

Modern Reorganization and Language Contact of the Chinese Vocabulary System

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Abstract: After entering the 20th century, great changes have taken place in the Chinese language, especially in terms of vocabulary. This change is not a simple increase in the number of words, but reflects a paradigm shift. The change involves not only nouns, but also a large number of verbs and adjectives, which this article calls “modern reconstruction of vocabulary system”. This article argues that the realization of scientific narration based on the consistency of words and texts is the fundamental motivation of language modernization; the reconstruction of Chinese vocabulary system can be basically completed in a short period of time, mainly due to the language contact within the cultural circle of Chinese characters in East Asia, which is also an important driving force for the rapid two character transformation of Chinese vocabulary. This paper gives a bird’s-eye view of the nature, new concepts and new forms of lexicalization, especially the interaction between Chinese and Japanese vocabulary.

Keywords: neologism, Japanese loan words, two character words, modernization, unification of spoken language and written language

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Chinese language underwent tremendous change in a relatively short time. This change was manifested largely in a great increase in neologisms. In 1958, linguist Wang Li stated: “Nowadays, in a political essay, the number of neologisms often accounts for more than 70% of all the vocabulary. From the perspective of vocabulary, the Chinese language has developed at a faster speed in the last 50 years than that in the previous thousands of years.” (1980: 516) Uriel Weinreich (1926-1967), a German linguist, also claimed:

It would be an oversimplification to speak here of borrowing, or mere additions to an inventory. As Hans K. Vogt puts it, every enrichment or impoverishment of a system involves necessarily the reorganization of all the old distinctive oppositions of the system. To admit that a given element is simply added to the system which receives it without consequences for this system

would ruin the very concept of system (Weinreich, 1976: 1-2).

Thus, any additions or subtractions of words, however slight, is enough to cause consequential change and subsequent reorganization of a given language's lexicon or vocabulary system. In modern times (nineteenth to the early twentieth century), these changes were foundational. This article describes this phenomenon as the "modern reorganization of the Chinese vocabulary system". This article will attempt to chronicle the principal reasons for this reorganization of the Chinese vocabulary system, the situations that compelled it, and the problems this reorganization sought to resolve.

I. NEOLOGISMS IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Existing studies of neologisms are primarily concerned with the following two categories:

1. New terms, including the names of Western cultural relics and institutions; terms of modern science and technology, and related terms to express abstract ideas, etc.
2. New affixes, quasi-affixes, and the three-character and four-character words (or word groups) based on them.

Additionally, this article asserts that changes in the basic vocabulary reflected by the increase in two-character verbs, adjectives (including non-predicate adjectives), the renewal of meanings of existing words, and the frequency of use are mainly responsible for, and make up the content of, the modern reorganization of the Chinese lexicon or vocabulary system.¹

The coining of neologisms can be traced to the late sixteenth century when Jesuit missionaries first translated Western literature to Chinese. In addition to translating texts, Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century took further initiatives by publishing newspapers, journals, and compiling English-Chinese dictionaries. Through these activities, neologisms were constantly being coined, and the relationship between existing words and English was established. In the twentieth century, a large number of terms coined by the Japanese were also introduced into the Chinese language. These words formulate the basic part of the reorganization of the vocabulary system. New terms, however, are not only the research topic of linguistics but also a source of investigation for

historians studying the modern period. In other words, the development of scientific and technological terms is often the starting point for studies in the history of modern disciplines, and the names of Western cultural relics play an indispensable role in researching the history of Sino-foreign cultural exchange.

The substantial addition of new affixes and their derivative components is another characteristic of the modern reorganization of the Chinese lexicon. Hu Yilu (1913) discussed affixes in his book *A Preliminary Study of Chinese Language* (国语学草创 *guo yu xue sao chuang*), pointing out that certain components in compound words become ambiguous, meaning they no longer affect the connotations of compound words, but retain the role of adjusting syllables or limiting meaning usage. These components become the morphological characters of the vocabulary and the linguistic units of affix. Hu argued that inflectional language tends to pursue simplicity and merge into words. The frequent use of inflectional language makes some components gradually become ambiguous, losing their original meaning. The change in form of the Chinese language was made “to pursue clarity,” and adopted an analytical and subsidiary form. Hu Yilu stated:

形式之界说虽为本义之消微及其原音之变化，然吾国语之本质，各语音独立不相侵越者也。故原音变化一项，不适用于吾国语之所谓形式也。

According to the definition of Western linguistics, affix, as a morphological element, is a unit with its original meaning disappearing and pronunciation changing. Each Chinese character has an independent pronunciation and there is no connection between characters, so the definition of Western linguistics is not applicable to define Chinese character (Hu, 1913: 58).

In other words, according to the morphological point of view, a morphological element involves the disappearance of the original meaning of the affix and inflection of pronunciation; however, Chinese is different from inflectional languages.² Individual components do not lose their essential meaning in compound words, which can be interpreted verbatim. However, this situation does not hinder the basic unity of compound words. Hu held that although two characters are integrated into one word, the original meaning of each character has only weakened, but not

disappeared. After being incorporated into compound words, “although the original meaning of each Chinese character may disappear, its pronunciation remains unchanged.” Hu Yilu argued that “Chinese affixes are incomplete morphological elements” (1913: 57). Hu goes on: “As a brand-new thing, Chinese affix was not recorded by ancient Chinese documents.” Hu Yilu claimed that although syllables have been added and morphology has attained more complexity, the concept has been subdivided and the meaning has become clearer, which could be regarded as a kind of simplification. Old affixes have long since lost their relevance, while new affixes have become increasingly significant. With great sensitivity, Hu Yilu pin-pointed the developmental trend that the Chinese language would undergo.

According to the definition of compound words and derivatives given by Western linguists, the Chinese language has few derivatives. Inflection is internal change and derivation is a kind of addition. The additional component has the function of the classification. Unlike Western languages, Chinese has no morphological changes; instead, it has its unique solutions. Two-character Chinese words seldom involve positioning morpheme, which suppresses the awareness of affixes in users of the Chinese language. Therefore, with regard to the affixes, Hu Yilu repeatedly highlighted that “Chinese affix is a new thing.” Due to these characteristics in the Chinese language, “compound words are much more than words with affixes.” Hu stated that: “the Chinese language tends to develop from two-character words to three-character words.” Wang Lida was the first to point out that the occurrence of new affixes was an influence of Japanese (Wang, 1958: 90-94). The author reckons that the occurrence of new affixes is a by-product of the modernization of Chinese. This occurrence is not only influenced by external factors but also a result of the fundamental characteristics of the Chinese language, which have not been activated for a long time. In modern times, the development of three-character words promoted the progress of affixation. Indeed, there are still many questions to clarify about the introduction and finalization of new affixes.

Compared with research on the above-mentioned new terms and new affixes, fewer studies have explored verbs and adjectives (including distinguishing words that cannot be used as predicates, i.e., “non-predicate adjectives”, which are called “new predicates” in this article). Thus far, the analyses of verbs and adjectives as new terms are largely limited to

individual cases and has yet to be organized or subject to overview. Nouns constitute concepts, predicates serve as the framework of narration, and sentences cannot be formed without predicates. The enrichment and renewal of predicates are vital to the reorganization of language and is largely affected by the movement that promoted consistency in spoken and written language during the May 4th Movement (an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement growing out of student demonstrations in Beijing on May 4, 1919).

Apart from new words, the renewal of word meaning and the increased frequency of classical words are phenomena that deserve our attention. The former is often jokingly described as “new wine in old bottles”; as for the latter, these classical words (most being character strings) having been dormant for so long, were suddenly resurrected in the first decade of the twentieth century, becoming active in the written language with an increasingly higher frequency of use, and were eventually included in the modern Chinese vocabulary. This type of word can be called “activated words.” In this regard, the words involved in the modern reorganization of the vocabulary system can be divided into the following categories:

1. New words, which are completely new words (their relations with the new conceptions will be discussed in the later section) and cannot be found in Chinese classics;
2. Words with renewed meanings; that is, old words with new meanings;
3. Activated words, or words with a sudden increase in the frequency of usage, and which become the core words of the vocabulary system in a short time.

The above three categories are collectively called “neologisms”, which formulate the main content of this paper.

It is worth mentioning that modern neologisms are mainly two-character words, with a few one-character words such as *ai* 癌 (cancer). According to the survey conducted for this article, there are 19 one-character words in total. New affixes were included in the new vocabulary system with the introduction of two-character words.

As mentioned above, the translation of neologisms began with the translation work of Jesuits who came to China in the late sixteenth century and Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century. However, the neologisms they coined were mainly in the areas of manufacturing, chemistry, astronomy, geography, mathematics, as well as a few words for the humanities. Until the end of the nineteenth century, despite the

promotion of Westernization, translation of various terms remained incomplete. According to Wang Li: “From the Opium War to the Reform Movement of 1898, only a few neologisms were coined. From the Reform Movement of 1898 to the May 4th Movement, it witnessed a rapid increase in neologisms.” (1980: 516) Many neologisms were coined around the May 4th Movement, including academic terms concerning humanities, most of which were coined in this short period of more than ten years. The dictionaries published during this period roughly reflect this fact, of which *Ciyuan* (辞源), literally meaning the sources of the words (the first major Chinese dictionary linguistically structured around words instead of individual characters used to write them), was the most famous representative work. In the twentieth century, the Chinese began to use neologisms with increasing frequency in the media, and schools of all kinds under the new educational system followed suit. The rapid addition of neologisms has brought confusion to the spoken and written languages of society and aroused the anxiety and opposition of language users (Shen, 2013: 169-180). Therefore, comprehensive language reference books that could give an account of the new additions became urgently needed for all sections of society. During the compilation of *Ciyuan*, as depicted by the May 4th Movement that took place a few years later, China was in a period of extremely unstable transition, where the old and new cultures were in a vortex of collision, struggle, and alternation. At that time, there were several dictionaries on legal and economic neologisms and terms introduced from Japan, such as *New Erya* (新尔雅, 1903), *Japanese-Chinese Dictionary* (日译汉语大辞典, 1907), *Chinese-Japanese Dictionary* (东中大辞典, 1908), *A Scientific Dictionary of General and Special Japanese Words: Special Use of Chinese Characters* (普通专门日语科学词典·附奇字解, 1908), *General Encyclopedia* (普通百科大词典, Edited by Huang Ren, 1908), *Physics Vocabulary* (物理学语汇, 1908), which were provided for Japanese students, (Saneto, 1982: 203-213; Shen, 2008: 75-84) and the *English-Chinese Dictionary* (英华大辞典, Chief editor: Yan Huiqing, 1908, Commercial Press) that imitated English-Japanese dictionaries. In October 1915, the Commercial Press based in Shanghai took eight years to compile *Ciyuan*, China’s first modern dictionary on the Chinese language. By 1949, the total sales of various editions of *Ciyuan* reached 4 million copies, which had a tremendous impact on the formation of the modern Chinese vocabulary system (Shen, 2018: 7-19). As its name implies, *Ciyuan* claimed

to reveal the etymology of words with the utmost details. However, *Ciyuan* does not provide sources or documentary evidence for a large number of entries. Analysis of the work reveals that there are 4,659 and 5,436 entries without sources in the main edition and sequel of *Ciyuan* respectively (Shen, 2010). However, the reason for these omissions is not entirely due to the lack of research. The main source materials for *Ciyuan* were the documentary evidence of traditional Chinese classics, excluding Chinese versions of Western texts translated by the Jesuits at the end of the sixteenth century or from the books included in the *Imperial Collection of Four* (四库全书), which was compiled by 361 scholars from 1773-1782 under the Qing Emperor Qianlong's imperial edict. For example, the editors of *Ciyuan* do not provide any documentary source evidence for nouns having to do with the five climatic zones such as *redai* 热带 (tropical zone) and *wendai* 温带 (temperate zone) in geography, or for other basic terms in mathematics and geometry, let alone for the numerous translated works of the Protestant missionaries after the nineteenth century. While this is a serious defect, when taking a step back, we realize at once that even if these works of literature were cited, it would not fundamentally change the fact that a large number of words without citable sources would still exist. These words without sources are mainly neologisms and academic terms. In this respect, the value of *Ciyuan* rested with these 10,195 unsourced words, which introduced new Western knowledge.

The large-scale collection of academic terms is undoubtedly the most important contribution of *Ciyuan* to the modern Chinese language. However, *Ciyuan* seldom involves new affixes. Another serious defect of *Ciyuan* is that thousands of two-character verbs and adjectives are excluded. The author of this article conducted an exhaustive survey on the two-character verbs and adjectives in *Ciyuan*.³ The survey results indicated that among the 2,277 two-character verbs and 491 two-character adjectives in modern Chinese with the same written form as those of Japanese, 1,713 two-character verbs and 342 two-character adjectives have not been included in *Ciyuan*. The following are some examples, including words found in Chinese classics.

Verbs: 爱护 *ai hu* (care) 包括 *bao kuo* (include) 表示 *biao shi* (express) 参加 (join)

创造 *chuang zao* (create) 分配 *fen pei* (allocate) 幻想
huan xiang (fantasize)
 概括 *gai kuo* (summarize) 改良 *gai liang* (reform) 进
 化 *jin hua* (evolve)
 接触 *jie chu* (contact) 考虑 *kao lv* (consider) 肯定 *ken
 ding* (confirm)
 扩张 *kuo zhang* (extend) 联系 *lian xi* (connect) 冒险
mao xian (venture)
 强调 *qiang diao* (emphasize) 确认 *que ren* (affirm) 确
 立 *que li* (establish) 摄影 *she ying* (film) 思考 *si
 kao*(think) 实现 *shi xian* (realize)
 体验 *ti yan* (experience) 团结 *tuan jie* (unify) 违反 *wei
 fan* (violate)
 吸收 *xi shou* (absorb) 象征 *xiang zheng* (symbolize) 消
 失 *xiao shi* (disappear) 兴奋 *xing fen* (excite) 压迫 *ya
 po* (oppress) 延伸 *yan shen* (stretch)
 占领 *zhan ling* (occupy)

Adjectives: 单调 *dan diao* (monotonous) 复杂 *fu za* (complex)
 丰富 *feng fu* (rich) 简洁 *jian jie* (concise) 简捷 *jian jie*
 (convenient)
 简单 *jian dan* (simple) 健康 *jian kang* (healthy) 健全
jian quan (sound)
 冷酷 *leng ku* (obdurate) 冷静 *leng jing* (cool) 冷淡 *leng
 dan* (inhospitable) 良好 *liang hao* (good) 明快 *ming
 kuai* (sprightly) 明确 *ming que* (explicit)
 伟大 *wei da* (great) 顽固 *wan gu* (stubborn) 危险 *wei
 xian* (dangerous)
 优秀 *you xiu* (excellent) 优势 *you shi* (preponderant) 优
 良 *you liang* (excellent) 有力 *you li* (powerful) 异常 *yi
 chang* (abnormal) 严肃 *yan su* (serious) 正确 *zheng que*
 (correct) 重要 *zhong yao* (important) 忠实 *zhong shi*
 (faithful)
 著名 *zhu ming* (famous)

This issue was not fundamentally solved in the revised edition of *Ciyuan* (1931). The lack of numerous two-character predicates makes it plain that the Chinese language at the time had yet to make the final accommodations needed to satisfy the new requirements of society, namely in devising the terms necessary to relate scientific narratives. The reorganization of the modern Chinese vocabulary not only involves the addition of academic terms but also includes predicates, two-character verbs, adjectives, and distinguishing words, known as non-predicate adjective, which are indispensable in scientific narratives. Among the thousands of old and new words that were not included in *Ciyuan*, most were frequently used in domestic media such as *Shenpao* (申报), *Ta Kung Pao* (大公报), and *Eastern Miscellany* (东方杂志). So why were these words excluded by the editors of *Ciyuan*? Some believe it is because the editors did not keep up with the times. Yet upon closer examination, this does not hold up. How to explain the gap between the entries in the dictionary and the actual use of words in the media? This important problem has been ignored for far too long. The author believes that the crux of the problem lies in that an enormous number of two-character words that have not been recognized as lexical units.

Ciyuan includes numerous words without citable sources, which promotes the modernization of vocabulary. However, the absence of a host of predicates makes the modern reorganization of the vocabulary system still one step away from success.

II. NEOLOGISMS AND NEW CONCEPTS: CONTENT AND FORM

Why did people need such a large number of new words at the turn of the century? At the time, the West underwent rapid development in science and technology. “There are so many disciplines with so many items, but China did not have relevant disciplines and items, how could they be translated properly? It is difficult to overcome this issue.” (Fryer, 1953: 15) Yan Fu also stated that: “Various new theories were proposed without corresponding Chinese expressions.” (1981: xii) Zhang Taiyan quoted Xunzi: “A new era needs new language, which requires the use of existing words or the coinage of neologisms.” In short, every new era requires new words to define its newest discoveries. New knowledge requires neologisms. Still, if we look closely at the following examples, we may find

it necessary to amend the conclusion we have taken for granted.

Nouns: philosophy 哲学 *zhe xue*, nerve 神经 *shen jing*, background 背景 *bei jing*, deficit 赤字 *chi zi*, regulation 法规 *fa gui*, law 法律 *fa lv*, rule 规律 *gui lv*, series 系列 *xi lie*, (The words in parentheses are cited from Wang Li's Historical Manuscript of Chinese Language on pages 522-524, the same below: gymnastics 体操 *ti cao*, proposition 命题 *ming ti*, political party 政党 *zheng dang*, principle 原则 *yuan ze*, police 警察 *jing cha*, history 历史 *li shi*, substance 物质 *wu zhi*, goal 目的 *mu di*, definition 定义 *ding yi*)

Verbs: promote 促进 *cu jin*, secrete 分泌 *fen mi*, vote 表决 *biao jue*, dispel 打消 *da xiao*; consider 考虑 *kao lv*, think 思考 *si kao*, attend 出勤 *chu qin*, extend 延伸 *yan shen*; (reform, improve 改良 *gai liang*, liberate 改善 *gai shan*, criticize 解放 *jie fang*, critique 批评 *pi ping*, 批判 *pi pan*, summarize 概括 *gai kuo*, restrict 制约 *zhi yue*, adjust 调整 *tiao zheng*)

Adjectives: monotonous 单调 *dan diao*, obdurate 冷酷 *leng ku*, normal 正常 *zheng chang*, sensitive 敏感 *min gan*; excellent 优秀 *you xiu*, correct 正确 *zheng que*, simple 简单 *jian dan*, fast 快速 *kuai su*, healthy 健康 *jian kang*; (absolute 绝对 *jue dui*, abstract 抽象 *chou xiang*, affirmative 肯定 *ken ding*, negative 否定 *fou ding*, positive 积极 *ji ji*, passive 消极 *xiao ji*, subjective 主观 *zhu guan*, objective 客观 *ke guan*, direct 直接 *zhi jie*, indirect 间接 *jian jie*)

These words were considered “new terms” and were criticized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some noun groups expressed new concepts, such as “哲学 *zhe xue*” (philosophy) and “神经 *shen jing*” (nerve), which did not exist in ancient Chinese; other neologisms expressed existing concepts, such as “法规 *fa gui*” (regulations), “法律 *fa lv*” (laws), and “目的 *mu di*” (goal), which were old concepts re-defined in the modern context. Verbs are used to name dynamic processes. Some new verbs indicate new dynamic processes, such as “分泌 *fen mi*” (secret)

and “表决 *biao jue*” (vote), while others are renamings or subdivisions of existing dynamic processes, such as “考虑 *kao lv*” (consider), “思考 *si kao*” (think), “延伸 *yan shen*” (extend), “批评 *pi ping*” (criticize), “批判 *pi pan*” (critique). Similarly, some adjectives expressed new states or new feelings, while others indicated new expressions or subdivided means, such as “优秀 *you xiu*” (excellent), “正确 *zheng que*” (correct), “简单 *jian dan*” (simple), “快速 *kuai su*” (fast), “健康 *jian kang*” (healthy). One of the functions of new verbs and adjectives (as opposed to “new nouns”, which are called “new predicates” in this paper) is to provide new forms, or to distinguish dynamic processes, states, and emotions that were previously indistinguishable. The new words include words with new meanings or new morphologies. As a general tendency, compared with nouns, many new predicates only provide new morphologies and do not express new concepts. For example, “考虑 *kao lv*” (consider), “思考 *si kao*” (think), “延伸 *yan shen*” (extend), “优秀 *you xiu*” (excellent), “正确 *zheng que*” (correct), “简单 *jian dan*” (simple), “快速 *kuai su*” (fast), “健康 *jian kang*” (healthy). These words were coined only to achieve the “Two-character Principle” described below. From the perspective of lexical history, it was a special phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this time, the Chinese language was in desperate need of various neologisms. While translating Spencer’s works, Zhang Taiyan realized the systematic defect of the Chinese vocabulary system. He stated: “There are 60,000 English words and 2,000 Chinese words. It is very difficult to translate English with so few Chinese words.” (Zhang, 2015: 46) So how to solve the dilemma of insufficient words?

Regarding the method of obtaining neologisms, Fryer proposed the use of ancient and rare characters or the coinage of new characters for translation; (Shen, 2010: 46) Yan Fu argued that “It is easier and more accurate to translate foreign languages with words and sentences used before the Han Dynasty, and it is not easy to translate foreign languages accurately with recent vulgar words”; (1981: xi) Zhang Taiyan likewise advocated the use of ancient teachings or the coinage of new characters. (Zhang, 2015: 44-50, 208-233, 498-522) These scholars focused on the utilization of classical vocabulary resources. At that time, there were three approaches to obtaining words for translation. Firstly, using existing words; secondly, coining new words; thirdly, borrowing Japanese words. In terms of the first approach, the use of the existing words for foreign language

translation inevitably led to deviations in meaning. With respect to the second approach, it took time and energy to coin new words. Yan Fu stated: “It takes a long time to coin a neologism for translation.” Scholars did not have enough time to coin new words. Kang Youwei’s proposal to borrow words from Japan before and after the Reform Movement of 1898 reflected this urgency. This was especially true after the abolition of the imperial examination system, when the new educational system had to be prepared under a strict deadline and it was impossible to devise new words for translation in such a short time. Indeed, apart from using existing words and coining new ones, borrowing Japanese words became the most feasible solution at that time. Wang Guowei stated: “It is necessary to coin neologisms to learn science or technology.” (1983: 97-100) Hu Yilu showed a different view from his teacher Zhang Taiyan: “The names of new things and the words that express new ideas should be used in the form of compound words instead of neologisms. It is suitable to introduce Japanese words into the Chinese vocabulary system.” (1913: 124) Later, Wang Li concluded that one of the characteristics of neologisms at the turn of the century was to “make use of Japanese words as much as possible.” (1980: 516) Although borrowing Japanese words produced abundant results with minimal effort, it was nonetheless necessary to overcome strong psychological resistance. Integrating Japanese words into the language was widely and fiercely opposed by Chinese society at that time. (Shen, 2019: 108-148) Nevertheless, a host of Japanese words were introduced into Chinese. The justification for this was that Japanese neologisms were in turn based on ancient Chinese and added to the English-Chinese dictionary. Moreover, most of them were in the form of two-character words. ⁴Thus, naturally, Japanese neologisms were absorbed by the Chinese.

The large-scale “invasion” of Japanese words profoundly affected the Chinese language. There were four ways of borrowing:

1. People: Mainly Chinese students in Japan. Due to the abolition of the imperial examination system, Chinese students studying in Japan reached its peak in 1904-1906;
2. Books: Various textbooks, and most translated books in this period were re-translations of Japanese books;
3. Media: Various newspapers, as well as magazines with Japanese editors and publishers or written by writers who had studied in Japan;
4. Dictionaries: Chinese dictionaries, English-Chinese dictionaries, and

various term dictionaries that were compiled based on similar publications in Japan.

The words borrowed from Japanese can be divided into three categories: “morphological loanwords”, “semantic loanwords”, and “activated words”.

Morphological loanwords, also called Japanese-made Chinese words, are the words with the same written form as Japanese, such as “哲学 *zhe xue*” (philosophy), “义务 *yi wu*” (obligation), “神经 *shen jing*” (nerve). A preliminary investigation reveals more than 1,500 morphological loanwords borrowed from Japanese among commonly used two-character words.

The semantic loanwords can be found in Chinese classics, Buddhist classics, Zen quotations, vernacular novels, and Shanshu (a literary form that features singing and recitation). However, in modern times, when translating foreign languages, Japanese translators changed the original meanings of words such as “革命 *ge ming*” (revolution), “经济 *jing ji*” (economy), “共和 *gong he*” (republic), “民主 *min zhu*” (democracy), and “社会 *she hui*” (society). These altered meanings were influenced by the Japanese language and the reorganization of the new semantic system of the Chinese language.

The activated word or Japanese activated word is a new concept proposed in this article. Activated words refer to classical words that had gone out of the use or were infrequently used and word strings that had not become common until the end of the nineteenth century. Japanese books translated into Chinese during the early twentieth century also bolstered the influence of Japanese words, bringing them into wider circulation and usage in written Chinese, leading eventually to their inclusion in the modern Chinese vocabulary. Activated words can be found in Chinese classics or Chinese translations of Western texts. Moreover, the meanings of these words have not changed since ancient times, which is to say they are not “Japanese-made Chinese words.” These activated words re-gained popularity in the first decade of the twentieth century. A preliminary study reveals that nearly 500 activated words among commonly used two-character words can be identified.

Semantic loanwords and morphological loanwords are words that name new nouns, academic terms, and abstract concepts, and thus remain a central topic of inquiry for researchers focused on the historical exchange

between Chinese and Japanese. As a majority of activated words are two-character verbs and adjectives that do not express new meanings, they are often ignored by researchers. Furthermore, activated words were technically already included in the written language when neologisms were introduced, and thus there was no obstacle to understanding their connotations. This is perhaps another reason why they have been ignored by researchers for so long.

In the book *Research on Vocabulary Exchange between China and Japan in Modern Times* (近代中日词汇交流研究 *jin dai zhong ri ci hui jiao liu yan jiu*, which was first published by Zhonghua Book Company in 2010, and republished by Social Sciences Academic Press (China) in 2020 with the title *The Birth of Neologisms: Modern History of Sino-Japanese Vocabulary Exchange* (新语往还: 近代中日词汇交涉史 *xin yu wang huan jin dai zhong ri ci hui jiao she shi*) the author of this article has made a detailed study of the evolution of neologisms from first coinage, to acceptance and widespread usage, beginning from the late sixteenth century to the early twentieth century. This study focuses on the following topics:

1. During the development of neologisms, why were Japanese neologisms more widely used than Chinese ones?
2. During the modern history of language exchange between Chinese and Japanese, the author examines a series of problems caused by the introduction of Japanese words. The previous large-scale language contact occurred in the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, which adopted the spoken language while the translation of Japanese books into Chinese employed the written language. Translated textbooks were used to teach students in the class. The translation of Buddhist scriptures took thousands of years, while the translation of Japanese books and its influence occurred in a relatively short period of more than ten years. The common point was that they needed to face a huge knowledge system with different cultures.
3. In terms of the vocabulary transfer caused by the language contact between Chinese and Japanese, a number of typical activities were selected for investigation, including text translation and dictionary compilation.
4. Etymological research was conducted from the perspectives of methodology and data group, which provide supporting evidence for the transfer of new words between Chinese and Japanese.

The book *Research on Vocabulary Exchange between China and Japan in Modern Times* mainly explored how the East Asian cultural sphere of Chinese characters created the vocabulary to express Western civilization and discussed several important issues in this process. The author of this article will carry out future research on the following three topics:

1. Detailed description of activated words.
2. Research on new affixes and new roots.
3. Compilation of the etymologicon concerning modern Chinese and Japanese neologisms.

The author argues that the first documentary evidence plays a crucial role in the study of morphological loanwords. Moreover, a thorough comparison of the meanings of classical words in translated texts and contemporary literature is an important approach to identifying semantic loanwords. However, it is difficult to identify activated words through documentary evidence and word meaning. Fortunately, the rapid development of corpora and big-data research methods in recent years has made it possible. The corpus enables researchers to observe changes in the usage frequency of words within a given time. Regarding the changes in the usage frequency of words, Ian Hacking, author of the introductory essay of the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Fourth Edition)*, cited G. C. Lichtenberg (1742-1799), who asked readers to compare how often the word “revolution” is printed in Europe in the eight years from 1781 to 1789 and in the eight years from 1789 to 1797. Lichtenberg’s flippant guess was a ratio of one to a million. I would venture the same fraction for comparing the use of the word paradigm in 1962 and on the fiftieth anniversary of the book. Yes, a million times this year for every one time then.” (Kuhn, 2012: 6) The increase in the usage frequency of some words reflects the attention of the language community to specific concepts. Although the current large-scale corpus has a few defects, with its gradual improvement, especially with the establishment of the Japanese diachronic corpus, we can obtain more accurate statistics on word frequency, and discover at which times we can observe an increase in usage frequency of relevant Chinese and Japanese words, thus exploring the varying interactions between the two.

Regarding the study of affixes, the massive occurrence of new affixes and their derived components is another important change in the Chinese lexicon. Since the twentieth century, the rapid development of three-character words has helped promote affixation. There are still many

questions to be clarified about the introduction and finalization of new affixes.

Why did a large number of classical words or word strings need to be reactivated? It can be argued that the modern reorganization of the Chinese lexicon needed to meet the following two requirements in form:

1. New concepts are expressed with a two-character word. When the new concept is introduced through translation, the translated word must be in the form of two-character.
2. A more often a group of synonyms or near-meaning two-character word should be coined for the one-character word that expresses the old concept.

The above requirements can be described as the “two-character principle based on single and two related words” in modern Chinese (Shen, 2017: 15-35). This principle means that the first task of the modern reorganization of the lexicon is the obtainment of terms. As existing terms were insufficient to complete modern language activities (i.e., scientific narrative), a large number of two-character verbs, adjectives, and distinguishing words were coined. That is to say, the “Two-character Principle” is essentially aimed at existing one-character verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. This principle may be interpreted as a characteristic of Chinese prosody. The author claims that the scientific narrative requires the vocabulary to provide single and two-character words for the same concept. How to get a huge number of two-character words in a short time? Hu Shi and Fu Sinian set their sights on Chinese classics. The classics are a treasure trove of words, but they cannot be used at will. In fact, as a historical reality, the borrowing of words from Japanese was the ultimate shortcut to accomplish this arduous task. The borrowing of Japanese words can save time and effort. Similar to the “two-character principle based on single and two related words,” modern Japanese vocabulary follows the “two-character principle based on Japanese and Chinese related words,” namely:

1. New concepts are expressed mainly in two-character Chinese words, which means that the newly added components, such as the translated word, must be in the two-character form.
2. Native Japanese words (*Wago*) must be in the form of two-character Chinese words with the same or similar meanings.

The construction of the modern Japanese lexicon started from the booming Rangaku (a body of knowledge developed by Japan through its

contacts with the Dutch enclave of Dejima) in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1887, the publication of Japanese term dictionaries began to come to an end, and the construction of the term system was basically complete. Since then, the coinage of predicates, mainly two-character verbs and adjectives, was put on the agenda. The fundamental principle behind these phenomena was the “two-character principle based on Japanese and Chinese related words.” The process of coining two-character words (self-created or borrowed from Chinese classics, Chinese translations of Western literature, and English-Chinese dictionaries) follows the “two-character word principle based on Japanese and Chinese related words”, which continued until the transition period from Meiji to Taisho (around 1911). The two-character lexicalization of Japanese preceded that of Chinese, making it possible to provide vocabulary resources for Chinese. Chinese classical words, modern words, especially the words in the Chinese version of Western literature had a marked influence on Japanese (Shin, 1996: 80-86). On this basis, the Japanese language has had a profound influence on Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese. This process can be called the “circulation of words in the cultural community of Chinese characters”.

The revival of dormant classical words under the stimulation of Japanese indicates that we need to re-examine the cause and mechanism behind the formation of modern Chinese two-character words. By the New Culture Movement in 1919, in just over ten years, two-character words developed from nothing to widespread popularity. The transformation from one-character words to two-character words was the most significant change in the modern Chinese lexicon. Why did this change happen? How to chart this development and correctly interpret the various factors that caused it? “Evolution” is a keyword in relevant research. Hu Shi stated, “The transformation of monosyllabic characters into polysyllabic characters is a major evolution of the Chinese language.” (Hu, 1920: 7) The so-called “evolution” indicates that the two-character lexicalization is the inevitable developmental direction of Chinese, which is decided by the nature and characteristics of Chinese. In recent years, Dong Xiufang put forward the theory of “lexicalization,” arguing that “the emergence and development of the disyllabic words that constitute the main body of modern Chinese vocabulary is a process of continuous lexicalization.” (Dong, 2011: 1) The so-called “lexicalization” proposed by Dong Xiufang refers to the process in which the original non-word

language becomes the vocabulary in diachronic development. Lexicalization, like grammaticalization, is the change of language units from clear to fuzzy, and from separation to combination. But neither “evolution” nor “lexicalization” can explain the emergence of such an immense number of two-character words in so short a time. While language has the potential to evolve and change, it requires the right set of external catalysts to do so. A large number of two-character predicate phrases showed no signs of two-character lexicalization until the end of the nineteenth century. How could such a large-scale lexicalization occur in just over a decade? The author holds that language contact between East and West, and between East and East, in modern times is the important driver of two-character lexicalization. The modern Chinese vocabulary is dominated by two-character words, which is the result of the development from one-character words to two-character ones. Constrained by the syllable quantity in Chinese, it was necessary to enhance the differentiation of two-character words to cope with the increasingly complex real world. Character is the unit of Chinese written language. For a long time, a character is a word, and even two-syllable words can be divided into separable characters in form. Primitive humans used one pronunciation to indicate an entire concept, such as *ju* 驹 for foal, *du* 犢 for calf, and *gao* 羔 for lamb; the two-syllable words made the expression more vivid, thus promoting the development and population of compound words. However, these alone could not adequately express the increase of new concepts. At best, these developments could improve negative differentiation, which was mainly used for oral expression. Meanwhile, to cope with the increase in concepts caused by social complexity, the Chinese adopted syntactic forms to increase the lexeme, and the word formation after the Han and Jin Dynasties underwent great development. With exception to idioms, if people are familiar with the components of a phrase, they are likely to understand its meaning. Word uses a pronunciation to indicate an object. Pronunciation can be decomposed, but the decomposed components and their meanings do not necessarily correspond to one another. They play different roles in language. Characters are the basic units of Chinese and temporary combination is the feature of Chinese vocabulary. Not all lexical units can be found in the dictionary. In other words, not all units are included in the mental lexicon. A one-character word cannot be dismantled or taken apart. Taking *jun* 駿 (fast horse) for example, we are unable to tell which part

indicates “fast” or “horse”. However, the two-character word, such as *kuai* 快 (fast) *ma* 马 (horse) can be broken down, which allows us to understand its meaning whilst conforming to the process of human thinking. So, it makes sense that a majority of verbs and adjectives were still phrases at the end of the 19th century.⁵ However, the simplification of phrases into words in just over ten years goes against our notions of how things develop, and we cannot elaborate on the reasons behind it.

The above are words with meaningful motivation. Among thousands of new predicates, over 50% of them do not have meaningful motivation, and they are characterized by parallel structure.

III. MODERN REORGANIZATION OF CHINESE VOCABULARY SYSTEM AND SCIENTIFIC NARRATIVE

After the May 4th Movement, the modern reorganization of the Chinese lexicon was basically completed. Academic terms and abstract vocabulary were incorporated into modern Chinese vocabulary, becoming indispensable components for expressing new conceptual narratives. The new predicates included a large number of synonyms, making it possible to make a discriminating description of these new conceptual systems. The function of new affixes and their derived components is to classify and systematize increasingly complex conceptual schemes. All the neologisms were incorporated for a common goal, namely, scientific narrative. What is the scientific narrative? Scientific narrative as a form of discourse should have the following elements:

1. Space, classrooms, and other school facilities.
2. Content: Knowledge concerning the natural sciences and humanities.
3. Targets: Students, background knowledge stipulated by the syllabus.
4. Media: Textbooks, teacher’s classroom lectures.

A basic requirement of the scientific narrative is that it can be told by speakers and understood by listeners. In 1910, the Imperial University of Peking established a discipline-based university to instruct law, politics, bancassurance, geology, chemistry, civil engineering, mining and metallurgy, and agronomy. It is intriguing to contemplate what language was used to instruct these disciplines. In 1916, Cai Yuanpei became the president and advocated “following the principle of freedom of thought and an all-embracing attitude.” The implementation of this educational philosophy placed a strong emphasis on language. Could the Chinese

language at that time undertake such a heavy responsibility?

The transformation from regional language to a national language constitutes the greatest change in East Asian languages, including Chinese and Japanese, since modern times. This process can be called “the modernization of languages”. The foundation on which the modern state was established stipulated that people participated in the country’s institutional activities, including political, economic, cultural, etc. In this regard, a common “national language” had to be mastered by all citizens, requiring the government to provide opportunities to learn this national language equally among all citizens. The linguistic device that achieved this goal was “the consistency in spoken and written language”, which was an approach to breaking the barriers between people’s classes caused by language. The consistency in spoken and written language advocated by the New Culture Movement (around the time of the May 4th Movement in 1919) has two connotations: spoken language refers to the language (vernacular) used by the general public for oral communication and written language refers to the classical language. Hu Shi called the latter the “dead language” and believed it had lost the function of expression. Hu Shi discussed “文学之文 *wen xue zhi wen*” (literary writing) in his book *Humble Opinions on Literary Reform* (文学改良刍议 *wen xue gai liang chu yi*). In order to bridge the gap between ancient and modern language and express true emotions, Hu Shi vigorously advocated writing in vernacular. Scholars argue that the most fundamental difference between “spoken and written language” and “classic language and old vernacular” is that the former is used mainly to express new knowledge. As such, the typical classroom discourse can be described as follows: spoken language refers to the speech used in the classroom, written language refers to the written words in the textbook; in other words, spoken language is the oral language for scientific narrative, and written language is used for formal articles. Previously, lectures were not a common teaching method in China. Those who have visited the Imperial College in Beijing are surprised that there are no classrooms in China’s highest institution of learning. China has always lacked the tradition of imparting knowledge in specific public spaces. “教室 *jiao shi*” (classroom), “讲堂 *jiang tang*” (lecture hall), “礼堂 *li tang*” (auditorium) and even “广场 *guang chang*” (square) are all foreign concepts and words. Even now, Mandarin (and its various dialects in Mandarin-speaking areas) and Cantonese are the only languages used in the classroom. The fundamental issue to be solved by “the consistency in

spoken and written language” advocated by May 4th Movement was not about literature, but about how to make Chinese a tool for the dissemination of new knowledge among all citizens equally despite their class or background.

As for Chinese written language, Chen Duxiu was the first to advocate the difference between “文学之文 *wen xue zhi wen*” (literary writing) and “应用之文 *ying yong zhi wen*” (practical writing), which Qian Xuantong agreed with. Liu Bannong proposed to divide articles into “文学 *wen xue*” (literature) and “文字 *wen zi*” (text), and argued that all areas of science should be included in the scope of “text” rather than “literature”. (Liu, 1917) Although he did not deny that “text” should be “literary”, he valued plain expression and dissemination. Liu criticized ancient China’s “scientific books” for deliberately confusing readers so that students were slow to grasp concepts. The difficulty of language made China’s academic pursuits struggle to gain popularity and remained under-developed. He also criticized Yan Fu’s *English Grammar Explained in Chinese* (英文汉沽 1904), arguing that although the content of this book ostensibly concerned English grammar, its use of ancient and convoluted classical Chinese was counterproductive. In order to understand the book, students had to first learn more than ten years of ancient Chinese. His argument was radical at the time but practical. In short, the advocacy of Chen, Qian, Liu, and other scholars for consistency in spoken and written language was based on a principle of enlightenment and education for all citizens.

Qian Xuantong and Liu Bannong talked much about literary writing, but they did not study practical writing. Fu Sinian was interested in the “writing of vernacular Chinese.” (Fu, 1919) The language is divided into verbal and written language. The spoken language might be changed in the process of transcribing, while the written language in books remained the same since the first publication, at the cost of losing the reverse-resiliency. Furthermore, the Chinese character system is obviously different from that of the Western languages. Chinese characters are visually distinct but audibly confusing. Fu Sinian stated, “In Chinese characters, each character has one pronunciation and one meaning, but many characters have the same pronunciation. As there are so many homophones, it is difficult to understand them by listening. The addition of a character to make a one-character word become two-characters facilitates comprehension. By expanding one-character words into two-character words with the same

meaning, people could clearly understand the meaning of the words when reading and hearing. Therefore, one-character words should be reduced, and two-character words (compound words) should be increased.” (Fu, 1918) Content and mode of language are important for the understanding of spoken language. For example, a common foundation of knowledge is the basis for understanding, and the allusions are great obstacles to understanding the Chinese language. Hu Shi strongly advocated “no use of allusions” in his book *Humble Opinions on Literary Reform*, and his point of view is that clichés can't express real feelings. Qian Xuantong and others were aware of the irreconcilable contradiction between the allusions understood by a small audience and public education. Fu Sinian was the first to explicitly state that Chinese characters are short in pronunciation and length, weak in distinguishing function, and not suitable for the transmission of oral knowledge. The two-character form made up for these defects, and it became indispensable to understanding practical writing. The vocabulary of practical writing can be roughly divided into two categories: nouns and predicates. The former includes a large number of scientific, technological terms, and abstract nouns, while the latter consists mainly of verbs and adjectives.

The science narrative required a corresponding language, which was the fundamental motivation of the modern reorganization of the Chinese lexicon.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese language is changing with each passing day. When discussing the writing of vernacular Chinese, Fu Sinian repeatedly emphasized “the use of Western words directly”. Europeanization is a powerful driver for the modern evolution of Chinese, so it should be regarded as the basis for the study of modern Chinese. It is worth mentioning that Europeanization was realized through the Japanese language. After the abolition of the imperial examination in 1904, a host of Chinese students went to Japan to study, making the translation of Japanese into Chinese popular. After Hu Shi and other Chinese students returned from America to China in 1917, the number of books directly translated from Western languages gradually increased. Even so, most works on social thought, literature, and arts were translated from the Japanese translations. The existence of a large number of Japanese-made

Chinese words supports this conclusion.

Content was the impetus for the change in form, and this change was discontinuous. The research on modern vocabulary (mainly referring to vocabulary after the 19th century in this study) differs from the research on vocabulary. Undoubtedly, it is crucial to describe the origin and development of words from the perspectives of their coiners, first documentary evidence, meaning, dissemination, popularization, stereotypes, and variations, which constitute the principal contents of large-scale Chinese lexicography. However, new perspectives and new research methods are also needed. Since modern times, the translated words have triggered changes in language styles and promoted language transformation. Therefore, we should pay special attention to the history of translated words.

The Chinese vocabulary requires numerous new lexical units, means of conversion between nouns, verbs, and forms, as well as new affixes that systemize and classify concepts. We attach importance to the functional changes of Chinese vocabulary. For example, we still know very little about the mechanism of the following three types:

1. Words such as “表情 *biao qing*” (expression) that are used as nouns when they change from the grammatical verb-object structure to the non-grammatical attribute-central word structure.
2. Words such as “科学 *ke xue*” (science) that change from nouns to adjectives.
3. Words such as “传统 *chuan tong*” (traditional) and “保守 *bao shou*” (conservative) that change from verb phrases to nouns and adjectives.

Whether or not the words “同情 *tong qing*” (sympathize) and “不同意 *bu tong yi*” (disagree) in the sentences “我很同情他的境遇 *wo hen tong qing ta de jing yu*” (I sympathize with his situation) and “他坚决不同意我的意见 *ta jian jue bu tong yi wo de yi jian*” (He firmly disagrees with my opinion) can be used as causative adjectives remain issues that need to be further explored.

The verb + noun attribute-central word structure involving the verbal morpheme is the non-syntactic form in Chinese. This type of compound word is rare in classical Chinese, but words such as “表情 *biao qing*” (expression) are obviously influenced by Japanese. Can we find a common principle of word formation for words such as “绣花 *xiu hua*” (embroidery), “炒饭 *chao fan*” (fried rice), “食盐 *shi yan*” (salt), and “构图

gou tu’ (composition)?

New knowledge requires new language. The modernization of language is bound up with the modernization of society, which is a common issue faced by East Asian countries. Chinese classics and English-Chinese dictionaries in the nineteenth century provided abundant vocabulary resources for the Japanese. The Japanese, which took the lead in constructing a modern vocabulary, helped other East Asian languages complete their modern transformation. As Wang Guowei said: “Japan is the bridge connecting China and the West.” Therefore, it is essential to clarify this period of history for the study of modern vocabulary.

Notes

Proofread by Daniel Canaris, Sun Yat-Sen University.

¹ At the turn of the century, the media was full of the criticism on “new terms”. The “new terms” include verbs and adjectives, but mainly refer to terminology.

² However, some inflectional languages, such as English, tend to reduce inflectional means and increase derivational compound means.

³ See Shin Kokui’s *Vocabulary Exchange between China and Japan in Modern Times* 近代中日词汇交流.

⁴ The main sources of modern Japanese vocabulary are: 1 Chinese classics; 2 English-Chinese dictionaries; 3 coinage. The main sources of modern Chinese vocabulary are: 1 Classics; 2 Native neologisms; 3 Japanese. It is worth mentioning that Japanese language affects the use of classical words and native neologisms.

⁵ Nouns refer to people, things, or abstract concepts, which need to be named. Actions and states denote the continuous process and do not need to be named. Therefore, in all languages, there are more nouns than verbs and adjectives. It is an interesting topic that how verbs and adjectives develop and how they differ from each other.

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