Diglossia and Its Discontent: The Linguistics of National Crisis in Early Twentieth-Century China

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Abstract Chinese language debates during the first two decades of the twentieth century were part of a discourse of national crisis when Chinese culture seemed unfit for competition in the modern world, and the time-honored state of diglossia began to appear as "schizoglossia" (Haugen, Einar. 1972. "Schizoglossia and the Linguistic Norm." In *The Ecology of Language: Essays by Einar Haugen*, edited by Anwar S. Dil, 148–189. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press.) to proponents of reform and universal education. Under the strong influence of Japan's *genbun itchi* movement, Chinese efforts to promote "the unity of speech and writing" showed some remarkable similarities with Japan but also many differences given the peculiar linguistic situation and political circumstances. This paper develops a new model for reassessing the state of diglossia and examines how various reform proposals and their critics understood the linguistics and social consequences of diglossia and its abolition.

Keywords Schizoglossia • Baihua • Baihuawen • Literary revolution • Class character of language

The Renaissance War

Chinese language reforms have long captivated sociolinguists and historians, but in American and Western scholarship this topic has often been dominated by what I would dub the "Renaissance War." At the center of this discussion was Hu Shi's (胡適 1891–1962) claim that his so-called literary revolution proclaimed in 1917, which demanded the replacement of the literary language by the vernacular, was comparable with the Latin-Italian shift of the European Renaissance (Hu 1934).

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Following the political upheavals of the 1910s that culminated in the demonstrations of 4 May 1919 and a movement of cultural renewal known as the May Fourth Movement, Hu Shi's vernacular project has become inextricably linked to the debates over the meaning of modernity for China.

In his 2006 response to an article entitled "The Chinese Renaissance" by Zhou Gang, the linguist John DeFrancis once again deplored Hu Shi's equation of Dante's concept of the vernacular with his own efforts to enhance the status of the Chinese vernacular. DeFrancis's objection was that what Dante was referring to as "vernacular" was actually the spoken language learned by children when they began to speak while Hu Shi only distinguished two styles of writing, the 'literary language' (*wenyan* 文言) of the Confucian Classics and the 'plain language' (*baihua* 白話) of the vernacular literature. DeFrancis contended that the modern Chinese literary language, far from being the living spoken language of the people, was in fact a hybrid style that mixed vernacular and literary elements and that this undermining of the vernacular by literary styles could only be prevented by abolishing the Chinese character script. "Hu Shi made the wrong comparison," DeFrancis wrote. "The comparison is not writing in Italian versus writing in Chinese in the misnamed 'vernacular' style. It should be Italian written in an alphabetic script versus Chinese also written in an alphabetic script" (DeFrancis 2006, 299; the article under discussion was Zhou 2005). Zhou Gang politely defended Hu Shi's position, arguing that the key to a fruitful comparison is diglossia, a hierarchic state of multilingualism defined by Charles Ferguson as a functional division between two languages in the same speech community each occupying a distinct domain: one the higher domains of religion, scholarship, or formal conversation, the other the lowly domains of everyday conversation or popular entertainment (Zhou 2006, 299–300).

The argument between John DeFrancis and Hu Shi began as early as 1950 with DeFrancis's book *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (DeFrancis 1950), for which Hu Shi wrote a review in the *American Historical Review*. Ridiculing DeFrancis's advocacy of the Communist-devised Roman alphabet script for Chinese, the Latinhua Sin Wenz, Hu Shi wrote:

> Did the famous Lu Hsün [Lu Xun (魯迅1881–1936)] ever write any prose in the Sin Wenz? Did Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong (毛澤東1893–1976) ever write anything in it? Did . . . any of the Communist advocates of Sin Wenz ever write anything in it? Even the people in the Communist-controlled areas will not learn a script in which a Mao Tse-tung or a Liu Shao-ch'i [Liu Shaoqi (劉少奇 1898–1969)] is unable or unwilling to write his own speeches or articles. And Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shao-ch'i will not write their speeches or articles in the new phonetic script because they know very well that, if they do, nobody will be able to read them. So they continue to write their speeches and articles in *paihua* [*baihua*] (the living spoken language written in characters), which they had learned through stealthily reading and loving the great *paihua* novels in their boyhood days, and which has been made respectable by the Literary Revolution. (Hu 1951, 898)

Interestingly, the struggle over Hu Shi's legacy is not yet over. It took its latest turn in a review of my own book (Kaske 2008) where—Zhou Gang's article unknown to me—I made a very similar argument, namely that Hu Shi's

appropriation of the term "renaissance" was rather narrow and largely limited to the language shift from Latin to Italian. Secondly, I argued that this appropriation was not new at all but received wisdom in the Chinese reform discourse since Huang Zunxian's *Description of Japan,* which was popular in the 1890s. And thirdly, I suggested that this comparison is fruitful because it challenges the notion of Chinese exceptionalism and places the Chinese language alongside other national languages that either emerged out of the lower variety of diglossia, such as Greek, Amhara, Japanese, or post-Renaissance European languages, or continued to exist in a diglossic state like Arabic or Tamil. At least the reviewer gave me the benefit of the doubt when he wrote that he did not believe I would endorse Hu Shi's "factititious" comparison between the literary revolution and the European Renaissance. However, he challenges this comparison for a different reason, namely because it appears to "endorse a teleological model of development in which the reduction or elimination of diglossia becomes an inevitable part of the transition to modernity" (Gibbs Hill 2010, 522). Thus, we see two alternative attacks on Hu Shi's vernacular project: one claiming that his *baihua* failed to promote sufficient vernacularization to make a contribution to modernization; the other objecting that any link between vernacularization and modernity is mere "teleology," implying that the latter could well have been achieved without the former.

Between these two, DeFrancis's assessment of Chinese language reforms as a failure has long dominated academic discourse. This has had two consequences: First, it strengthened the impression of Chinese exceptionalism, as expressed in Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*:

> It is thus clear that, except for the rulers and the literate, language could hardly be a criterion of nationhood, and even for these it was first necessary to choose a national vernacular (in a standardized literary form) over the more prestigious languages, holy or classical or both, ... That choice admittedly was made everywhere sooner or later, except perhaps in China where the *lingua franca* of the classically educated became the only means of communication between otherwise mutually incomprehensible dialects in the vast empire, and is in the process of becoming something like a spoken language. (Hobsbawm 1990, 56)

In contrast to Hobsbawm, I do not believe that there is anything exceptional in making "the *lingua franca* of the classically educated" into a universal means of communication, since the same can be said for Italian. Second, for many years the emphasis in research was on the script reform rather than on language reforms in general. Now this is about to change through my own work and through that of Zhou Gang, whose book on vernacular literature from a sociolinguistic perspective was published in January 2011 (cf. Zhou 2011).

In the meantime, the Chinese discourse on the May Fourth Movement since the 1990s has seen a shift from unfettered endorsement of its progressive nature to growing skepticism and revisionism. And with it has come criticism of Hu Shi's vernacular project. Hu Shi has always been denied the role of progenitor of *baihua* in mainland Chinese discourse, but this has not diminished the general endorsement of vernacular Chinese written in Chinese characters (much to the detriment of proponents of an alphabetized vernacular as shown above). By contrast, we now find voices that decry the loss of Classical Chinese and advocate the recitation of

the Confucian Classics by school-age children—a chief target of attack for the original literary revolutionaries (Zhang 1997, 101–121; Makeham 2008, 319–323). This tendency, I believe, is indirectly reflected in the review of my book.

Teleological or not, we cannot deny that the Chinese language today is a vibrant language with high literacy rates, a burgeoning publication sector, a huge presence on the internet, and a huge potential to become a major language of scholarship and science. Any pondering over the advantages of an alphabetized written language or of making Classical Chinese into a national language are thus of a purely counterfactual nature. In this article I will trace the origins of Hu Shi's vernacular project back to the late Qing crisis of cultural consciousness. I will reexamine Hu Shi's place in the creation of modern written Chinese, and I will attempt to define what sort of written language emerged out of the May Fourth era and how it contributed to modern standard Chinese.

Towards the Unity of Speech and Language

Despite a few earlier calls to action, it is reasonable to argue that the idea that the Chinese language and writing system was in need of reform was born out of the national crisis that followed the Sino-Japanese War of 1894/1895. Initially, the basic goal of reformers was not so much national unification but nation-building through greater participation of the population in ongoing social change. In other words, reform-minded elites were looking for more effective ways to communicate their social agenda to the masses. For these intellectuals the classical literary language, which ruled supreme in the diglossic state of Chinese, began to appear dysfunctional because it was hampering their efforts to reach a wide audience.

The incentives and models for reform were provided by both Western and Japanese influence. Japan provided the slogan "the congruence of speech and language" (*genbun itchi* 言文一致), which was originally a denomination for a vernacular literary style written in a mixture of Japanese *kana* and Chinese characters. The second half of the 1880s saw the Japanese language reform movement at its zenith. Several clubs advocated phonetic scripts—either Japanese *kana* or Latin romaji. Tsubouchi Shōyō (坪内逍遥 1859–1935) elevated the vernacular novel, which was formerly regarded as vulgar entertainment, to the most valuable genre of literature. The first professor of comparative linguistics at Tokyo University, Basil Hall Chamberlain, urged the *kana* and romaji clubs to apply the new vernacular style to their orthographies. There was also the first backlash against these developments from the conservatives. In 1886, when Huang Zunxian, a Chinese diplomat in Japan, wrote his *Description of Japan*, he defended the phonetic script, claiming "if speech and writing are diverging, only few people become literate, whereas if writing and speech are congruent, many people become literate" (Huang 1974, 2: 815).

This view on the dysfunctionality of diglossia would later make him famous among reform advocates in China, but it was not before the crisis of 1895, when

people were desperate to make sense of Japan's success over China and some turned to deeper cultural and linguistic explanations, that his book was published. Huang Zunxian set the stage for much of the Chinese debates around language and script reform during the 1890s. First, he linked the writing system to literacy rates and literacy rates to national strength. Second, he was the first to link the "unity of speech and writing" to the shift away from Latin toward the European national languages, mainly in order to explain European successes in education. Third, he defined the "unity of speech and writing" as either the vernacular written in Chinese characters or the vernacular written in a phonetic script. Subsequently, two basic approaches towards language reform were struggling for hegemony; I have labeled these "vulgarizers" and "alphabetizers." On the other hand, more cautious reformers, whom I have labeled the "modernizers," were demanding a simplification of the literary language by relaxing its rather rigid standards of propriety, while a group of anti-reformers, the "historicizers," responded to all these demands by insisting on the status quo of diglossia in China. In fact, a modernized version of the literary language became the mainstream language of the press and most publications during the first two decades of the twentieth century, not least due to the inexorable influx of foreign terms and idiom. Most of what the so-called *wenyan* May Fourth activists fought against was, in fact, this modernized style. But while the debate between the "modernizers" and "vulgarizers," which was the essence of the "literary revolution" proclaimed by Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀 1879–1942) in 1917, gradually faded after the 1930s and has only recently produced new headlines in China following the Confucian revivalists' love for Classical Chinese, the argument between the latter and the "alphabetizers" continued for a long time. I believe that the "Renaissance War" between Hu Shi and John DeFrancis can be seen as a distant echo of this debate.

The "Alphabetizers": Making a Living

The crisis of 1895 also resulted in a greater interest in missionary Romanization schemes, but it was not the superiority of a phonetic script as such that attracted reformers. China had seen phonetic writing of its language before, such as the Xiaoerjin script of the Chinese Muslims in Gansu and Shaanxi, although I doubt that Han Chinese elites in the south were aware of it (cf. "Corpus of "Xiao-Er-Jin" Script of Muslim Chinese: Collection and Digitalization" under the supervision of Machida Kazuhiko 2012). However, some of them might have known Manchu transliterations of Chinese syllables in imperial dictionaries or at least seen them on public inscriptions and on every copper coin. The new interest in phonetic scripts was born rather out of the new idea of progress and its necessary prerequisites and out of the fear of losing the social Darwinist competition with the aggressive foreign powers pounding on the gates of the country. As Lu Zhuangzhang put it in his much read article "The Origins of Reform:"

> Except from the eighteen provinces of China and the savages without writing, everywhere else, where the sun and the moon are shining, and the morning dew falls, there is nobody who doesn't use a phonetic script, so that the phonetic script is the general rule in the countries of the whole world. (Lu 1896, 15815)

I have identified 29 competing schemes for phonetic scripts created by 24 different people until 1911 alone (Kaske 2008, 152–160). I am sure with some digging we would find even more, but most of them remained obscure. Only two schemes were of any importance, that of the pioneer Lu Zhuangzhang (盧戇章 1854–1928) in Fujian and Wang Zhao's (王照 1859–1933) Mandarin syllabary in Beijing.

The creators of these two schemes shared a few important characteristics: They were both the first professional language reformers in China. Both were educators who operated schools and made education in their phonetic scripts their profession. Both sought the patronage of powerful figures—Wang Zhao that of the eminent scholar and phonologist Lao Naixuan (勞乃宣 1843–1921), Lu Zhuangzhang that of the Japanese governor of Taiwan. And both competed to promote their schemes with the Board of Education in Beijing in order to be approved for introduction into the national educational system. Wang Zhao reportedly had an almost paranoid sense of copyright, which reveals how much he depended on his Mandarin syllabary for a living. None of them advocated abolishing either the Chinese characters or the literary language. Actually, they cannot be regarded as enemies of diglossia because instead of abolishing diglossia they added an element of digraphia to it, as DeFrancis remarked in one of his articles (DeFrancis 1984, 59–66). However, their efforts anticipated the fate of phonetic scripts in China to this day: they never became anything more than an educational tool.

The "Vulgarizers" or What Is "*Baihua*"?

In his letter to the PMLA, John DeFrancis sharply criticized Hu Shi for advising authors to follow the style of outdated novels instead of sticking to the spoken language. Moreover, he deplored that "the overwhelming preponderance of academic, journalistic, and general writing" had turned *baihua* from a style meant to represent the spoken language into an undistinguishable hybrid of vernacular and literary elements (DeFrancis 2006, 299). But what exactly is "*baihua*"?

Hu Shi claimed that *baihua* dated back to the Tang Dynasty and that the novels of the Ming and Qing dynasty were actually *baihua* novels. However, the identification of the vernacular of the novels as "*baihua*" did not happen before the early twentieth century. The novel *Jiu wei gui* (九尾龜*Nine-tailed Turtle*) by Zhang Chunfan (張春帆d. 1935) stands as one of the most well-known late Qing *baihua* novels today, even though it has been characterized by May Fourth intellectuals as a "depravity novel of the worst kind" (Wang 1997, 82). Its author might have agreed with the latter, but he would hardly have considered his book a "*baihua* novel." The only instances in which the author uses the term were in its original meaning in the

Beijing dialect, where it was pronounced "*baihuo*" and "*kongkou shuo baihuo* (空口说白话)" meaning "talk nonsense" (Zhang 2000, passim).

Novels like *Nine-tailed Turtle* were entertainment for the elites, and the author's choice of style was not dictated by a wish to enlighten the masses; rather, he used a dirty style to address dirty topics. That is to say, he gave preference to the vernacular in order not to contaminate the sanctity and purity of the literary style with lowly topics. Before the 1890s a strict dichotomy of *baihua* versus *wenyan* did not exist. "*Wen* 文" in itself was a category so heavily charged with normative value that there could be only (good) "*wen*" and (bad) "non-*wen*," at best the latter was called "vulgar" (*su* 俗).

The term "*baihua*" assumed a new meaning only in the late nineteenth century. In 1897 and 1898 a group of reformers close to Liang Qichao (梁啟超1873–1929) and Wang Kangnian (汪康年1860–1911) founded a number of enlightenment journals and newspapers in the Shanghai region that were directed at less educated readers, among them the *Yanyi Baihuabao* (演義白話報 *[Popular] Renditions Vernacular Newspaper*, 1897). The term became further politicized thanks to a famous polemical essay entitled "*Baihua* is the foundation of reform" published by Qiu Tingliang (裘廷梁 1857–1943) in his *Wuxi Baihuabao* (無錫白話報 *Wuxi Vernacular Journal*, 1898). Qiu emphasized the importance of an educated people for the development of China, and for the first time established *baihua* as an educational style in opposition to the commonly used *wenyan*, which only catered to a small literati audience (Kaske 2008, 273–274). Further research may reveal another earlier reference, but I believe that my finding holds that "*baihua*" was a reform slogan rather than a technical denominator.

After 1898 "*baihua*" became the euphemism used to denominate an educational style that imitated speech. The style of these early *baihua* texts was quite different from the style of vernacular novels and a far cry from the "academic, journalistic, and general writing" of the May Fourth era. Their emergence and enduring appeal was closely related to a surge in public speaking, a trend that also came from Japan, where Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉 1835–1901) had emphasized the importance of public speeches in his *Gakumon no Susume* (学問のすすめ *An Encouragement of Learning*) and where Chinese students learned to appreciate public speeches as a means of propaganda and lecturing as a mode of teaching (Chen 2009, 270–320).

Baihua was mostly written for the uneducated and its style completely imitated speech, but since the authors were all literati this required a special effort, as expressed in the *Jinghua Ribao* (京華日報 *Beijing Speech Daily*) of 1905:

> Yesterday, I received a letter from Mr. Wang . . .saying that if you talk to people without education, you should be as accessible as possible. Words from the literary language should be used very little. . . .We will of course be careful to revise our texts. ("Yuyan he wenzi butong de binggen" April 1, 1905)

Authors had to consciously revise their text in order to expurgate elements of the literary language, a process that required constant reminder and effort. Although the written language had existed in a diglossic state for centuries, this did not mean that most people were bilingual in their writing habits. In the 1911 novel *Shangjie*

xianxing ji (商界現形記 *Exposure of the Business World*), the family of a merchant protagonist faces difficulties in finding a suitable marriage partner for his younger sister because they insist on finding a successful literatus. Among other requirements, the candidate was also to be well versed in both *wenyan* and *baihua* styles (cf. *Yunjian Tianzhuisheng* 2012, Chap. 4). Most literati never wrote a novel, one of the very few genres open to the vernacular language: the majority of literati were monolingual in writing, although they spoke their own dialect in addition, or perhaps multiple dialects. With the emergence of *baihua* newspapers, manuals, and textbooks, more literati became bilingual in writing than ever before, but this did not necessarily mean that they abandoned their diglossic attitudes easily.

The Class Character of Language

What was really at stake in these debates was the relationship of the educated elite, who was in command of the literary language, with the illiterate or semi-literate masses. How could the elite communicate change to the masses? Should they be taught reading in the elite language? Or should elite messages be communicated to the masses using the lower language registers? Or should elite language be abandoned for the sake of meeting the masses on lower ground? For the latter project, a new question arose: The educated elite and their high language variety had for centuries secured the standards and thus ensured the unity of China. If the unified norm provided by the literary language was abandoned, what would replace it to secure the unity of the country?

This does not mean that everybody actually wished to communicate with the masses or make changes to the status quo. The class character of language is beautifully expressed in a story from Zhang Chunfan's Late Qing novel *Nine-Tailed Turtle*, which also illustrates that the enlightenment value of the vernacular is in no way self evident.

> Zhang Qiugu. . .realizing that there was an argument going on in front of the gate looked outside and saw Gong Chunshu talking to a cart driver. Qiugu could not help laughing about Chunshu's use of refined literati language. How would a man who is like an animal of the wild be willing to listen to him? As expected, this rickshaw puller not only did not listen, but he even bluntly rebuffed Gong Chunshu. Zhang then saw Xin Xiufu stepping forward [in support of Chunshu] and reciting a gust of new words to the cart driver. Qiugu was even more amused. . . .Laughingly he said [to Chunshu and Xiufu]: "Using such language to persuade this sort of unconscious cattle, is literally like 'playing the zither to an ox,' you totally waste your time, since he will not understand you anyway. Do you really believe that a cart-pulling moron deserves such dignity? (Zhang 2000, Chap. 43)

The protagonist observes two friends in an argument with a cart driver and he ridicules their use of cultivated speech in talking with him. Although this is about speech, not writing, it does show that elements of the literary language actually did infiltrate the speech of the educated elite. It is also notable to observe the shift in elite language. The first friend is using a language influenced by Chinese classical

literature, whereas the second uses new expressions learned from translations of foreign works, most likely via Japanese. A traditional and a modern elite language coexisted at that time. Yet in both of the two elite idioms the two friends were talking in an idiom far above the comprehension of a simple, illiterate cart driver whom the author likens to a stupid animal.

Who Had the Greater Revolutionary Potential?

How can we compare the revolutionary potential of the two approaches used by the "Alphabetizers" and the "Vulgarizers" when it comes to changing the class bias of Chinese diglossia? Although on the surface abolishing the time-honored Chinese characters appears to be a revolutionary act, in fact I believe that the revolutionary potential of phonetic scripts was amazingly low. The schemes were only used to teach the illiterate poor; the elites were not interested, and none of the schemes surveyed actually advocated abolishing the characters. When a Qing official from the Board of Education reviewed Lu Zhuangzhang's scheme for the Beijing dialect, his main concern was not the phonetic character of the script but the fact that Lu's alphabet transcribed the spoken Beijing dialect and was not based on Song Dynasty rhyme book categories. The official document does not simply rebuff Lu's proposal but goes into a very detailed and elaborate exposition of the principles of phonology ("Xuebu zi waiwubu wen" 1906, 67–71). One of the reasons that so many schemes were developed may have been that it was much easier for most Late Qing literati to understand phonetics than to write a decent *baihua*.

By contrast, the vernacular was potentially more dangerous to the literary language precisely because it already had a relatively developed entertainment literature and wide currency. The socially explosive power of reigning in the supreme hegemony of the classical written language was well perceived by contemporary writers, Chinese and foreign alike. Qiu Tingliang was the first to openly challenge the hegemony of the literary language. In detailing eight advantages of replacing the literary language by *baihua* he puts eradicating the arrogance of the literati in the second place.

> Second, it expurgates arrogance. One of the bad habits of the literati is to esteem [only] themselves and disrespect others, this poisons the whole empire. If we take the basis [of their self-esteem] away, this would dampen their spirits and they would strive for practical sciences. (Qiu 1963, 121)

In Qiu Tingliang's ranking of the advantages of using *baihua*, the promotion of elementary education came only fifth and the benefits for the poor, eighth. Qiu's statement, published in 1898, was the most radical assertion of the vernacular to be found before the literary revolution of 1917, and it firmly established the term "*baihua*" as a battle slogan challenging the supremacy of the classical language *wenyan*.

Conservatives sensed that the danger coming from *baihua* was of a political nature. Gu Hongming, the apologist of an idealized traditional China, claimed in 1915 that the dichotomy between the literary language on the one hand and illiterate vernaculars on the other was a good thing precisely because it kept the plebs out of politics:

> . . .let us understand what we mean by the Chinese language. There are, as everybody knows, two languages—I do not mean dialects—in China, the spoken and the written language. . . .In China, as it was at one time in Europe when Latin was the learned or written language, the people are properly divided into two distinct classes, the educated and the uneducated. The colloquial or spoken language is the language for the use of the uneducated, and the written language is the language for the use of the really educated. In this way half educated people do not exist in this country. That is the reason, I say, why the Chinese insist upon having two languages. Now think of the consequences of having half educated people in a country. . . . In Europe and America since, from the disuse of Latin, the sharp distinction between the spoken and the written language has disappeared, there has arisen a class of half educated people who are allowed to use the same language as the really educated people, who talk of civilization, liberty, neutrality, militarism and panslavism without the least understanding what these words really mean. People say that Prussian Militarism is a danger to civilization. But to me it seems that half educated man, the mob of half educated men in the world today, is the real danger to civilization. (Ku 1915, 97–98)

On the other hand, it is also true that *baihua* did not live up to its potential during the Qing dynasty. The impact of Qiu's article was limited by the very fact that it was published in a local vernacular journal. Moreover, most journalists and editors of *baihua* periodicals, instead of following Qiu Tingliang's call to challenge the literary language, made painstaking efforts to simplify their style in order to speak to the uneducated people.

Late Qing reformers—alphabetizers and vulgarizers alike—did not advocate principally abolishing diglossia. They were merely concerned about alleviating its obvious disadvantages for communicating social change to the cart drivers of China. They continued to use the literary language to communicate among themselves. Late Qing *baihua* newspapers have been described as the immediate predecessors of May Fourth *baihua*, thus denying that the "literary revolution" of Hu Shi and Chen Duxi was revolutionary at all. However, the impact of these newspapers and journals in fact remained indirect. Seen from a long-term perspective, there is evidence that they served a new generation of school children and students as informal textbooks and socialized them in the context of *baihua*. But the diglossic state of the Chinese language was not yet seriously challenged.

What Was "Revolutionary" About the Literary Revolution?

Instead of dwelling on the Renaissance analogy we should therefore rather ask ourselves what was "revolutionary" in the "literary revolution" proclaimed in 1917 by Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi in their journal *New Youth*? Jack Goldstone, who has

argued in favor of a fourth generation of revolutionary theory, defines a revolution as "an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society, accompanied by formal and informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalized actions that undermine authorities" (Goldstone 2001, 142). Revolutions are not just popular uprisings but may emerge out of elite conflict and start with collapse at the center if opposition elites are seeking to reform or replace the regime.

The revolutionary act in the "literary revolution" was not Hu Shi's vindication of the novel as a valuable literary genre. Hu Shi used the term "*wenxue geming*" (文學革命 'literary revolution') in an almost innocent way, much as Liang Qichao, chief advocate of modernizing the literary language, had used it earlier when he spoke of a "*wenjie geming*" (文界革命 'revolution in the literary field') (Ma 2000, 62; 99–100). It was directed at intra-literary developments (Hu 1990, 862–867). The true call for revolution in the sense of Goldstone's definition as an "an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society" came from Chen Duxiu rather than Hu Shi. Chen Duxiu had published a *baihua* newspaper in 1904 in order to propagate revolutionary ideas, but at that time he did not care about eliminating diglossia, rather he used language selectively depending on the audience, and he continued elite practices of communicating in the literary language with his peers. This was different in early 1917, when Chen, under the impression of the failed political revolution of 1911 and his intensive study of the French Revolution, redefined the literary revolution as part of a larger social revolution. Knowing that this would make him many enemies within the literati class, he defined three goals of the literary revolution as

1. to overthrow the ornate and flattering literature of the nobility and to establish a simple and lyrical national literature;
2. to overthrow the stale and flamboyant classical literature and to establish a fresh and honest realist literature;
3. to overthrow the pedantic and difficult to understand elitist literature and to establish an easily readable and popular social literature. (Chen 1917)

Although Chen Duxiu does not mention *baihua* here, it is clear from his reference to literary styles that the prevalent literary language has to be revolutionized as well. We sense here already that Chen Duxiu's and Hu Shi's political ways would part very soon—Chen Duxiu became one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, while Hu Shi remained true to his American liberal ideas.

The "literary revolution" was in fact not a revolution of the people but one of the elites. Its most significant result was that the intellectual elites in China started to see the vernacular not as complementary to the classical language but as a competitor for prestigious literary writing. While late Qing *baihua* established a bilingual mode of writing, the literary revolution made writers shift back to a monolingual mode with the difference that they now would write in the vernacular. At the same time, political changes added impetus to the movement. Yuan Shikai's (袁世凱 1859–1916) death liberated the cultural scene in Beijing. Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, and other reformers were appointed as professors of Beijing University. They became a crucial group of intellectuals who saw it as their responsibility to study

and elaborate the vernacular in order to develop it into a viable, multi-functional modern national language.

Yet, in the initial 2 years the "literary revolution" was not yet "accompanied by formal and informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalized actions that undermine authorities," the second condition Goldstone cites as defining a revolution. This mobilization came after May Fourth 1919 when the "literary revolution" finally left the narrow confines of academic and educational discourse and entered politics with scores of radical student publications written in this style (cf. Chou 1963). It was exactly because of the importance of the literary language for the reproduction of the elites that this movement, unlike the earlier Japanese "*genbun itchi* movement," assumed the dimensions of a social movement against the whole traditional system.

Baihua Versus Baihuawen

So what about DeFrancis's criticism of May Fourth *baihua* as a hybrid language instead of a pure spoken language that was understandable to the uneducated masses? I believe that DeFrancis, and with him Eric Hobsbawm, commit an intellectual fallacy here because they seem to think that a language has just to be chosen and used. However, language is a social construct that has to be created, and this is even truer for modern national languages. All modern national languages are hybrid constructs that include classical and contemporary, as well as foreign, elements (Haugen 1983, 269–289).

The group of literary revolutionaries at Beijing University quickly became aware of this fact, and they developed self-confidence as creators of the new national literary language of China. In January 1918, Hu Shi conceded that his former attempt to exclude all literary expressions from his *baihua* poems had failed and that a mixed style using both literary and vernacular expressions was preferable. This made him reflect on the meaning of *baihua*. His conclusion led him to state that *baihua* did not necessarily mean the vulgar tongue but simply "*mingbai*" or 'clear.' He thus declared literary elements to be acceptable as long as they were clear enough (Hu 1918; Hu 1916, 567). The linguist Qian Xuantong (錢玄同 1887–1939), concerned about integrating elements from Chinese dialects and European languages into this new literary language, compared it with Esperanto, which was a planned language composed of elements of various European languages (Qian 1918, 286). As a result of these efforts, the new literary language required a new name. Peng Qingpeng in 1917 called it "*jicheng guanhua*" (集成官話 'Integrated Mandarin') (Peng 1917), but soon thereafter a new name came into use, "*baihuawen* 白話文."

When DeFrancis spoke of a hybrid style that is not "*baihua,*" he was correct. According to deeply ingrained diglossia patterns, early twentieth-century Chinese considered speech and writing to be completely different categories with writing not thought to be a mirror of speech. In 1918 Qian Xuantong conceded that it was

nonsense to juxtapose "*baihua*" and "*wenyan*" because one was speech and the other denominated writing. He noted that it would be better to say that "modern people use modern language (*jinyu* 今語) to write essays, ancient people used ancient language (*guyu* 古語) to write essays" (Qian 1919, 91). Only after 1919 did the term "*baihuawen* 白話文" finally appear in the linguistic discourse and become the technical term for the new hybrid style created and elaborated during and after the May Fourth New Culture Movement. DeFrancis criticized the results of the "literary revolution" under the influence of Communist attempts to erase the May Fourth heritage in the 1930s and 1940s. Yet, I believe that the revolutionary aspect of the "literary revolution" should not be sought in creating a language accessible to the masses, but in the fact that it created a new literary language for the elites that was contemporary and close to spoken language but could also be used for high-end purposes like philosophy and sciences. Although Late Qing *baihua* was created as an imitation of uneducated speech, it did not fulfill these purposes.

In 1909 the textbook editor of Commercial Press Du Yaquan (杜亞泉 1873–1933) objected to the use of *baihua* in textbooks for elementary math education. There were two reasons for this: First, a concern for stylistic propriety. He thought that students would not be able to use proper literary expressions once their perception of style was contaminated by *baihua* elements. The second reason was that *baihua* expressions appeared cumbersome and less clear. Du Yaquan admitted that the dichotomy between the written and spoken languages was an obstacle to national communication in China. His solution was not to use *baihua* but the implementation of a simplified and standardized literary style. As a Jiangsu man, who in 1912 also developed a phonetic notation in Roman letters for the Jiangsu dialect (Du 1912, 1–7), Du believed that there was not one *baihua* but many, and that a simplified classical style was the only way to ensure that the written language of China remained unified. The goal of national unification should be to upgrade spoken language in order to make it closer to the written language not to degrade the standards of the written language (Du 1909, 802). Here we once again return to our cart driver in the story from *Nine-tailed turtle* but from a completely different perspective. Rather than talking to the cart driver in his own primitive language, the cart driver should be educated to be able to speak in a language that approximates that used by the elites.

On the other hand, if we compare the examples given by Du we might wonder from our modern perspective what exactly constitutes the difference between *wenyan* (called *wenci* 文辭 by Du) and *baihua* (Table 1):

In these examples the difference is merely in the use of the verbs, but today's grammarian would not hesitate to include Du's *wenyan* examples with modern *baihua* grammar. The answer to this puzzle may be that *wenyan* and *baihua* are entirely constructed categories. Du Yaquan would count as a "modernizer" in my very rough categorization of reform approaches, because he was advocating the modernization of the literary language rather than the use of *baihua*. But what Du Yaquan identifies as *baihua* here is actually the Late Qing newspaper style that imitates speech, and what he identifies as the literary language in fact more closely resembles the hybrid *baihuawen* created during the May Fourth era.

Table 1 Examples

	Baihua	Wenci
Use a certain amount of money	使錢若干 shǐ qián ruò gān	用錢若干 yòng qián ruò gān
Break three bowls	打了三隻碗 dǎ le sān shuāng wǎn	打破三隻碗dǎ pò sān shuāng wǎn

Conclusion

The "literary revolution" proclaimed by Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu played a crucial role in the dissolution of diglossia in China. It did not emerge out of the blue but was the result of two decades of rethinking the roles of language and writing in Chinese society, an era when national crisis made the dichotomy between the classical literary language and the "vulgar" language appear to be what Haugen has called "schizoglossia" (Haugen 1972, 148–189). The literary revolution and the subsequent May Fourth Movement were indeed a turning point because they concluded a process of status choice and began the process of corpus planning in which *baihuawen* became the modern Chinese literary language (Haugen 1983, 269–289). Although the results of this linguistic shift—a contemporary literary language written in Chinese characters—have been criticized by both proponents of the classical language and a phonetic script, whatever the outcome of these and any subsequent debates might be, we have to admit that the results of Chinese language policy have been quite impressive. Today, literacy rates in China are high, and in recent years Chinese has become a vibrant language of science and academic publishing. While at the same time the declining status of German as a scientific language has become a matter of debate even though it emerged from diglossia centuries earlier (Ammon 2010, 400–404; Jha 2011; Zhou Ping et al. 2009).[1]

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[1] The issue of German as a language of science (Deutsch als Wissenschaftssprache) has been a matter of concern for the past decade and has even been a topic for a hearing of the Bundestag (see Vilmar et al. 2001; "German as a Scientific Language—Joint Statement by the Presidents of the AvH, the DAAD, the Goethe Institute, and the HRK" 2012).

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