

## Chapter 9

# Conclusion

To conclude, I refer to my three claims from the introduction:

1. Language planning was implemented based on the existing language situation. On the one hand, this meant legitimizing the status quo. On the other hand, it meant legitimizing change by constructing or overemphasizing the historical legacy.
2. Language planning was carried out on the basis of traditional Chinese scholarship.
3. Wei Jianguo's language concept stayed the same, even if its phrasing in the People's Republic of China was different from that of the Republic of China.

Claim 1 refers to the national language movement on the Mainland. My discussion illustrated how the legacy of Northern Mandarin as standard language was constructed or at least overemphasized to legitimize it. The promulgation of the "old national pronunciation" in 1913 was not successful: it contained more characteristics from Southern Mandarin, while during the 19th century, the Beijing pronunciation had slowly acquired more prestige than that of Nanjing. Additionally, Northern Mandarin, as an amalgam of the dialects spoken in the North (with Beijing as most prominent reference point), had the significant advantage of being associated with vernacular literature, such as the Ming and Qing dynasty *baihua* novels. Therefore, according to Wei Jianguo, it had historical legitimacy and was a living tradition found in folk performing art, with Wei especially emphasizing the Peking opera. This shows how the May Fourth language reform project shifted the focus of the linguistic sciences toward popular genres and means of expression, reflecting a greater visibility and inclusion of what was formerly perceived as vulgar.

Although the Beijing dialect was accepted as representative for the northern dialects, its implementation was difficult. It was hard to realize discourse in reality. What is required to turn an idea in the heads of an intellectual into reality for the populace? As the history of the 20th century shows, political power, the ability to institutionalize and authorize, played an important role. In the case of

Taiwan, the promotion of *guoyu* went hand in hand with claiming supremacy over the island.

Claim 2 was proven in my discussion of both the national language movement and the script reform. Phonology and graphemics were not the only tools used to legitimize the language planning measures historically; other methods included traditional philological methods. Wei Jiāngōng's 1941 *Zhōnghuá xīnyūn* was basically a traditional rhyme book, and it was used to spread the standard language of the modern Republic. Lexicography, arguably the linguistic field with the most innovation, turned to traditional Chinese scholarship. The phonographic sorting of free morphemes as lexical items found a compromise between sound and shape. The majority of the simplified characters in the PRC then were either existing shorthand forms, which Wei Jiāngōng and his colleagues extracted from the enormous pool of China's historical characters, or they were newly created characters that followed the character-creation rules from ancient times. Qiu Xigui exemplifies this by treating the script reform as one of many processes in the development of the Chinese script.<sup>1</sup>

Claim 3 is tied to my theoretical considerations. I stated in the introduction that Wei Jiāngōng's concepts of language (including language-related concepts, such as script and language evolution) will be the focus of my work. I conclude his core language concept comprises the following: language is a tool to facilitate communication between the people, nobody should be left out, and that all members of society should be able to understand it. This means that language can be reformed to ensure inclusion and communication. This tool exists in the dimension of sound: the spoken word comes first, and the script is just a secondary, graphic representation of this sound. The script then, according to this concept, can also be reformed if it does not fulfill its task.

This utilitarian concept of language was framed differently in the Republic and in the PRC. In the Republic, Wei Jiāngōng emphasized historical legitimacy and nationalism. In the PRC, he projected the class struggle narrative on script development. In addition to their extensive knowledge of traditional Chinese philology, Wei and his colleagues became increasingly proficient in Western linguistics as well. This enabled Wei to frame his unchanging main concept in many ways. Contemporary Chinese linguistics is built on the work of these scholars: contemporary Chinese linguistics would not exist without traditional rhyme books, graphic etymology, latinized phonetic transcriptions, or a grammatical analysis with word classes. The dangerous dominance of Western powers not only prompted the radical questioning of the Chinese language and script but also induced a pathbreaking reorientation. It has been argued that contact with the West brought with it a phonocentrism that seemed more progressive and attractive, but that was ultimately discarded in favor of preserving Chinese characters.<sup>2</sup> I would, however, like to offer the reading that the phonocentric idea was not discarded, but that the phonetic characteristics of the characters were rediscovered.

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1 Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 [translated by Mattos, Gilbert and Norman, Jerry], *Chinese Writing* (2000).

2 Zhong, Yurou, *Chinese Grammatology: Script Revolution and Literary Modernity, 1916–1958* (2019).

The self-assertion that took place illustrated how the Chinese script cannot do less than the Latin alphabet, but more.

To conclude, I refer to my claim that the concepts function as the nexus between the discourse and the material world. The concepts formulated in the language discourse had to correspond to the material world to be successfully implemented, as seen in the comparison between “old” and “new national pronunciation”. Additionally, a solid basis of political stability and popular and institutional support was required to support language and script reforms.

