

Abstract:

Overall, this paper discusses the development of Simplified Chinese. A “new language” that was developed in the 1940s. The first part of the paper will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Simplified Chinese, which helped with the learning curve of mainland Chinese and literacy rate during the Cultural Revolution. However, the paper argues that it was at the cost of culture and traditional art. Then, the paper will compare China with an imaginary country “Oceania” in George Orwell’s novel “1984”, in which Oceania also had a language reform.

Imagine a world where you lose your roots, your ability to connect and compose. Ideas flood in our head, but you just can’t find the right word and form to express them. This is what “1984” discusses: word elimination. Even though it is a fictional novel, a similar phenomenon occurred in China during the 1940s. However, there are some differences between the plot of the novel and the event that took place in China. Even though the intention of Simplified Chinese was to help educate and literacy during the Culture Revolution, the replacement is indeed not an evolution but a vain sacrifice of our ancestors’ wisdom and intellect.

The idea and origin of Simplified Chinese stemmed during the 1930s. However, no actual establishment and enforcement were made until 1950, after the Communist party took control of the mainland of China. During the regime of Mao Zhe Dong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, Simplified Chinese was fully established and imposed in 1956. At that time, it only included a total of 2236 Chinese characters.

One of the biggest benefits of the simplification of Chinese is to help people better visualize and remember Chinese characters, which are intricate and complex. In the 1940s,

an estimated 80% of Chinese were illiterate. When Simplified Chinese became included in the 9-Year Compulsory Education Act, the illiteracy rate gradually reduced. In 2010, only 4.08% of the people were illiterate.

Furthermore, based on research conducted by the Chinese officials, a randomly selected passage from the People's Daily has 255,124 characters with an average of 9.15 strokes in traditional Chinese and 7.67 strokes in Simplified Chinese. This illustrates that commonly used characters are much easier to memorize since there are fewer strokes.

Increasing literacy is not only beneficial to the people but also helpful for law enforcement and the ruling of the communist government. Propagandas and posters were widely used to build, instill, and enforce ideas of nationalism, congeal social centripetal force, and raise a strong hatred towards enemies such as the western countries and the KMT Party. However, with an extremely low literacy rate, the propagandas weren't effective, so the solution was the introduction of Simplified Chinese, which enabled people to learn Chinese much faster and help with the spread of propaganda and patriotism.

Another advantage of Simplified Chinese, stated in a government report in 1958, was the unification of Chinese words and characters. Because for centuries, each region modified and localized Chinese characters to fit their dialects and daily use, which made it difficult to communicate between provinces and people of different regions. To unify the characters, laws were passed and executed to promote the use of Simplified Chinese and Mandarin and the use of local dialects was discouraged.

The information from the Chinese government mentioned in the above paragraph clearly stated some of the advantages of Simplified Chinese, but what the paper didn't mention were unpredictable, unforeseen disadvantages that will occur in the future. First of all, historical research was the one that was greatly impacted. Since all of the Chinese literature before the communist party took control were written in Traditional Chinese,

accessing historical primary sources has become more difficult. As search queries are inputted as Simplified Chinese characters to search for Traditional Chinese characters, it is often not found due to the differences. Other aspects that have been affected are art. Calligraphy has always been written in Traditional Chinese. Therefore, for beginning calligraphy students, they will need to first relearn the Chinese characters to understand and then practice past works to hone their skills.

After discussing the advantage and disadvantages of the establishment of Simplified Chinese, the paper will compare mainland China with the fictional country Oceania in the novel "1984". Oceania is set in the time at around 1984, and we can observe and study the differences between mainland China and Oceania. In the novel, the main purpose of "New Speak", the Simplified English developed by Oceania's government, is to minimize thinking and prevent opposing views. For instance, in Oceania, the word, "Free", continues to exist, but it no longer has the meaning of "Liberty". "Free" only refers to something that is gained without payment of money or commodity. Since no word in Oceania possesses the idea and concept of freedom and independence, the right and privilege of the citizens of a free country, it is only reasonable that many other ideas and definitions are taken away. Gradually, people will lose the tools and words to freely express their opinions---one thing an authoritarian government is afraid the most. On the other hand, Simplified Chinese established by the communist government only simplifies the strokes of characters, and the original meaning and connotations of each character still remain. Mainland Chinese still possesses the ability to formulate and convey opinions through Chinese compositions, and that is something people should take advantage of and preserve, as well as the history and culture of the language itself. As Chinese citizens are drastically more educated and literate than before, the re-introduction of Traditional Chinese characters and the continuation of legacy and culture is necessary. Simplification of complex problems is necessary, but not

the simplification of history and culture.

What trend and direction will the Chinese language head towards in the future is still uncertain. In 2006, the United Nations decided to replace Traditional Chinese with Simplified Chinese as the official Chinese language in the United Nations, however, it is also evident that language planners in China have already been introducing modifications to the Chinese orthography, bringing back traditional characters back here and there. The Chinese language itself is formed by thousands of years of wisdom and intelligence. If we abandon elements of our language, what else is not abandonable? I believe that in the future, Simplified Chinese will develop towards bringing back Traditional Chinese Characters, bringing back our ideas, values, and civilization.

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