sort of core that needs to be continued (*yin* 因), whereas elements affected by *quan* 權 can be dismissed or altered (*ge* 革). Since the people naturally know which elements in the script should be continued and those that should be dismissed, Wei calls for an adoption of characters and simplification methods that developed among the common people. These characters and methods are “established by custom” (*yue ding su cheng* 約定俗成), a phrase Wei and other reformers like to quote from *Xunzi* 荀子 (ca. 3rd cent. BCE).<sup>57</sup> This concept is represented by the principle of “adopt the existing ones and do not create new ones” (*shu er bu zuo* 述而不作) in the official explanations accompanying the Republican *Jiantizi biao*.<sup>58</sup>

Many of these existing character variants, however, have been called “vulgar” (*su* 俗, also: popular, non-standard), and are juxtaposed with “correct” (*zheng* 正, also: standard, orthodox) characters. Between these two extremes on the spectrum of the social status of character variants, Wei proposes a third category: “common” (*tong* 通). Wei then offers an explanation for these three categories that removes them from the realm of prestige and enters the realm of chronology. “Correct” characters have been established longer. “Vulgar” characters have been newly created and are therefore simply not accepted yet. They are not inferior or “erroneous” (*e* 訛), but chronologically younger. It is not a question of quality, but of chronology. Newly created characters were called *su* because they lacked tradition. The different categories are fluid and change with time. Today’s “erroneous” or “vulgar” may be tomorrow’s “standard” and “correct”.<sup>59</sup>

53 Hintzen, Geor, “The Place of Law in the PRC’s Culture”, in: *Cultural Dynamics* 11.2 (1999), 167–192, see 184.

54 Jiang Qing 蒋庆, *Gongyang xue yinlun* [Introduction to the study of the Gongyang commentary], Shenyang 沈阳: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe 辽宁教育出版社, 1995, 232ff.

55 Zhang Dainian quotes the passage *Li Lou* 離婁 I, 17 from the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), that states even if men and women are not to touch each other, a man should still grab his sister-in-law to save her from drowning, to show that *quan* can be translated as “assessment”. Zhang, Dainian, *Key concepts in Chinese philosophy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 358.

56 The term *jing* originally denoted “warp” (from weaving) and subsequently metaphorically meant “rule”, “canon”, “guiding thread”, “guideline”. See: Unger, Ulrich, *Grundbegriffe der altchinesischen Philosophie: ein Wörterbuch für die Klassische Periode*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000, 48.

57 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti – jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biao zhun xingshu shuping” (2001), 170. Wei here uses it as general ideal concept for reforms, but it can also characterize one particular character variant. Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 6.

58 Jiaoyu bu 教育部 [Ministry of Education], “Jiantizi biao” 簡體字表 [Table of simplified characters], in: *Xiang-E tielu xunkan* 湘鄂鐵路旬刊 [Ten-day periodical of the Hunan-Hubei railway] 117 (1935), 19–21, see 20. See also: Zhou Youguang 周有光 [translated by Zhang Liqing 张立青], *Zhongguo yuwen de shidai yanjin* (2003), 61.

59 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, “Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti – jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biao zhun xingshu shuping” (2001), 170–171.

According to Wei, an example of this categorization and its chronological explanation is found in Tang dynasty: Yan Yuansun's 顏元孫 (d. 732) orthography dictionary *Ganlu zishu* 干祿字書 (Lexicon for Seeking a Salary).<sup>60</sup> This volume and other reference books of the Tang dynasty mark the introduction of a standardized orthography that became a crucial criterion for the examinations of scholar-officials.<sup>61</sup> Wei explains how the Tang ended an era where writers had a certain orthographic freedom and began an era of standardization of writing norms thanks to a wider spread of block printing.<sup>62</sup> The Tang also marked the introduction of *kaishu* as predominant script for block printing.<sup>63</sup>

*Kaishu* provided the graphical standard for the ROC "List of Simplified Characters". The adopted simpler *caoshu* variants were "kai-ized" (*kaitihua* 楷體化 or *kaihua* 楷化).<sup>64</sup> In other words, their shape was adapted to *kaishu*. The explanations accompanying the "List" state that while the round forms of *caoshu* are well-suited for handwriting, the straight lines and sharper angles of *kaishu* make it suitable for printing. Wei did not believe that handwriting and printing types had to be the same.<sup>65</sup>

Adopting existing graphical solutions to decrease the complexity of the characters was also pursued by the two scholars whose work Wei discussed: Rong Geng and his *Jianti zidian* and Huang Zhongming's research on a standardized semi-cursive script. Rong's dictionary already contained 138 characters that would later be adopted in the PRC reforms, most of which are the results of

- 60 Wei also examined it in its secondary capacity as rhyme book. Cf. his 1939 article: Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, "Tāngdài xīngyōng de yī zhōng yūnshū de mùcí (*Gānlù zìshū* suǒ jù yūnmù kǎo)" 唐代行用的一種韻書的目次 (《干祿字書》所據韻目考) [The table of contents of a rhyme book in use during the Tang period (examination of the rhymes in the *Ganlu zishu*)], in: *Wei Jiāngōng wénjí* 魏建功文集 [Collected works of Wei Jiāngōng], ed. by Ye Xiāochūn 叶笑春, Rong Wénmín 戎文敏, Zhōu Fāng 周方 and Mǎ Zhēnxīng 马镇兴, vol. 2, Nanjing 南京: Jiāngsū jiàoyù chūbānshè 江苏教育出版社, 2001, 317–338.
- 61 McNair, Amy, "Public Values in Calligraphy and Orthography in the Tang Dynasty", in: *Monumenta Serica* 43 (1995), 263–278, see 263.
- 62 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, "Hānzì jùbù gāizāo de wèntí – jiāntìzìbiāo, jiāntìzìdiān hé biāozhūn xīngshū shūpíng" (2001), 170.
- 63 Wilkinson, Endymion, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (2013), 33.
- 64 Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, "Hānzì jùbù gāizāo de wèntí – jiāntìzìbiāo, jiāntìzìdiān hé biāozhūn xīngshū shūpíng" (2001), 178.
- 65 See Wei Jiāngōng 魏建功, "Hānzì jùbù gāizāo de wèntí – jiāntìzìbiāo, jiāntìzìdiān hé biāozhūn xīngshū shūpíng" (2001), 173. As well, during the PRC simplification discussions, keeping different styles in handwriting and printing was debated. For example, some argued that the cursive forms like 东 or 车 (car) should be confined to handwriting, while 東 and 車 should be printed. The cursive variants were only officially adopted in 1964. Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 138.

omissions and contractions.<sup>66</sup> His sources were historical *suzi* and *caoshu*.<sup>67</sup> Wei summarizes Rong's concept of script development as a straight line beginning from the ancient script (*guwen* 古文) and progressing towards the future in different stages: the small seal script (*xiaozhuan* 小篆), the clerical/official script (*li* 隸), standard/regular script (*kai* 楷), semi-cursive (*xing* 行), and cursive (*cao* 草), and finally simplified (*jiantizi* 簡體字).<sup>68</sup> Wei juxtaposes his own view on script development, presenting a two-dimensional model where *lishu* and *caoshu* existed synchronously, while *xingshu* split off from *lishu* before the establishment of *kaishu* and hence existed in parallel to both. From *kai* over *xing* to *cao*, he sees a gradual decrease of complexity (*fan* 繁) and increase of simplicity (*jian* 簡) while they also coexist(ed). He furthermore claims that Xu Shen's *liushu* do not apply for the characters after the seal script, which comprise all scripts from *lishu* onwards.<sup>69</sup> While Wei is aware of the limited explanatory power of the *liushu*, he neither mentions Tang Lan's 唐蘭 (1901–1979) theory of three character types (*sanshu shuo* 三書說) that was published in 1935<sup>70</sup> nor does he propose his own idea.

As well, Huang Zhongming's *xingshu* shows a discernible overlap with the already mentioned simplification schemes. It entails, for example, *men* 門 - 门 (door) and *bei* 貝 - 贝 (shell).<sup>71</sup> They are characterized by a contraction of strokes and variants that would be adopted in the PRC in the 1960s. However, Huang concentrated on character components, some of which do not have the capacity

66 For a list of the characters, see: Zhao Ping'an 赵平安, "Rong Geng he ta de *jiantizi dian*" 容庚先生和他的《简体字典》[Rong Geng and his 'dictionary of simplified characters'], in: *Yuwen Jianshe* 语文建设 [Language construction] 1 (1997), 42. See also: Xuan Jiancong 禰健聰, "*jiantizi dian* he Rong Geng de hanzi jianhua yanjiu" 《简体字典》和容庚的汉字简化研究 [The 'dictionary of simplified characters' and Rong Geng's research on the simplification of Chinese characters], in: *Zhongguo wenzixue bao* 中国文字学报 [Journal of Chinese graphemics] 7 (2017), 34–44. An example of omission is *hao* 號 - 号 (number, appellation, et al.). It must be noted, however, that 号 was probably the older variant as both appear in the *Shuowen jiezi* and the entry 號 makes reference to 号. See: Li Leyi 李乐毅, *Jianhuazi yuan* [Origin of simplified characters], Beijing 北京: Huayu jiaoxue chubanshe 华语教学出版社 [Sinolingua], 1996, 97.

67 Xuan Jiancong 禰健聰, "*jiantizi dian* he Rong Geng de hanzi jianhua yanjiu" (2017), 34.

68 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, "Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti - jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biao zhun xingshu shuping" (2001), 179.

69 Wei Jianguo 魏建功, "Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti - jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biao zhun xingshu shuping" (2001), 180.

70 Tang Lan proposed the *sanshu* theory in his *Guwenzixue daolun* 古文字學導論 (Introduction to paleography): (1) "graphs depicting figures" *xiangxing wenzi* 象形文字 (2) "graphs depicting concepts" *xiangyi wenzi* 象意文字 and "graphs depicting sounds" *xingsheng wenzi* 形聲文字, Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 [translated by Mattos, Gilbert and Norman, Jerry], *Chinese Writing* (Early China Special Monograph Series 4), Berkeley: University of California, 2000, 163. It was further developed by Chen Mengjia and then by Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 (\*1935) into three widely accepted categories today, summarized by Wilkinson as: "(1) the form indicates the word and hence the sound; (2) a character is used for its phonetic properties; and (3) the character combines (1) and (2)." Wilkinson, Endymion, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (2013), 36. Cf. also Ba Zhe 巴哲 and Luo Na 罗娜, "Hanzi leixing lilun yanjiu lüelun - cong 'liushu shuo', 'sanshu shuo' dao 'xin liushu shuo'" 汉字类型理论研究略论——从“六书说”、“三书说”到“新六书说” [A Brief View on the Study of Chinese Character Type Theory - From 'Six Types Theory', 'Three Types Theory' to 'New Six Types Theory'], in: *Pingxiang xueyuan xuebao* 萍乡学院学报 [Journal of Pingxiang University] 36.2 (2019), 82–85.

71 Huang Zhongming 黄仲明, "Biao zhun xingshu zhi yanjiu" (1936), 205.



(unlike the two examples) to stand on their own. The components are presented in *xingshu* handwritten style; they are not *kaiti*-ized. Huang's work is foundational research, not a direct reform proposal. He sees *xingshu* as a suitable middle way between the complex *kai* and the simple *cao*.<sup>72</sup>

However, this approach that starts with foundational research before calling for concrete reforms was exactly Wei Jiangong's wish. They were by far not the only ones rummaging through the vast Chinese historical script inventory. There was not only a vogue for short forms. Similar to other movements of the time (such as the folklore movement already described in 3.1.2, page 57), the script reform movement proceeded hand in hand with a movement to systematize or reorganize (*zhengli* 整理) the traditional inventory.<sup>73</sup> Wei summarized his conception that not only must all possible reform schemes be carefully considered but also that they must have a strong philological foundation in his 1936 essay "Making a plan for the Chinese characters" (Wei hanzi anpai jiyi 為漢字安排計議).<sup>74</sup>

Concluding his review of simplification ideas, Wei presents the way (*tujing* 途徑, or procedure) to a partial reform:

順先民之常軌，立繁簡之兩綱；  
視日用之切要，辨省變之多方。<sup>75</sup>

Follow the practice of the ancients, establish two outlines for complex and simple;

discern what is most necessary in daily life, discriminate the many ways of omitting and changing.

For Wei Jiangong, the approaches to the "partial reform" of the characters were neither thorough nor systematic enough. They were still far from a new system of shape and sound. He would be proven wrong: the PRC reforms two decades later would adopt a large part of these partial reform ideas. He was right because phoneticity would play a larger role and many new *xingshengzi* would be adopted. Before the PRC reforms are examined in the next chapter, a list of examples from the ROC is provided.

### 7.2.3 List of Simplified Character Examples from the Republican Period

- The traditional character *biao* 標 (sign, mark) appears as 标 only on the *shoutouzi* list and not the official *Jiantizi biao*. The variant, created by omit-

72 Huang Zhongming 黃仲明, "Biaozhun xingshu zhi yanjiu" (1936), 195.

73 *Zhengli* can also be "to put in order". I take the translation of "reorganization" from Schwarcz, Vera, *The Chinese Enlightenment* (1986), 71, 346, 352. Schwarcz refers to the reorganization of the national heritage that began during the May Fourth era.

74 Wei Jiangong 魏建功, "Wei hanzi anpai jiyi" 為漢字安排計議 [Making a plan for the Chinese characters], in: *Wei Jiangong wenji* 魏建功文集 [Collected works of Wei Jiangong], ed. by Ye Xiaochun 叶笑春, Rong Wenmin 戎文敏, Zhou Fang 周方 and Ma Zhenxing 馬鎮興, vol. 4, Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe 江苏教育出版社, 2001, 160–168.

75 Wei Jiangong 魏建功, "Hanzi jubu gaizao de wenti – jiantizibiao, jiantizidian he biaozhun xingshu shuping" (2001), 186.

ting the component *ya* 𠂔 (cover) appeared first on a 1934 table of *suzi*.<sup>76</sup> Li Leyi argues that the short form could also be a result of the contraction of strokes in the *caoshu* version.<sup>77</sup> See figure 3.

- By proposing to replace the complex form of *cong* 從 (follow) by 从, and actually omitting two of three components, both the *Jiantizi biao* and the *shoutouzi* list reinstate the earliest character form. It was found on oracle bones from Yin 殷 (today Yinxu 殷墟), capital of the Shang dynasty.<sup>78</sup>
- The short form for *deng* 燈 (light), 灯, also on both lists, saves strokes by introducing the phonetic *ding* 丁. It appeared during the Yuan dynasty in block printing to ease the carving of the blocks.<sup>79</sup> It is one example of the *xingsheng* approach in which the new component is not only introduced because it is simpler, but also because it has a suitable phonetic value.<sup>80</sup> This approach would be increasingly employed during the PRC reforms.
- An example of the replacement of the *kaishu* variant by a cursive variant, which is also an important technique to contract the shape, is *dong* 東 (East), shortened to 东. Its cursive variant actually dates back to Han dynasty cursive, also called *zhangcao* 章草. The rounded, interlinked strokes of *caoshu* had to be “*kaiti*-ized”. Just like Wei, also other reformers considered using it only for handwriting but not for printing.<sup>81</sup>
- *Dui* 對 (correct, toward, et al.) is one example where the complex component on the left is contracted or replaced by a component chosen for its simplicity but not for its phonetic value to create the short form 对. This was first done by Yuan block printers.<sup>82</sup>

76 Xu Zemin 徐則敏, “550 *suzi biao*” 550 俗字表 [Table of 550 non-standard characters], in: *Lunyu* 論語 [The Analects] 45 (1934), 1005–1007, see 1005. In the table, the *suzi* are handwritten, presumably for a lack of printing types. See also: Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 57.

77 Li Leyi 李乐毅, *Jianhuazi yuan* (1996), 19.

78 Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 102.

79 Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 117.

80 The same is the case for *yuan* 遠 - 远 (garden) and *yuan* 園 - 远 (far); both appear on both Republican lists and have their origins in Yuan variants. Li Leyi 李乐毅, *Jianhuazi yuan* (1996), 288–289. Why do especially many phonetic simplified characters go back to that time? Because the language at the time was considerably closer to nowadays’ Standard Chinese. However, some simpler phonetic variants are actually the older ones, such as the case of *da* 达 - 達 (reach, arrive, attain) dating back to Yin oracle bone inscriptions. The signfic *yang* 羊 (sheep) was added in Zhou times. Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 105.

81 Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 128; Li Leyi 李乐毅, *Jianhuazi yuan* (1996), 64; 东 also appears in Rong Geng’s *Jianti zidian*, cf. Zhao Ping’an 赵平安, “Rong Geng he ta de *Jiantizi dian*” (1997).

82 Bökset, Roar, *Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters* (2006), 134.



Figure 3: *Biao* 標 written in *caoshu* 草書. Image source: Li Leyi 李乐毅, *Jianhuazi yuan* 简化字源 (Origin of simplified characters), 1996.

