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Uneasy companions: language and human collectivities in the remaking of Chinese society in the early twentieth century

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Abstract
How we think national standard languages came to dominate the world depends on how we conceptualize the way languages are linked to the people that use them. Weberian theory posits the arbitrariness and constructedness of a community based on language. People who speak the same language do not necessarily think of themselves as a community, and so such a community is an intentional, political, and inclusive production. Bourdieusian theory treats language as a form of unequally distributed cultural capital, thus highlighting language's classed nature. The rise of standard languages thus reflects a change in the class structure of a nationalizing society. In contrast, I move beyond the familiar Western cases on which these theories are based to reveal the shortcomings of both these theoretical approaches. China, with an exceptionally artificial national standard language that was promulgated by the state in an extremely top-down process, highlights the importance of intentionality in both the design of the language and the social function it was supposed to play. Building on Weber and Bourdieu, I argue that even egalitarian language standardization projects, such as the Chinese case, can result in unintended new hierarchies of privilege and power, outrunning the best intentions of their designers.

Keywords Bourdieu · China · Class · Language · Nation · Weber

On December 21, 2010, the BBC reported that China's General Administration of Press and Publication, seeking to avoid further "sullying the purity of the Chinese language," had banned the use of English words in the print and broadcast media (BBC 2010). The regulation that the BBC was reporting on, the "Notice Regarding the Better Regulation of the Language Used in Publications," actually did a fair bit less. In seeking to stem the tide of irregular usages, the government sought to impose what amounted to a "house

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style" on the media nationwide. It banned the use of foreign acronyms, foreign words appearing without explanation, and Chinese-coined neologisms that mixed Chinese with English (i.e., "Chinglish") that had no clear definition (Xinwen Chuban Zongshu 2010). A few days later, the Communist Party–run newspaper the *Global Times* published opinion pieces by Wang Di in both English and Chinese defending the policy. In Wang's view, the problem was not with people online using casual language interspersed with English, but rather with formal publications' irregular usages. The casual employment of nonstandard usages, both in Chinese and English, was detrimental, Wang argued, to the cognitive abilities of the Chinese public, and reflected a lack of national self-confidence. Though all languages have always had foreign influences, Wang wrote, the present relationship between English and Chinese was highly unequal and, in effect, represented an "invasion" of the latter by the former (Johnson 2010; Wang 2010). Since then, flare-ups over language purity in the Chinese media have occasionally reappeared (Economist 2014).

The English-language media are often bemused at such attempts to defend a language against the onslaught of English. French-speakers are probably their most frequent object of derision, particularly attempts by the state in France and Quebec to regulate the usage of ordinary French speakers. Often part of an effort to stem the Anglophone tide, purist coinages that fail to take hold, like *texto pornographique* for "sexting," do make for good newspaper copy (Mikanowski 2018). But making jabs at the inability of a language regulatory body to influence something so seemingly democratic as language is to miss the forest for the trees. That the entire territory of China now encompasses ever-increasing numbers of Mandarin speakers (and France, French speakers) is in itself a remarkable change from just a century earlier, when China, France, and the rest of the world were a patchwork of many regional languages. How, then, have national lingua francas arisen?

How one answers this question depends on how one conceptualizes the relationship between language and human collectivities. Is language a form of cultural capital, or is it a basis for groupness in itself? If, as in Pierre Bourdieu's thinking, one prioritizes language's nature as a form of capital, then one is primed to notice the ways in which it is unequally distributed in society, reflected in such vertical distinctions as class and status (Bourdieu 1991; Gramsci 1991, pp. 183–184; Hanks 2005). A national standard language would, in this model, be most easily explained as the result of a shift in class relations and the imposition of the language of the new bourgeois elite as the language of a nationalizing society. If, on the other hand, one prioritizes language's ability to facilitate the formation of social relationships, as in Max Weber's thinking, then one is more likely to notice how language can be deployed to create symbolic and social boundaries among horizontally-distinguished units of peoplehood, such as ethnic, religious, and national groups (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Muehlmann 2014; Tada 2018; Weber 1978, pp. 42–43). In this model, the choice of official language is not necessarily reflective of any particular class, even though rulers are usually in charge of such decisions. This article interrogates these two contrasting conceptualizations of language—Bourdieusian and Weberian—and finds both fall short in explaining the nature of national standard languages in cases that differ greatly from their European base.

These shortcomings stem from the nineteenth-century European origins of modern social theory, which largely takes Western cases as normative, especially when it comes to language. Changes in post-medieval European language practices, at least among the

literate elite, consisted in a gradual shift from Latin to the national vernaculars. As a result, language change is usually studied from the perspective of the slow evolution of language practices amid the rise of the bourgeoisie and market capitalism. The state played a significant role in spreading national standard languages to the masses in Europe, and language was a critical, if imperfect, way nations were distinguished from one another in theory and practice. For rulers, who often were foreigners in their own lands, it was increasingly important to be less culturally different from the people they ruled, and language rose to prominence as a marker of national identity (Anderson 1991, pp. 76–77; Gellner 1983, pp. 35–38; Lie 2004, p. 126).

In contrast, changes in language practices outside of Europe, such as those that occurred throughout East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century, occurred much more abruptly, usually in reaction to Western expansionism. As a result, these places outside Europe tend to be studied separately as cases of postcolonial modernization and development, in which countries seek to "catch up" to the West (Fishman et al. 1968). The "language planning" literature that covers these non-Western cases, often utopian in outlook, has not been very active since the 1980s, after it found its optimism misplaced. Sociology itself has for decades been largely mute on the subject of language, and language studies are now mostly done in linguistics, sociolinguistics, or linguistic anthropology. Language, however, is an eminently sociological subject of study, since it is the basis of virtually all social interaction. Linguistic anthropologist William Hanks has articulated the "conviction that language is basic to human sociality" (Hanks 1996, p. xiv). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any social interaction occurring without language. Politics, much less political protest or social movements, cannot occur in the absence of linguistic exchanges. Even violence does not necessarily surprise or puzzle us unless it is "senseless" or "meaningless." Linguistic exchange is the medium *par excellence* of conveying meaning, and even, as some scholars have argued, a means of constituting social reality. Language, in other words, is foundational to social life (Austin 1975; Berger and Luckmann 1967, pp. 34–41; Searle 1995).

This article shows that, though the more familiar Western cases may suggest it, a national standard language is not always or necessarily the language "of" the ruling class. Such may often be the case, but the connections between language and class—or any other human collectivity, for that matter—are not so straightforward as the word "of" may suggest. Neither is a national standard language simply the political reorganization of a preexisting language community as a nation-state (Tada 2018, p. 455). In this article, I examine the Chinese state's nation-building efforts, a key part of which was to codify and elevate a new national language. Integral to this project was the transition away from Literary (or Classical) Chinese to Modern Standard Chinese, or Mandarin. The key formative period for this change spanned the 1910s and 1930s, a revolutionary era during which the imperial state collapsed and a succession of regimes attempted to take its place. During these three decades, the national spoken and written languages were created and made official by the Ministry of Education. Mandarin increasingly became the language of education in an emerging state-run school system, and it grew as a medium of communication in print, broadcast, film, and music. In effect, the Chinese state accomplished in three decades what had occurred in Europe over the course of several centuries: a transition from a supranational classical language to a national vernacular. Because of this compressed timeframe, the Chinese case provides a concentrated view of the state's efforts to create and propagate a national standard language, a perspective that the Western

cases—far more gradual and thus more seemingly "natural"—do not provide. China, long the world's most populous country, is effectively the single largest national language development project in human history, and the inability of existing theory to account for this case and other similar non-Western cases is cause enough for serious concern—and thus fertile ground for further inquiry.

The Chinese case is especially theoretically generative because it clarifies the relationship between competing models of language in a way that the more familiar Western cases do not. France is often cited as exceptionally centralized and top-down in its national language policy, but the less-familiar Chinese case is even more extreme: at the time of the state's creation of the standard language, it represented the living practice of virtually no one. Mandarin is a historically discontinuous form deliberately designed to be different from any living Chinese vernacular. While Mandarin is usually associated with Beijing dialect or the speech of the imperial court, its pronunciation system and vocabulary are explicitly distinct from either of these linguistic antecedents.

As such, Mandarin represents a degree of linguistic artificiality that exceeds its Western counterparts. As an intensively cultivated artificial language, Mandarin reveals how language standardization really is an attempt at technocratic social engineering. Among the most pressing goals of social policy in early twentieth-century China was the spread of literacy. The difficulty of the existing written standard, Literary Chinese—a supranational lingua franca comparable to Latin—was thought to inhibit widespread literacy. Hence language reform: creating a standard language more accessible to ordinary people, thus making it easier to learn to read, thereby furthering national integration and, in the eyes of reformers, national strength. Mandarin, as a national standard language that was more accessible than its predecessor, represented an extension of an official language from a narrow imperial elite to the entirety of a national society. As an extreme case of linguistic engineering and inclusive (even oppressive) language policies, the Chinese case contributes significantly to our understanding of the malleability of the relationship between language and human collectivities. I argue that both the Bourdieusian and Weberian approaches fall short in their explanatory power because they ignore the important role of human intentionality in shaping not only the *function* of a language—the link between a standard language and its intended community—but also the *form* of the language—its sound and spelling, and even grammar, which can be made to be more or less accessible to learners.

While in this article I highlight human agency, I do not seek to argue that the problem with the Weberian and Bourdieusian approaches is an overemphasis on structure and an elision of agency—a tired dichotomy as there ever was. Rather, the issue is that each theorist has treated language itself as autonomous—that is, they assume that broader changes in the internal workings of a language (in particular, its pronunciation and grammar) are beyond individual human manipulation. The autonomy of language is an assumption that forms the basis of much of American linguistics, but it is one that has long been resisted by scholars outside of that field (Newmeyer 1986).[1] Nevertheless, linguistic autonomy—the essentially democratic nature of language, impervious to top-down manipulations of its internal workings—is an assumption that is more widely held than one might think: jokes about

[1] My use of "autonomy" here points to assumptions about language's democratic nature, owing to its apparent imperviousness to consciously made "internal" modifications (i.e., to its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation), as opposed to "external" modifications (changing a language's role in society—e.g., designating a language as the official language). This is distinct from Bourdieu's usage, which addresses the autonomy of fields of power.

the French Academy's ham-handed attempts to regulate language, along with snarky asides about wholly-invented languages like Esperanto, would not be funny if we did not believe language to be beyond the control—much less invention—of mere individuals. But the Chinese state made use of existing linguistic raw materials to create something entirely new: a language oriented towards a vision of a society in which the official language was widely accessible to all.

Building on the strengths of Weber and Bourdieu, I present an alternative theoretical approach, leaning on the notion of "unanticipated consequences" (Merton 1936). I argue that a language itself can be designed to suit a particular social purpose, and that the relationship between such a language and a particular group of people is not a given, but rather can be intentionally made. However, the consequences of these intentional moves can be contrary to the intentions of the movers. My alternative approach decenters the linguistic autonomy implicit in the conceptualizations of Weber and Bourdieu that lead to each theorist's conclusions about language, society and the rise of national standard languages. Doing so allows us to account for such extremes of language planning as the Chinese case, in which the language was deliberately plebeianized to further nation-building and thus constitute a new feeling of belonging among a previously disparate population—a possibility not really considered by Weber. And yet, in spite of this intended democratization of language, language-proficiency-based hierarchies of class have still arisen in China (Li 2004, 2014). However, under my alternative theoretical approach, instead of being built into the system from the outset, as Bourdieu posits, this emergence of linguistic inequality becomes more easily explained as an unanticipated consequence of language standardization.

In the ensuing sections, I first discuss in more depth the theoretical approaches taken by Weber and Bourdieu in explaining the relationship between languages and groups of people.[2] I then show, through a historical narration of the Chinese case of language standardization, how these theories fail to explain the radical linguistic reconfiguration of Chinese society that occurred in the twentieth century. I then present my alternative theoretical approach, showing how it more easily accounts for these changes and avoids the difficulties that Weber and Bourdieu run into when used to explain the sort of linguistic changes that I detail.

Existing explanations: Weber and Bourdieu

Germany's sometimes troubled association with linguistic and ethnic nationalism is familiar. Thus, it might be surprising to discover that Max Weber argued that commonality of language was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a set of humans to believe themselves to belong together. Such at least was certainly the case at least in the sense of a collectivity whose primary bond was the sort of social relationship Weber called "communitization" (*Vergemeinschaftung*),[3] which for him was based

[2] In this article, I loosely use "groups of people," "human collectivities," and "social aggregates" as equivalents for social groupings that might be rooted in any number of intersecting symbolic and social boundaries, such as class, nationality, and ethnicity.

[3] There are a number of English translations of *Vergemeinschaftung,* including "communal social relationship" (Weber 1978) and "communalization" (Scaff 2011; Weber 2019). Here, I follow Bruun and Whimster (Weber 2012), whose usage to me seems least forced.

"on a subjectively **felt** (affectual or traditional) **mutual sense of belonging** among those involved" (Weber 2019, p. 120).[4] For Weber, this subjective feeling of belonging was a key component of his conception of ethnic groups, which he defined as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both…" (Weber 1978, p. 389). And the concept of nationality, in Weber's view, included a "vague connotation that whatever is felt to be distinctively common must derive from common descent" (Weber 1978, p. 395).

Although, in Weber's time, as well as in our own, "a shared common language is pre-eminently considered the normal basis of nationality," Weber nevertheless pointed out that many nation-states comprise speakers of more than one language (such as Canada and Switzerland). Conversely, speakers of the same language in many cases belong to several different nations (such as English and German). Moreover, merely speaking the same language was "insufficient in sustaining a sense of national identity (*Nationalgefühl*)" (Weber 1978, pp. 395–396). Indeed, a community defined by speech—what famed linguists such as Leonard Bloomfield (1933, pp. 42–56) and John Gumperz (1962) would call a "speech community"—was for Weber similar to one defined by ethnicity: a concept whose components—language and belonging—did not hang together easily. Mitsuhiro Tada (2018, p. 442) has gone so far as to argue that such a concept would "disappear" if the concept were fully fleshed out, though others have pointed out that Weber did, at least initially, include the notion of a "language community" (*Sprachgemeinschaft*) in his conceptualization of a communitization based on consensus (*Einverständnis-Vergemeinschaftung*), since in this early conceptual scheme, Weber posited that speakers behaved "as if" the rules of language had been arrived at by prior agreement (though they actually had not been) (Lichtblau 2011, p. 460; Weber 2012, pp. 290–291). These rules, of course, could later be made explicit, as in the establishment of a language academy, such as the Accademia della Crusca in Italy, thereby transitioning to a different kind of social relationship, the "rational ideal type of societization" (*Vergesellschaftung*) (Weber 2012, pp. 291, 293).

In his later writing, Weber modified his ideal-typical conceptualizations of social relationships by pairing "communitization" (*Vergemeinschaftung*) with a revised notion of its complement, "societization" (*Vergesellschaftung*).[5] He had originally defined societization as a social relationship based on explicit agreement, but in his revised scheme, societization now pointed to one based on "a **balance** of rationally motivated interests (whether value rational or purposively rational), or to the **connection** of interests motivated in the same way"—that is, mutual interest alone, not necessarily with any explicit agreement (Lichtblau 2011, p. 463; Weber 2019, p. 120). In this revised scheme, language was no longer conceived of as being able to serve as the basis for communitization—a subjective feeling of belonging together; it was, however, helpful in (though not in itself sufficient for) facilitating societization—action based on mutual interest, which requires a mutual understanding greatly aided by having a language in common (Weber 2019, p. 122).

[4] Keith Tribe, in his translation of *Economy and Society,* uses boldface to indicate emphasis marked in Weber's original text, avoiding the confusion that italics might create, given that italics are also conventionally used for words in the source language (German) (Weber 2019, p. x).

[5] *Vergesellschaftung* has also been translated in several different ways, among them, "associative social relationship" (Weber 1978), and "sociation" (Scaff 2011; Weber 2019). Again, I follow Bruun and Whimster (Weber 2012).

As linguistic anthropologist Shaylih Muehlmann (2014) has pointed out, difficulties with the concept of "speech community," which assumes a consensus and homogeneity among speakers that are almost never encountered in the real world, have prompted many scholars to move on to other, seemingly more workable concepts, such as nationality, ethnicity, minority, or various conceptualizations of the public sphere and its constituent "publics," originated by Jürgen Habermas (1991). Ethnic or national community and its inherent constructedness are perhaps most familiar to contemporary scholars in the form of Benedict Anderson's (1991) *Imagined Communities,* which itself was situated within a larger body of constructivist literature on nationalism, arguing that nationality existed first in the minds of people—strangers—who were bound across space and time by languages—national vernaculars—spread by print capitalism. In a similar vein, Weber notes that, "Today, the interests of writers and publishers lead as a matter of course to greater uniformity of language (*Sprachpropaganda*), as contrasted to private languages formerly closed by social rank, or privy to particular persons" (Weber 2019, p. 125). These national vernacular languages, bolstered by a market in print, were then co-opted by emerging national governments in a nation-building wave that first crested in Europe, and then later (derivatively) in other parts of the world.

In a sense, then, we can consider Weber to be a major progenitor of an inclusive model of language, in which the use of language as a constitutive criterion of group membership is an exercise in creative ascription done by a national state. Indeed, the potential for inclusivity of Weber's conceptualization of language is evident in his argument that members of a language group "normally have no interest in excluding other persons," though they might want to keep certain conversations private. Of course, language still had the potential to exclude: in his view, "a language (which is sacred, status-specific, or secret) or a market can be monopolistically 'closed' through consensus and association." But the openness or closedness of the relationships whose basis was having a language in common was, for Weber, not a given (Weber 2012, p. 295).

Bourdieu, on the other hand, took a quite different approach in his examination of language's role in shaping society. His arguments largely parallel parts of the Marxian linguist Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov (1986), who criticized the structuralist approach in linguistics by arguing that the study of language cannot be divorced from its social context. Bourdieu also echoed Antonio Gramsci, who had himself studied linguistics: Gramsci argued that language standardization was a "political act," and that changes in language practices reflected larger realignments among social classes (Gramsci 1966, pp. 202–205). In *Language and Symbolic Power,* and to a lesser extent in *The State Nobility,* Bourdieu's point of entry was a critique of structuralism, which in his view treated language as an idealized symbolic system to which all speakers had unfettered access. Deriding this structuralist conceptualization as "linguistic communism," Bourdieu argued such an approach was untenable because of the manifestly unequal distribution of linguistic and cultural capital in society, promoted most heavily since the French Revolution by an educated bourgeoisie, who had "everything to gain" from the privileged position that "their" language increasingly occupied (Bourdieu 1991, p. 47). Even before the French Revolution, however, the Parisian French language of the social elite had already been advancing "hand in hand" with the construction of the monarchical state (Bourdieu 1991, pp. 46–47). Bourdieu's insight was to introduce notions of "class relations of labor and production"—i.e., political

economy—into the structuralist framework, which had shown that language, a symbolic system, is structured by its own internal logic—i.e., autonomous—and that language is then used to construct the social world of its speakers, organizing people's experiences and reinforced by practice (Hanks 2005, p. 77). In Bourdieu's view, access to an official or standard language was limited by society's elites, who sought to legitimize their status by controlling access to the mass education system. Elites, Bourdieu argued, allowed a small amount of social mobility through the schools to preserve the appearance of meritocratic fairness (Bourdieu 1996; Wacquant 1993). Bourdieu's approach, then, might be characterized as an exclusive model of language, pointing out the differential access that people have to language, and by extension, the public sphere, the labor market, and opportunities in life in general.

Bourdieu argued that the need for a national standard language becomes pronounced during the creation of a nation. Citing the Durkheimian notion of consensus, he argued that language and education become tools for national "moral and intellectual" integration (Bourdieu 1991, p. 49). In a way, in pointing out the arbitrariness of a national standard language—how it in fact was not necessarily inherently better than so-called "dialects"—Bourdieu's argument acknowledged the artificial and constructed nature of a national speech community. At the same time, his argument took for granted the nation as a unit of analysis, an assumption whose limitations have been pointed out specifically in works that examine transnational contexts. For instance, Haeri's (1997) work on Bourdieu's notion of "language markets," in which some languages are valued more highly than others, transplants his theory to Egypt, where foreign languages such as English, French, and German often deliver better-paying careers than the national standard, Classical Arabic. Bourdieu's use of the nation—and France specifically—is part of a broader trend of methodological nationalism addressed in Mitsuhiro Tada's critique of the "naturalization of a standardized national language" in sociological research (Tada 2018, p. 441). Both Haeri and Tada, as well as many others, point to the global dominance of English as evidence that the nation's conceptual hold on language, so long taken for granted, has never really been a workable idea (Gordin 2015; Pennycook 1994; Swaan 2001).

Though this article does discuss a national case—China—it does not ignore the global and transnational context in which the creation of a Chinese language and a Chinese nation took place simultaneously, a context in which the rapidly industrializing nations of Europe encroached ever more deeply into social life around the world. Chinese reformers, while resenting Western imperialism, admired what they perceived to be the Western model of language practice, in which a standardized language was made available to all citizens through mass education. In fact, recent historical research has shown how intellectual reformers in China sought explicitly to make the standard language accessible and to universalize literacy (Luo 2016; Merkel-Hess 2016, p. 54; Tam 2016; Weng 2018).[6] Language, as structuralists posited and Bourdieu accepted, might be a symbolic system with its own internal logic, but I argue such a logic is susceptible to intentional modification and planning.

[6] The Chinese intellectuals' imaginings of Western linguistic egalitarianism may have been exaggerated, at least in the rhetoric of their advocacy: well into the twentieth century, Bourdieu (1991, pp. 62–63), discussing France, was arguing that educated elites, in an endless pursuit of distinction over others, often ended up making the official language more difficult.

Moreover, even if building a community on the basis of a language, as Weber argued, is an exercise in prescribing (rather than describing) a social demarcation, such an association can still be planted in the minds of the members of any such community and thus become a social fact. As pioneering sociologist of language Joshua Fishman argued, debates over the arbitrariness of national languages—that is, how they are not inherently superior—are usually marshaled to prove or disprove "the validity of nationalist ideology (or of a particular nationalist ideology) concerning the crucial role and the superior quality of the vernacular (or of a particular vernacular)" rather than to clarify "why such views have so frequently come to be held and to be held so fiercely and by so many" (Fishman 1972, p. 40). Such a critique applies as much to Bourdieu as it does to Weber. Bourdieu argues that standard languages are arbitrary ("misrecognized" as superior, in his parlance) and oppressive. Weber argues that there is no inherent conceptual basis for associating people by language, and that all such associations are artificial. As the Chinese case so well illustrates, neither argument is particularly satisfactory, because the state can both *make* a new language—one that is easier, rather than more difficult—and the state can *force* an association between that language and its designated imagined community. These policies then take on a life of their own, becoming social facts in their own right, external to and independent of any particular individual, and endowed with the power to coerce and constrain (Durkheim 1938, pp. 1–13).

Reforming language in China

At the time that Chinese language reformers were creating a new standard language in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, their country was home to about one-quarter of the earth's population. The new republican regime had nominally taken over the imperial territory of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), an agglomeration of extreme human diversity, though centralized authority was weak in the face of regional warlords that controlled substantial portions of China. The intellectuals who worked in the Ministry of Education sought to create a new standard language for a polity that previously had been held together by Literary Chinese, an arcane written language used mainly by elite literati, who constituted less than 10 % of the population (Elman 2013, p. 132). In attempting to create a unified written and spoken standard for use by the citizens of a post-imperial Chinese nation, these reformers were not simply elites who were imposing their own language on the rest of society. In fact, their overriding concern was the spread of literacy to strengthen the nation. Impassioned debates over many issues, ranging from the country's linguistic fragmentation to the difficulty of the character-based script, raged all through the first decades of the twentieth century. Many proposals were raised and discarded: some argued for the widespread use of Esperanto; others advocated the simplification of Chinese characters, or even their abolition in favor of an alphabetic script. In this section, I outline the complicated changes that occurred in China's existing language situation in the nineteenth century and how language reform took place early on in the republican era (1911–1949). I focus on the reform of the spoken language, as this process illustrates particularly well the ways in which language reformers attempted to make the language more accessible, adopting an inclusive approach to language by attempting to bring about a more linguistically egalitarian society.

The evolution of linguistic culture in China[7]

Like virtually all modern nation-states, China is a multiethnic society, and its linguistic and ethnic diversity is special if only for its magnitude: China is, after all, the world's most populous nation and also the second-largest nation by territory, with a land area almost equal to all of the European continent. China's size is also matched by its antiquity, with a recorded history stretching back at least two thousand years. In the eighteenth century, several Qing emperors were able to conquer or gain suzerainty over vast swaths of Inner Asian territory, roughly corresponding to today's Western regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. It was this territory that Chinese republican revolutionaries inherited in 1911 upon the collapse of the imperial system, and one that they fatefully decided to keep intact in their attempts to build a new nation from the ashes of empire (Crossley 2000, p. 341). With the exception of lands lost to Russia in China's northeast, the detachment of outer Mongolia, and Taiwan's de facto independence, China's current territorial holdings largely correspond to the Qing dynasty's multiethnic empire—a continuing source of tension, especially in its western territories, where ethnic minorities face continuing government repression.

China's official language is based on, but not identical to, the dialect of Beijing. The language is often referred to as "Mandarin," although this term specifically refers to the country's official spoken language, which is now called *putonghua,* or "common speech," especially in mainland China. (Another term *guoyu,* or "national language," is mostly used in Taiwan.) The written language, though closely based on Mandarin, retains some influence from Literary Chinese, and is usually simply referred to as written "Chinese." Favoring brevity over precision, this article will refer to China's official standard language as "Mandarin." Though drawing from existing language practices, Mandarin is in large part an artificial construct: by design, it was no one's native language, and even speakers of Beijing dialect today have to modify their speech in order to speak the standard (Duanmu 2007, p. 5). Mandarin is thus like all other modern standard languages, which have to varying degrees all undergone a process of active cultivation, whether through regulation by a state-sanctioned organization like the French Academy, or through private codification, as with lexical publications such as Webster's and the Oxford English Dictionary (Gordin 2015; Romaine 1998). Unlike unstandardized languages, mastery of standard languages does not simply happen by itself in childhood development; it must be gained through educational training (Milroy 2001).

What distinguishes Mandarin, however, from the familiar Western cases—most frequently English and French—is that it is an extreme case. Famed Chinese linguist (and all-around polymath) Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) noted that the vernacular speech of Beijing was not held in any particular regard in his childhood (Chao 1976, p. 7). This state of affairs had been true for much of the preceding 500 years: the imperial lingua franca used by the literate elite, known as *guanhua* (meaning "officials' speech"), was an informal amalgam heavily influenced by the speech of Nanjing, the capital of the early Ming dynasty. The linguistic influence of Beijing, to which the Ming moved their capital in 1421, did not make itself felt until the latter half of the

[7] I follow Harold Schiffman's (2002, p. 5) definition of "linguistic culture": "the set of behaviors, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language, and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language."

nineteenth century (Coblin 2000). All along, *guanhua* was never precisely defined in terms of pronunciation, grammar, or other conventions—Chao himself said his father and grandfather both spoke it "poorly" (Chao et al. 1977, pp. 56–57).

Elisabeth Kaske (2008, pp. 1–7) has argued that China's language situation before the 1920s was strongly diglossic. Diglossia is a "relatively stable language situation" in which there is a strong divergence between a heavily codified "high" variety for formal use and one or more "low" varieties for everyday use (Ferguson 1959). A classic example of diglossia is the superposition of Latin—premodern Europe's language of scholarship—over a wide variety of local vernacular languages. In China's case, the high variety was Literary Chinese, a language that exists primarily in written form, but there was no single low variety; rather, there were several different layers of linguistic practice. There was the imperial spoken lingua franca*, guanhua*. Based on this form of speech was a written language, known today as *baihua* (meaning "clear speech," or simply the "vernacular"), in which many popular novels of the past several centuries had been written. (These works of narrative fiction belonged to a genre much less prestigious than the historical and religious texts written in Literary Chinese.) There were also hundreds of forms of local speech all across China, mostly mutually unintelligible—what we today, purely for reasons of habit, would call "dialects."[8]

This language situation reflects a strong divergence in Chinese linguistic culture between the written and spoken word. Indeed, even into the late nineteenth century, the Chinese words, and thus concepts, for written language (*wenzi*) and spoken language (*yuyan)* were separate (Kaske 2008, pp. 31–32). The complex language practices of China had pronounced implications for the organization of society: up until the twentieth century, empowering literacy in Literary Chinese was restricted to the less than 10 % of the population that had access to the resources necessary to learn and use that highly arcane language, which was useful primarily for the empire-wide civil service examinations (Elman 2013, pp. 132–33).

There is no precise agreement about when this highly stratified language situation began to fall apart. Kaske (2008, p. xi) argues that China's unexpected defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 was the principal impetus, while sociolinguist Ping Chen (1999, p. 13) argues that it was China's defeat in the Opium Wars of the 1840s that spurred reform. Almost all observers cite the intentions of language reformers, working within the state, to align writing more closely with speech, a goal they borrowed from Meiji-era (1868–1912) Japanese reformers. For many progressive intellectuals in China, the use of Literary Chinese for most types of formal writing was an impediment to social progress and thus national strength, since mastering Literary Chinese and the large and arcane canon written in it was a long and arduous process, available only to the affluent (Elman 2013, p. 134). The purport of language reformers from the 1910s to the 1930s was to break the monopoly of Literary Chinese in most formal written domains and to create a new national lingua franca and a new literature for a newly imagined Chinese nation. In so doing, they were influenced by language reformers in Japan, who after many debates that began in the 1870s, shed their centuries-old reliance on Literary Chinese as a prestige language. Between the

[8] No language can be demarcated purely on linguistic criteria. The conceptualization of "Chinese" as a unitary language with many "dialects," as opposed to a family of related but mutually unintelligible languages, is a political decision and not a linguistic one (Norman 1988, pp. 1–3).

1890s and 1920s, they settled on educated Tokyo speech as the spoken standard. A related written form that retained heavy use of Chinese characters, supplemented by a conservative *kana* orthography, served as the written standard. This situation remained largely in place until the end of World War II. Even today, however, Chinese characters remain in regular use in written Japanese (Clark 2009, p. 128; Gottlieb 2005, pp. 8–9; Heinrich 2012, p. 69; Kaske 2008, pp. 16–27; Lee 1996, pp. 48–49).

This retention of Chinese characters makes Japan's script reforms more conservative than those carried out in Korea and Vietnam in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These two other countries in China's cultural orbit had also seen Literary Chinese employed by their educated elite. For Korea and Vietnam, as for Japan, language reform, to varying degrees, meant a rejection of the Chinese cultural heritage and an indigenization of language by nationalist intellectuals. In both cases, Chinese writing was jettisoned in favor of an alphabetic script. In contrast, China, as the former regional hegemon, found itself wrestling with a cultural inheritance that could only be understood to be its own, a point that infused debates over language reform with a unique anxiety.

In more theoretical terms, language reformers and the state they served, in seeking to create a unified national standard language, were creating a linguistically inclusive Chinese nation, a task made more urgent by the polyglot and multiethnic legacy left by the Qing empire, defunct since 1911. The inclusion of hundreds of millions of new potential speakers into a freshly imagined (but yet-to-be-achieved) national speech community transformed what empowering literacy in an official language meant. The extension of an official language to people who had previously been mere linguistic bystanders meant that the value of such a language was now more broadly in demand. Stratification previously imposed largely by lineage and economic circumstance instead had to be legitimized through a reconstituted educational meritocracy, now conducted in a single unified national language. While Bourdieu reads this as an imposition of bourgeois hegemony—he says that, in France, the bourgeoisie had "everything to gain" from national linguistic unification—the Chinese case, in the extreme artificiality of its language, reminds us that such an imposition can also be read as incorporation and inclusion. Indeed, even for the French case itself, historian Eugen Weber (1976, p. 303) reminds us that the spread of standard French was facilitated mainly when ordinary people saw it as a benefit to themselves, useful for personal and familial advancement, an argument that de Swaan (2001) has taken up in more global form, with his analysis of the relative value of languages to individual interests.

Reformers and standardization

The modern sounds of Chinese, essentially a modified subset of Beijing pronunciations, were created by a small group of men working within the republican Chinese state. The initial effort to standardize pronunciation took place in 1913, when some forty delegates from most of China's provinces and regions met in Beijing as part of the Committee for the Unification of Reading Pronunciations (*Duyin Tongyi Hui*). Given the controversies over what shape the national speech was to take, the Committee's ambit was exceedingly narrow—essentially, to codify a register of pronunciation for the formal reading of texts, as opposed to a more casual register of everyday speech. In this

way, the Committee sidestepped the question of determining which region's grammar, syntax, and lexicon to adopt for the national standard, and it also punted on the heated question of script reform (i.e., retaining characters or adopting a phonetic script). Instead, the Committee took the highly limited step of standardizing the pronunciation of the characters of the existing script. The result of the Committee's work was a set of pronunciations for about 6500 Chinese characters, 90 % of which were based on Beijing pronunciations, and the other 10 % of which adopted features of other regions' forms of speech. This initial standardization, now usually known as "Old National Pronunciation" (*Lao Guoyin*), was strange indeed (Chen 1999, pp. 16–19). It incorporated many elements from southern and eastern dialects that were wholly alien to what was permissible in actual spoken Beijing dialect. For instance, Old National Pronunciation incorporated an extra tone, the "entering tone" (*rusheng*) that was present in some southern dialects, in addition to the four existing tones in Beijing dialect (Kaske 2008, pp. 414–415).[9]

As years passed, this pronunciation system failed to take hold. Political turmoil in the fragmented political landscape of the late 1910s contributed to bureaucratic paralysis at the Ministry of Education, which failed to implement the decisions reached by the 1913 Committee until August 1918, when it officially promulgated the phonetic notation system developed by the Committee (Kaske 2008, pp. 416–419). From a more practical standpoint, the failure of the original standard pronunciation was probably also due to a lack of teachers able to transmit the new pronunciation to the limited number of students able regularly to attend schools at the time. Yuen Ren Chao once claimed that he was the only person able to speak the new standard (Chao 1976, p. 79). Starting in the mid-1920s, Chao and six other linguists working for the Ministry of Education formed a small subgroup to work out what they perceived to be the main technical problems with the standard pronunciation. In October 1925 they met for the first time and informally called themselves the "Society of a Few Men" (*Shuren Hui*) (Chao et al. 1977, p. 78).[10]

This group of seven comprised men of very similar upbringing. Its members, in addition to Chao, were Liu Bannong (1891–1934), Li Jinxi (1890–1978), Zhou Bianming (1891–1984), Lin Yutang (1895–1976), Wang Yi (1875–1960), and Qian Xuantong (1887–1939) (Su 2012, pp. 97–98). All of these men came from well-to-do backgrounds and had been educated as linguists. Several had studied abroad: Chao and Lin in the United States, Liu in Europe, and Qian in Japan. Discussions about language reform and standardization often took place in informal settings outside the Ministry of Education, which was located in Beijing in the early 1920s. These were heady times for

[9] All Chinese languages are "tonal," meaning that the tones are highly significant. Changing the tone of a syllable will change more than its emotional expression—it will shift its meaning altogether, from, say, "sugar" (*táng,* uttered with a rising tone) to "hot" (*tàng,* with a falling tone). The fifth tone of Old National Pronunciation was derived from a category of syllables that, centuries ago, had ended in the stops *–p, –t,* and *–k,* a characteristic preserved in the more conservative dialects of the south, including Cantonese. This characteristic was lost over the years in many northern dialects, including that of Beijing, which redistributed these fifth-tone syllables more or less randomly among the four remaining tones (Chao et al. 1977, p. 81; Kaske 2008, pp. 413–414). Adding a fifth tone, therefore, is highly confusing—speakers used to four tones must redistribute an unsystematic and unpredictable subset of syllables from the usual four tones into the fifth tone.

[10] The nickname *Shuren Hui* was a reference to the *Qieyun,* a rhyming dictionary published in 601 CE by the lexicographer Lu Fayan, who wrote in the preface, "We few men decide, and it is decided" (*wo bei shu ren, ding ze ding yi*).

these language reformers, who made considerable progress in refining China's national language. Chao records in his diary that he met socially with others in the Society of a Few Men, sometimes at the home of prominent writer Hu Shi (1891–1962). The entry for September 11, 1920—as with most of his diaries, written in English—reads in part:

> Out to Suh Hu's [Hu Shi], a house with large low rooms, with mats for carpet & many Chinese books. Hu has invited several members of 國語研究會 [*Guoyu Yanjiu Hui,* The Association for National Language Research] to tea. 錢 [Qian] … & 汪怡 [Wang Yi] among them are most talkative. I discussed very rapidly & at great length various points with them. I am surprized [sic] at the comparative soundness & thoroness [sic] with which they have thought out things. They wrote a Chinese letter in international phonetic script, which I read with ease. Some of their ideas were exactly as I thought of several years ago, but thinking they would be too radical to find listening ears, I kept them all to myself. They are going to publish some sound tables & consulted my ideas. I contributed some which they adopted right there & then. They proposed to make me a member of the National Language Research Society. With men like those I just met, I think the Chinese language has hope (Chao 1920).

One might wonder how these men were able to communicate with one another. Not one of them had grown up in Beijing; all but one were from eastern and southern provinces, with dialects differing greatly from that of Beijing. Only Chao grew up in the north, having been born in Tianjin (about 130 km southeast of Beijing) to parents from Changzhou, in the eastern coastal province of Jiangsu, and he later recounted some familiarity with Beijing dialect as a child (Chao et al. 1977, pp. 56–57). The usual practice at the time was to communicate roughly in what is now confusingly referred to as "blue-green Mandarin" (*lanqing guanhua*), which Chao later described thus: "Blue-green Mandarin is a popular phrase describing those people who pick up Mandarin keeping a lot of their own native accent. So there's no standard blue-green Mandarin [laughter]; it depends upon who is saying it" (Chao et al. 1977, p. 80). Further clues to this roughly defined common speech come from another famed language reformer (and onetime anarchist) Wu Zhihui (1865–1953), born near the city of Wuxi, also in Jiangsu, who in December of 1920 gave a lecture on the dual problems of pronunciation and literature in the new national language. Begging his audience's forgiveness, he explained why he was resorting to "blue-green Mandarin" in giving his talk: "Brothers (*xiongdi*), supposing I used Wuxi dialect to give this talk, it would sound awful (*nanting*), or if I used Shanghainese, I wouldn't be able to speak it very well (*shuo bu lai*), so I might as well use blue-green Mandarin to talk then" (Wu 1920).

Over the course of the 1920s, Chao and other language reformers ended up modifying the "Old National Pronunciation" by replacing most of the non-Beijing pronunciations of Chinese characters with their Beijing equivalents, thus creating a "New National Pronunciation" (*Xin Guoyin*) (Chen 1999, pp. 19–22). In an oral history compiled in 1977, Chao said: "We decided—that is, the National Committee on the Unification of the Language—decided that we'd better take the natural speech of Peking [Beijing] city. Peiping [Beiping] it was called then. And so, we just found out how people actually spoke. It's still the standard now—the so-called general speech—

p'u-t'ung hua [*putonghua*]. Peking is now the standard dialect" (Chao et al. 1977, p. 78). In 1932, the Ministry of Education published the first glossary of modern Chinese pronunciation, the *Glossary of the National Pronunciation of characters in common use* (*Guoyin changyong zihui*) (Jiaoyubu Guoyu Tongyi Choubei Weiyuanhui 1933). The idea behind this almost wholesale adoption of Beijing pronunciations was mainly practical: in order to teach the Chinese a common language, there needed to be teachers able to teach such a language. And the easiest way to create such teachers was to conform to existing practice in a set region. "At one stroke," Chao wrote, "were created more than one million potential teachers" (Chao 1976, p. 80). Of course, even in a single city, language can vary, and Beijing is no exception: the language (or perhaps better, languages) spoken in Beijing have varied greatly over time. They vary by location within the city, and they also vary by age among the speakers themselves. Two of the biggest turning points in the evolution of the language spoken in the city have been the capitulation in 1644 to Manchu invaders upon the collapse of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and the steady influx of migrants into the city ever since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 (Chirkova 2003, p. 6).

What then was the language that made its way into a government-produced dictionary in 1932? The distinguished linguist and sinologist John DeFrancis argued that the standard language was supposed to be that of the Beijing native with a "middle-school education" (DeFrancis 1950, p. 76). In so saying, he may have been unconsciously echoing the pronouncement of a republican-era language reformer, Ma Guoying, about whom little is known. Ma set forth a threefold definition of the New National Pronunciation: the standard language had "(1) A standard location: Beiping [now Beijing] in the Republic of China; (2) a standard people: natives of Beiping who had grown up there and experienced secondary education (*zhongdeng jiaoyu*); [and] (3) a standard pronunciation (*biaozhun yin*): the Beiping pronunciation from the mouths of the standard people" (Ma 1929, p. 3).

These assertions, however, of the naturalness of the new standard by Ma, Chao, and others represented a significant oversimplification. Even as it was brought closer to Beijing speech, the national standard language was still a modified version of it. In the preface to the 1932 *Glossary,* language reformer Wu Zhihui cautioned that Beijing pronunciation had not been incorporated wholesale into the standard; some localisms had been shorn (Wu 1933, p. iii). Specifically, in the years since then, this has meant that, in a language dominated by monosyllabic sound units, contemporary Mandarin has about 30 fewer possible syllables than Beijing dialect's 432, when the four tones of this tonal language are excluded from consideration.[11] When the four tones are factored in, Mandarin has 80 fewer possible syllables than Beijing's 1376.[12] While these differences may seem small, in practice, this means that people who are familiar only with standard Mandarin (from, say, the internet, or television and radio) have difficulty "understanding Beijing speakers when they visit the city for the first time" (Duanmu 2007, p. 5). In other words, the differences between the spoken form of the standard language and the dialect that supposedly constitutes its basis are significant enough to impede mutual intelligibility.

[11] These numbers also exclude considerations of the retroflex suffix *r,* as well as merged and unstressed syllables (Duanmu 2007, p. 5).

[12] Not all syllables exist in all four tones.

Nevertheless, the desire to bring the standard into closer alignment with a living local vernacular was an explicit attempt to make the language more accessible. Ma and Chao, among others, both pointed out the difficulty of teaching a language that no one spoke naturally; Ma himself said that language was "connected with locality" (*you difangxingde*), and that the older ecumenical Chinese standard language—"Old National Pronunciation" (*Lao Guoyin*) had no "standard location," which meant that "no one was able to speak such pure sounds"; such a language could not be used to unify the nation (Ma 1929, p. 2). In many ways, the creation of a standard that was accessible to a portion of the population with far less education than the people who created it represented a deliberate plebeianization of the language situation in China. Linguist Ping Chen argues that this was revolutionary: "In the 1930s, for the first time in the history of the Chinese language, it was specified that, instead of retaining historical distinctions that no longer existed in modern vernaculars, or accommodating features in dialects other than the base one, the phonology of the contemporary vernacular of Beijing should be adopted as its standard pronunciation" (Chen 1999, p. 21). In contrast to what Bourdieu has argued, in China, an educated elite in effect attempted to create something easy for everyone to learn.

While the standard was brought closer to the people, over the past hundred years since language reform began, the people themselves have had to be brought closer to the standard. It was only in about 2007 that, in the estimation of the Chinese Ministry of Education, the number of people who could "speak Mandarin" outnumbered those who could not (Reuters 2007). The most recent estimate optimistically puts the number of people able to communicate in the standard language at around 70 % of the population, leaving the other 30 %—about 300 million people—outside a national speech community that remains very much still under construction (BBC 2013). As the state continues to make efforts to promote Mandarin, within the population of Mandarin-speakers, there exists a continuum of skill levels. For teaching and broadcasting, as well as other professions in China that require a good command of standard Mandarin, job candidates must take examinations to gauge their mastery of the language. Indeed, over the past several decades, an entire intellectual and bureaucratic apparatus has arisen to assess the Mandarin competency of populations in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, based on local needs (Feng et al. 2010; Guojia Yuyan Wenzi Gongzuo Weiyuanhui and "Yuyan wenzi yingyong" Bianjibu 1998; Zheng 2004).

Such a differentiation—treating the new standard as a measurable skill—dates back many decades to the beginning of language standardization. As early as 1930, there were Mandarin promotion schools at which teachers could take examinations to measure their competency in the standard language, both spoken and written. For instance, beginning in late December 1930 at a weekly session of the Shanghai Itinerant School (*Shanghai Liudong Xuexiao*), jointly organized by the Chinese National Language Education Association (*Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui*) and the Shanghai Education Bureau (*Shanghai Jiaoyu Ju*), 137 teachers from forty-six schools in the Shanghai area were able to participate in workshops on various aspects of the new national standard language, including seminars on national standard pronunciation (*Guoyin*) and the new

romanization system known as Gwoyeu Romatzyh (*Guoyu Luomazi,* or National Language Romanization) (Quanguo Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui 1930, p. 5). They were also able to take examinations that tested their ability to transcribe Mandarin Phonetic Symbols (*Guoyin Zimu*)[13] into Chinese characters, as well as their listening and speaking ability. Each examinee was awarded a maximum of forty points for the written portion and a maximum of sixty points for the oral portion of the test. A passing score was seventy points and above, a result that fifty-six participants were able to achieve (Quanguo Guoyu Jiaoyu Cujin Hui 1930, p. 6).

Such an explicit hierarchy of skill, as established by examination, is only possible for people who have been incorporated into the community of linguistic practice on which such skill assessments are based. Indeed, the language examinations above, rather than limiting access to the language and education, were part of an effort to increase the number of speakers of the standard language. Bourdieu interprets the expansion of a standard language as a way in which most people's native language ability is demoted to slang, colloquial speech, *patois,* or dialect, and the elite establish their linguistic dominance by claiming the superiority of their own language. Scholars have noted a similar demotion of dialect in twentieth-century China (Tam 2016).

While there is considerable truth in this reading of how language standardization transformed individual speech from a local identity marker into a marketable and measurable skill, one should also remember the linguistic world that language reformers sought to replace, one in which people who were not able to use the official language found themselves totally excluded from politics and from any job or other opportunity that lay outside their immediate linguistic environs. Indeed, as language reformers and the state sought to expand the reach of the new national standard language, the language increasingly became a national attribute. As the scope of this language grew, the possibility of a quantifiable ranking of skill in this language became increasingly possible. Thus, the Bourdieusian conceptualization of language as cultural capital only becomes plausible when the scope of the Weberian conceptualization of language as a facilitator of community-building expands to encompass most of the population of a nation.

In other words, a state can make a national speech community by creating a language to suit the needs of the future society it envisions, and then by progressively reinforcing the association between that language and its national community through broadened access to this language, afforded through mass education. Both a language and its community, in the case of national standard languages, can be made by the state through increased access to the standard language via education and through the inculcation in the mind of each citizen of the bond between language and community.

[13] These alphabetic symbols were originally used in the 1913 Committee meeting to denote character pronunciations, and were called *zhuyin zimu* (sound-annotating letters), and later also *Guoyin zimu* (National Pronunciation letters). They are still in current use in Taiwan in Mandarin-language pedagogy and computer character input. In 1930 the government renamed them *zhuyin fuhao* (sound-annotating symbols) to avoid giving the impression that they were a replacement for Chinese characters (DeFrancis 1984, p. 242). They are often informally called *bopomofo,* after the first four symbols of this transcription system.

Interpreting the Chinese case: the unanticipated consequences of rules unification

In China, we find a case in which the implementation of a national language intentionally made to be accessible and egalitarian has nonetheless resulted in an increasingly linguistically homogeneous nation-state and the rise of new hierarchies of linguistic and cultural capital. China thus provides a case helpful in augmenting the Weberian and Bourdieusian social theories of language. To Weber's view of the artificiality of associations between languages and communities, I would add that such associations, once made, are real enough in their social consequences. To Bourdieu's theories of linguistic stratification, historically rooted in the rise of bourgeois dominance, I would add that such stratification can arise even when the bourgeoisie intends exactly the opposite: linguistic egalitarianism. Thus, I argue that it is more useful to think of linguistic stratification as an unintended byproduct of the unification of a linguistic field on a national scale. We might generalize from such a state of affairs by building a theory of unanticipated consequences of rules unification.

Why did language reformers and the Chinese state they served work to ensure that the new official language was accessible? One major reason was the kind of society they envisioned—one in which education and opportunity were more widespread. Splashed across the pages of countless late-Qing and republican-era tracts, the egalitarian intentions of language reformers are easy enough to discern among their many proposals to solve China's ills. Lamenting China's classical literature as a "dead" literature, and perceiving Chinese characters as incompatible with a modern society, progressive intellectuals repeatedly argued that the Chinese masses needed to be exposed to the benefits of modern ideas. To do so, education needed to be brought within their reach (Cheng 2001). Mandarin, as a new standard language, was therefore part of a larger social project: the language was explicitly designed by modernizing intellectuals to be more accessible in order to further national integration. Language standardization also reflected a new and broader meritocratic thinking—seeking to give all the nation's people access to literacy and education, something previously restricted to a small class of elite literati (Weng 2018).

I argue, and the Chinese case helps demonstrate, that the rise of national standard languages represents a new kind of sociality forged from the creation of a new kind of language and a new kind of association between language and peoplehood. Much of the debate about language outside the discipline of linguistics has been about how to associate languages with social aggregates. An important question in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, for instance, has been how "people are organized into collectivities through linguistic practices" (Muehlmann 2014, p. 593), an approach treated with caution by Weber. Research in sociology, on the other hand, usually begins with commonly recognized social aggregates (race, gender, class) and then imputes linguistic practices and characteristics to those groups (Tada 2018, p. 462). Bourdieu used this approach, taking social class as a starting point (the "dominant," the "elite") and then ascribing to them certain language practices that such a class designated as "official." Weber was right in pointing out that linguistically defined communities are artificial creations—an approach subsequently taken up by much of the literature on nationalism. Bourdieu was right in noting that linguistic practices are classed. Nevertheless, as Tada (2018) has pointed out, languages cannot be assumed to be inherently

linked to certain collectivities—certainly not nations, given the increasing linguistic globalization of the world. In so arguing, Tada points to a much larger issue: language practices and their associations with groups can be and have been made and remade. The Chinese case shows how language reformers attempted to reshape society by remaking language and transforming its relationship to the people that the language was supposed to serve.

Language standardization in virtually all places has been an elite project, but the ends that elites sought to achieve have varied by time and place. In Europe, the rise of national vernaculars began in the Renaissance and intensified during the Reformation with the spread of vernacular religious texts through the new print markets (Chartier 2014; Febvre and Martin 1976; Martin 1994). The intention in almost all cases was the spread of literacy to the masses for one reason or another. During the Reformation, Protestant leaders wanted widespread literacy to give ordinary people direct access to scripture; it was also helpful that print was the great propagator of Protestant theology and ideology.

In early twentieth-century China, intellectuals believed that literacy led directly to national renewal. The unification of what Bourdieu termed the (national) linguistic field necessarily advantaged some while disadvantaging others. A unified linguistic standard does not even have to be particularly difficult to produce differential outcomes in life chances: as my empirical examination of the Chinese case has demonstrated, even a language designed to be accessible did not avert the rise of a new hierarchy of merit. But it does not follow that the rise of a national language was simply a bourgeois imposition of its own language. The Chinese case shows that reformers there implemented a language not their own and, for that matter, not anyone else's. Prior to the linguistic modernity exemplified by today's ubiquitous national standard languages, access to official languages was limited to a small elite who could read Latin (in Europe) or Literary Chinese (in East Asia). Modernity in the linguistic sense has meant the expansion of meritocratic forms of thinking—particularly in literacy and education—to the rest of the population, newly conceived of as national. It is thus useful to think in terms of what Robert Merton (1936) called the "unanticipated consequences" of purposive action: the rise and spread of national standard languages have led to the reproduction of social advantage in a newly reconfigured and unified linguistic field.

Such an entrenchment of elite privilege is almost self-evident in the more familiar Western cases: for instance, many sociolinguistic studies have delved into social stratification and language practices in Anglophone and Francophone countries (Grillo 1989; Milroy 2012). Sociolinguistic studies of China have followed in a similar vein. Working largely within the framework of Euro-American sociolinguistic theory, researchers have traced patterns of prestige and status associated with different kinds of accents within Mandarin, as well as among different Chinese dialects, finding that "standardness" is often strongly associated with social prestige and cultural cachet in both Taiwan and mainland China (Li 2004, 2014; Liao 2008). In China, language reformers created a standard language that was intended to be more accessible than the Literary Chinese that preceded it. While sociolinguists often make valid critiques of the social inequities arising from standard language ideology, the prior language situation, in which only a very small segment of the population had access to education, was far more unequal. Velitchkova (2014, 2015) has shown that, even in communities firmly

committed to linguistic egalitarianism, hierarchies still can arise. The global Esperanto community, which promotes a constructed language that was deliberately designed to be easy to learn and had no native constituency, has nevertheless seen hierarchies of expertise and facility in the language constitute themselves among the community's members.

Questions of language often reflect questions of equity: those who can more easily master the dominant language have an advantage over those who cannot. Such differences can arise from accidents of birth—for instance, those whose native language is globally dominant, such as English. They can also arise from random variation in individual human ability—in all societies, there are people who have more of a knack for polyglot glibness than others. In all cases, structural factors, such as one's class position within society, have a huge influence over whether one's native abilities can be fully realized. Thus, criticisms of the social stratification resulting from "standard language ideology" are not wrong (Heinrich 2012; Milroy 2001). But while it is true that societal attitudes should be more relaxed and tolerant of linguistic diversity, we nevertheless should also recognize the communicative gains that standard languages have brought about. Indeed, for a long time in many parts of the world, linguistic diversity was an impediment to communication over larger distances and thus confined populations to much more limited social and geographic spaces.

Therefore, efforts to address the inequities of our current language practices, while acknowledging the harm that has accompanied the rise of standard language ideology, must also realize that any melioristic attempts to transform human practices and institutions are bound to encounter unanticipated and perhaps even undesired consequences. Language reformers in China took a pragmatic and technocratic approach by seeking to create a standard that more closely reflected actual spoken practice among ordinary Chinese people, one that was easier to learn than Literary Chinese, a written standard that had for millennia been divorced from any sort of living speech. In spite of this attempt at creating a standard accessible to all, once this standard took hold after the 1940s, it is plausible then to think about who might have the most advantage in achieving mastery of this new standard in school—those with the various forms of capital sufficient to acquire education.

What should be added to Bourdieusian theory about language, capital, and fields of power is that, even when agents in power seek a more egalitarian way of organizing knowledge, those egalitarian aims may be thwarted by the nature of the field, in which differential advantage at a given starting point translates into social stratification along the dimension in question—in this case, language. Today, Beijing-based Mandarin is associated with education and sophistication (Li 2004), something that would not have necessarily been true at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Beijing dialect seemed to represent a lower register of speech (Chao 1976, p. 7). Bourdieu mistakes the effect (language-based social stratification) for the cause, which he argues is a shift in class dominance. Moreover, in taking official "French" as a given (effectively treating language as autonomous), while at the same time considering French the possession of a particular social class, he leaves us with a simplistic view of how national standard languages came to be: the language of the dominant class equals the official language. But China, as we have seen, is a counterexample: bourgeois intellectuals, a "dominant" class (or at least the most influential in linguistic matters), sought to create an official language that was accessible to most people.

Weber, too, assumed linguistic autonomy when he treated language effectively as a given, a symbolic system independent of its speakers, and thus not a natural basis of group identity. However, such associations between language and peoplehood, while not necessarily coming into existence on their own, can be made. Language reformers in China attempted to create a language that would reflect the population's current usage and thus constitute a new form of Chinese cultural practice and identity. They attempted at first to create an ecumenical standard that reflected linguistic practice from several different regions of the country. When that failed, they changed tack and adopted in almost its entirety the speech of Beijing, making it easier to find qualified teachers. Here we can observe an empirical instance of a language being deliberately created to constitute a newly imagined national community. Thus, as Mandarin is used by ever larger portions of the population, the nationalist vision of a polity unified by language is slowly being realized.

In many ways, nationalism is not necessarily an ideology that describes any actual reality, but rather is one that prescribes a normative way of organizing society—unifying society by fabricating a language and assigning it to the desired population. In short, we know that languages can be artificially made, and that communities, too, are social constructions. However, we must also recognize that the connection between languages and the communities to which they are assigned can also be made and thus are no less "real," no less of a social fact. The agent in making such a connection is usually the state. The apparent artificiality of such an association between languages and communities is, as I have shown, not a sufficient argument to detract from their reality and the actual effects they have in constituting those communities and influencing the life chances of individuals within those communities. Moreover, how those languages are designed and how they are linked to their communities can reflect a panoply of social goals, not just the entrenchment of a dominant class. The state in China attempted to create a more egalitarian situation, both linguistically and otherwise. How hierarchies of cultural and economic capital have arisen, in spite of the state's best efforts through most of the twentieth century to quash such inequalities, is an interesting question in its own right, rather than an intellectual given, as is commonly understood (Andreas 2009, p. 277, 2019).

Conclusion

There is, as we have seen, great theoretical confusion in determining the connection between languages and human collectivities, and thus in explaining the rise of a national standard language. This confusion results from, I argue, a lack of clarity on whether to think of language as something that is autonomous or something that is purposive, intentional, and transformable. For instance, when Bourdieu critiqued structuralism's disregard for the social conditions of linguistic "production," he did not seek to discard structuralism's insights altogether. He had no dispute with the idea that symbolic systems such as language are internally structured according to a logic independent of human intentions. But in treating language—specifically, an official language—as an autonomous system that was at the same time a form of cultural capital, language's internal logic was put beyond human control, while at the same time language itself was able to be deployed as one form of capital convertible into other

forms of capital. Bourdieu's paradigmatic case of such capital conversion was the accumulation of cultural capital in schools and its subsequent conversion to economic capital on the labor market. While both sides of such a dualistic conceptualization—structuralist and also political-economic—of language do not at first appear to be incompatible, its implicit empiricism—a philosophical position that sees a phenomenon, in this case language, as autonomous and thus beyond individual human control—is actually at odds with the obvious intentionality we have seen in the Chinese case, in which even the internal logic of the standard language itself was subject to human manipulation and planning.

This tension between empiricism and intentionality, a language's form and function, is what the Chinese case highlights. Language reformers in China sought both to shape the internal form of the language itself—its lexicon, its grammar, and its pronunciation—as well as to recast the external role the language played in society—a tool of social inclusion in furtherance of nation-building. In their minds, the one was not separable from the other. The Chinese language first had to be made simpler and more accessible before it could serve as a tool to turn a polyglot hodgepodge into a unified nation. The Chinese case also turns on its head the question of how languages are associated with social groups. The Weberian approach was to show how conceptually untenable grouping people by language was: any analysis of actual societies would undermine the notion of a speech community. Weber implicitly assumed linguistic autonomy when he argued that a community defined by language was an inherently constructed concept. But the artificiality of assigning a language to any group of people does not preclude people from actually putting such an association into effect. The Chinese case shows how language reformers sought deliberately to create a speech community, first by standardizing a language and then by assigning it to and propagating it among the group of people they conceived of as constituting a Chinese nation.

The subsequent stratification of Chinese society appears to be a failure of their egalitarian vision and a confirmation of Bourdieusian theory, in which linguistic dominance is predicated on class dominance. However, one must remember that Bourdieu's theory took place within a national framework. For him, it was only after people entered, voluntarily or not, into a national linguistic field, that they became subject to the state's valuation of their utterances. For Bourdieu, the state was the unifier of the linguistic field and the monopolist of symbolic capital, and France, with its language academy and powerful, centralized state, furnished the empirical underpinning of his thinking. This nationalist and statist framework, however, becomes problematic when we expand the scope of analysis to other parts of the globe. The Chinese case, in being an even more top-down case of linguistic design, seems at first to be a more extreme version of France. But one must consider the global context of China's language reform. The impetus to change in China was the subordinate position in which China found itself in an imperialist global system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even today, a transnational view of the world's language situation reveals that English, without a central state body explicitly regulating its form and inhabiting a quasi-anarchic global system, still dominates.

Both the Weberian and Bourdieusian models of language have often been mobilized, in part, to explain the nature of national lingua francas. The Weberian model pointed out the artificiality of grouping people into nations according to language. On the other hand, the Bourdieusian model, based on Marxian insights into class, saw language

dominance as reflecting class dominance: the rise of an educated bourgeoisie heralded the rise of the language of that same class. Language was possessed and defended by that class as a form of cultural capital. As this article has shown, however, neither model adequately captures the intentionality that can underlie the creation of both a national language and the nation such a language is meant to bring into being. The Chinese case reminds us that a language's form, as well as its function, is susceptible to being molded by conscious human effort, and that the shape of the resulting society can outrun the intentions of even the most clear-eyed of visionaries.

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