Articles / Aufsätze

The Development of Linguistics in China

A study of the contributions of Yuen Ren Chao and Wang Li*

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1. *Introduction*

Like other disciplinary historians, the historians of Chinese linguistics mainly study its origins, explore the development of its schools, evaluate its scholarly works scientifically, and thus advance the discipline. In the past several decades, there have been histories of Chinese linguistics focusing on all periods, specific historical movements, and subfields like phonology, grammar, and minority nationality languages (Zhou 1966, 1980; He 1985, 2005; Wang 1993, Gong 1997, Deng 2002, Pu 2002, Zhang 2003, Wu 2005, Zhou 2006, Zhou 2008, Shao 2011, Lepschy 2013, Wilkinson 2015).

To appreciate the extraordinary contributions of Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) and Wang Li (1900–1986) to the development of linguistics in China, it is important to have an understanding of the historical context leading to their work.[1]

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1.   Here the two names are spelled differently according to the consistency. Yuen Ren Chao is in the foreign order (last name last) and Wang Li is in the Chinese order (last name first). To avoid ambiguity, Chao deliberately broke up his disyllabic given name Yuenren into a first name and a middle name, Yuen Ren (Chao 1975: 10–11). As readers may notice, though some of the names were kept in the Wade system, or the well-established forms, the majority of the names adopt the Pinyin spelling system.

Traditionally, Chinese scholars only considered the *wényán* 文言 "Classical Chinese, or literary language" worthy of study and documentation,[2] and the vast body of Chinese literature was in *wényán*. The literary or written style differs significantly from the colloquial as it has an idiom, with special vocabulary, which is closely related to, but very different, in usage from that of the colloquial or spoken language. Generally, the written idiom is monosyllabic; and the spoken is disyllabic. Highly elliptical and concise in syntax, the characters in the literary language are more information-loaded, and much is left out without being explicitly elaborated. Because the writing builds upon the preceding *literati*'s work, the number of allusions increases quality. All these factors make it extremely difficult to resolve ambiguity and obscurity. Therefore, the study of language in China began by scholars reading classic literature and composing high quality literary essays. Compared to modern Western linguistics, the study of Chinese had a much narrower scope, as it merely included rhetoric, prosody, and textual annotations as core areas (see Section 3.4 below).

For centuries, there was a lack of interest in a systematic analysis of grammar or spoken language. Due to its exegetical function, such language study is referred to as *xiǎo xué* 小学 "primary learning".[3] This changed with the publication of the first grammar *Mǎ shì wén tōng* 马氏文通 [Basic Principles for Writing Clearly and Coherently by Mister Ma 1898], written under the framework of Latin grammar by a native Chinese Ma Jianzhong (1845–1900). This grammar represented a new era of scientific and systematic study of Chinese. The year 1898 was indeed an important milestone separating the modern Chinese linguistics from the philology. Zhang Binglin (1868–1936) criticized the inadequacy and incorrectness of the name *xiǎo xué*, and he suggested a new name of *yǔyán wénzì zhī xué* 语言文字之学 [the study of the language and characters] (Pu 2002: 476).

During the late Qing dynasty (1644–1912), Western learning initiated discourse among Chinese scholars and intellectuals, who strongly believed that the country could be strengthened by adopting rigorous and comprehensive science. The door to a modern scientific world in China was pushed open with the gunfire of the Opium War. Compared to the mild attitudes in late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) toward absorbing Western learning through the activities of missionaries, the late Qing dynasty saw a disruption of old traditions. Language and

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2. Classical Chinese dated back from the end of the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.) to the end of the Han period (202 B.C.–220 A.D.), i.e., from early 4th century B.C. to 220 A.D.

3. *Xiǎo xué* "primary learning" was first coined by Liu Xin (ca. 50 B.C.?–23 A.D.). It referred to the place of primary education for school age children where they were taught *liù shū* 六书 "six ways of forming characters". Later, *xiǎo xué* is regarded as an aid to understanding Classics called *dà xué* 大学 "advanced learning".

characters had become a target and a scapegoat for what was perceived as a lagging China. The American-educated scholar Hu Shih (1891–1962) fired the first shot of Literary Reform to shatter the dominance of Classical Chinese. Since the Vernacular Literature Movement of 1917, writing in the Mandarin colloquial spread widely.[4] People started to write the language the way they spoke. Paralleled with the movement that established *báihuà* 白话 "vernacular language" as a writing style, the National Language Movement made the Beijing dialect the standard. The promotion of Mandarin in 1954 by the new government and its approval of Pinyin alphabet in 1958 provided incentive for the new style, both spoken and written, to undergo greater changes including vastly increasing the numbers of loan words as well as adopting grammatical structures.

Since then, Western trends not only critically influenced the study of Chinese, they also led to the creation of Chinese linguistics. A new discipline necessarily entails institutional recognition — such as creating academic departments in universities, establishing journals, and forming scholarly communities. In 1946, the first Department of Chinese Linguistics was opened at Sun Yat-sen University. In 1952, the journal *Zhōngguó yǔwén* 中国语文 [Studies of the Chinese Language] was initiated, which to date has a far-reaching influence both home and abroad, and it plays a significant role in fostering high-quality research in Chinese linguistics and related fields. Journals of *Fāngyán* 方言 [Dialect] and *Mínzú yǔwén* 民族语文 [Minority Languages of China] were both initiated in 1979. In 1980, a national organization for scholarly exchanges, Chinese Linguistics Society (CLS), was founded in Wuhan, Hubei Province; and in the following year, it held its first annual meeting in Chengdu, Sichuan Province.

Once established, the modern discipline has followed a Western approach and it has applied Western theories and methodologies. During the long march of advancing traditional philology into a modern scientific discipline, two names are most celebrated: Yuen Ren Chao and Wang Li. They made monumental contributions in setting the foundation of modern linguistics in China. Their keen insights, facile intellects, and profound knowledge as conveyed through their writings influenced directly and indirectly all subsequent generations of scholars in the field.

4.　It was also called Literary Revolution. Hu Shih (Yuen Ren Chao's lifelong friend) proposed a new vernacular writing style to replace the difficult 2,000-year-old classical literary style. He fired the first shot with his letter to the editor of *Xīn qīngnián* 新青年 [New Youth], vol.2, No.2, October 1st, 1916. The letter was later expanded to an article "A Program for Literary Reform" in the same periodical, vol.2, No.5, January 1st, 1917. Both the letter and the article were written in respectable *wényán* and proposed "not to avoid vernacular characters". It was not until one year later that articles in the colloquial began to appear in this revolutionary periodical.

Chao and Wang were trained in Western science after years of study of the Chinese tradition. They were among the first to learn linguistics in the West at its early development. They both drew on the many great works on language that appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Joseph Vendryes's *Le Language* (1921), Edward Sapir's *Language* (1921), Otto Jespersen's *Language* (1922), and Leonard Bloomfield's *Language* (1933), and the journal *Language* with its first issue in 1925.

As "the father of Chinese linguistics", Chao's contribution to linguistics is global and many-faceted.[5] His career was mostly spent in America, and he was extolled by his colleague and friend Martin Joos (1907–1978) who insisted that "In matters of language, Chao never goes wrong".[6] Except for pursuing his doctorate in France (1927–1932), Wang Li's academic career was solidly anchored in China as he pioneered and accomplished in each subfield of Chinese linguistics. He taught hundreds of students who went on to major positions in a range of universities. His core spirit was summarized in eight Chinese characters by the renowned historian Ji Xianlin (1911–2009): *lóng chóng bìng diāo, zhōng xī róng huì* 龙虫并雕，中西融汇 [master in both academic and popular writings, guru in combining the Chinese traditions with the Western theories].

Chao and Wang contributed much in their long and distinguished careers as scholars and mentors. Their voluminous writings well reflect the magnitude of activity of their brilliant minds. The large number of contemporary eminent Chinese and American scholars, who have been their students, bears witness to their success in this regard. Their successes raise two critical questions: What are the factors that led to the success of the two Western-trained Chinese linguists? What did they have in common?

As China welcomed back the first overseas returnees, the domestic environment could be characterized as a nation thirsting for knowledge and desperate for change. Among the returnees were the young Chao and Wang. That was a critical moment in Chinese history. Chao immediately put himself in the circle to work on the National Romanization system. After the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949, Wang Li was actively involved in the promotion of Mandarin and Pinyin alphabetic systems. Both scholars, though in different periods, embraced the mission of making history and becoming agents for social and academic advancement.

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5.   Chao was thus praised by Fu Sinian (1896–1950), the founding Director of the Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica.

6.   To respond to this comment, Chao later wrote a short essay titled "Where Chao Went Wrong in Matters of Language", published in *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* in 1972. He said he certainly appreciated this great compliment, but in many ways which Martin had not noticed, he did go wrong quite a number of times in matters of language.

However, it should not be forgotten that the early education of both linguists took place at home within the classical Chinese tradition. While they caught up with the modernization and Westernization of ideas and methodologies, the invaluable legacies from earlier Chinese scholars provided numerous fields for them to plough and harvest. The devotion and efforts of the Qing philologists paved the way for the birth of this new discipline in humanistic learning — Chinese linguistics. The historical phonology in Qing period was highly regarded as is evidenced in the acclaim from the Swedish sinologist Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978). In 1936, Karlgren recognized the growing number of Chinese scholars who integrated the acumen and Chinese learning of the Qing era into their research — equals of the Qian-Jia 乾嘉 scholars and at the same time fully equipped with all the tools of modern linguistics research.[7] He praised their work:

> How could a Westerner ever dream of competing with them? Whereas this group of modern scholars, with their perfect command of the classical language and the entire Chinese book world, can extend their activities to the whole field of Chinese culture, the only thing for a Westerner to do is to try and acquaint himself thoroughly with one small corner of the big field and there make his modest contribution. (Karlgren 1962 [1940]: 4)

Karlgren was referring to the translators for his *Études sur la phonologie chinoise*: Yuen Ren Chao, Li Fang-Kuei (1902–1987),[8] and Luo Changpei (1899–1958). He might also have referred to the rising stars like Tung T'Ung-Ho (1911–1963) at the Institute of History and Philology, who openly showed disagreement with his *Da-Jiang* 搭-桨 rhyme category in *Shijīng* 诗经 [Odes]. While Kargren was not at first in agreement, he later thought the criticism was not unreasonable (Tung 1970: 1).

Knowing the scholarship of both traditional and modern as well as West and East, Chao and Wang not only furthered philological legacies; but they also creatively and ingeniously applied the methodology of modern linguistics to a systematic study of the language. The fusion of West and East learning enabled them to bridge the two traditions and find answers that were hard to pin down with a one-sided viewpoint. They developed new theories out of language data, finding approaches applicable to the nature of Chinese. With a superb command of

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7.   Qian-Jia refers to the period during the Qianlong and early Jiaqing reigns (1796–1820).

8.   Li Fang-Kuei was another internationally renowned linguist. He didn't want to rival with his colleague Yuen Ren at the Academia Sinica who was already a giant in Chinese dialects. So he decided to study Sino-Tibetan languages and the Tai language family, and later established his absolute primacy in these particular fields. Li was introduced as "the father of non-Chinese linguistics" by Professor Zhou Fagao (1915–1994) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong when invited to give a talk there in 1970 (Xu 2010: 247).

historical linguistics, phonology, dialectology, and the systematic study of Chinese grammar, they contributed more by far to establishing Chinese linguistics than any other scholar in its history.

Except for the similar paths in their youths, they ended up in different lands due to historical and social circumstances. Different working and living environments, institutional platforms, and communities around them led to their more or less divergent pursuits in linguistics. In order to fully acknowledge the two linguists, I will first introduce their biographies, followed by a discussion of their works and achievements. A philological history, with a comparison to modern and Western linguistics, was incorporated in Section 3.4 through the lens of Wang Li, the author of the first book on the history of Chinese linguistics. This history tells us much about Wang Li — his versatile knowledge of the philological tradition, his treatment of the history with a Western perspective, and his selection of pivotal moments and major advances reflect his expertise and interests. The historical account enables readers to understand the trajectory to modernity through his application of modern linguistics to construct a history of the discipline. The final section addresses the continued relationship of their successes to the present generation of Chinese linguists, based on a retrospective reflection of their institutional platforms and an analysis of the status quo of the linguistics programs in Chinese universities.

2.   *Yuen Ren Chao — the father of Chinese linguistics*
2.1   *Biographical sketch*

A native of Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, Yuen Ren Chao[9] was born in Zizhulin in the city of Tianjin on November 3rd, 1892. The family moved about frequently during his childhood because of his grandfather's frequent assignments to posts of magistrate in Tianjin, Beijing, Baoding, Cizhou, Qizhou, and Jizhou. After the death of his grandfather, the family moved back to Changzhou when he was 10 years old.

Chao went to the family school when he was 7 years old,[10] and he continued learning with another private teacher after returning to the south. At age 14, he entered his first modern primary school attended by children of different families. Since then, he started keeping a diary, which he continued for 76 years. He wrote that his year in the modern primary school was a turning point in his physical and

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9.   Yuen Ren was a 31st generation descendant of Chao Kuang-yin (927–976), founder of the Song dynasty (960–1279) (Chao 1975:10).

10. The age was Chinese reckoning. It would be 6 years old in Western reckoning.

mental development (Chao 1975: 60). One year later, he attended Jiangnan High School in Nanjing, and he lived in the dorms for three years (1907–1910).

At 17, he went to the United States under the Boxer Indemnity Fund, and he studied at Cornell University (B.A. in Mathematics, 1914) and at Harvard University (Ph.D. in Philosophy, 1918). At Cornell, he also studied physics, and at both universities he devoted considerable time to studying music. Also, he began taking courses in linguistics, which was a new academic field at the time. In 1920, he returned to China to teach at Tsing Hua College.[11] On the third day of his arrival, he was asked by Liang Qichao (1873–1929) to serve as interpreter for Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), who was lecturing in China. A major reason for selecting Chao as interpreter was that his dissertation treated problems related to logic.[12]

During that period, he moved out from Tsing Hua suburb to join Russell in the apartments in the eastern part of the city. Also at that time, he began to know and was attracted to Yang Buwei (1889–1981), who was managing a hospital. Without ceremony, the two got married on June 1st, 1921, witnessed by his friend Hu Shih (Yang 1947, 2007: 509).

After marriage, he returned to United States with his wife and taught philosophy and Chinese at Harvard from 1921 to 1924. Then with his family, he traveled to various places in Europe from 1924 to 1925 before going back to teach at Tsing Hua. He first visited Russell in England. In the summer of 1924, he also visited Bernhard Karlgren a few times at Göteborg.[13] In Paris, he registered at the Université de Paris and audited lectures given by the most noted French linguists Joseph Vendryes (1875–1960), Antoine Meillet (1866–1936), Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) and Henri Maspero (1883–1945). Returning to China in 1925, Chao became an advisor at the Research Institute of Tsing Hua where he taught linguistics and phonetics.[14] He also taught logic at the Department of Philosophy until Jin Yuelin

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11. Tsing Hua College, built with the Boxer Indemnity Fund, became Tsing Hua University in 1925.

12. Chao recalled: "Bertrand Russell looked very much what I had expected from photographs and descriptions, except that he looked stronger, taller, and more gracious-mannered than I had thought. He looked like a scholar. It was easy for me to get acquainted with him thru mutual acquaintances at Harvard." (Chao 1972b: 14)

13. In Chao's memory, Karlgren was modest and restrained, very much like a Chinese scholar. It was during those meetings that Chao broached the translation of Karlgren's *Études sur la phonologie chinoise* into Chinese. They kept good relationships and Yuen Ren lamented at Karlgren's death, saying "We have lost one of the most Chinese of Western sinologists".

14. Chao and the three other advisors Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei (1877–1927) and Chen Yinke (1890–1969) were called the "Four Giants" at Tsing Hua. The four of them brought the Institute to its highest reputation.

(1895–1984) was recruited. After teaching briefly at Tsing Hua, he became a permanent research fellow of the newly founded Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica. Chao was the chief of the linguistic section from 1929 to 1938 (except for a 20-month sojourn in Washington, D.C.), when he conducted dialect surveys in many areas of China.

During the Sino-Japanese war, the Chao family moved from Nanjing to Changsha, and eventually to Kunming in southwest China. After eleven months as a refugee, Chao decided to accept the offer of a one-year visiting professorship from the University of Hawaii. In August 1938, the Chaos left for the United States via Hong Kong, a British colony. When the Hawaii contract ended, Chao moved to New Haven and taught at the Oriental Department of Yale University for two years. At that time, Yale was the center of American linguistics, and Chao participated in every Yale Linguistic Club meeting. He became a member of the Linguistic Society of America in 1939, and he went regularly to the summer meetings of the Linguistic Society, which took place at various universities in the Midwest. Starting in 1941, he taught at Harvard and joined the Chinese dictionary project sponsored by the Harvard-Yenching Institute. He was employed under various titles of Research Associate, Research Fellow, and Lecturer in Chinese Language. In 1943, he was asked to direct the Chinese language section of the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at Harvard.

Chao had planned to go back to China, the country he held dearly, but he was appointed by the University of California at Berkeley to another one-year contract in 1948. The "stopover" became his permanent home. Chao was appointed Agassiz Professor of Oriental Languages and Linguistics in 1952, and he held this position until his retirement in 1960. He was recalled to service for three more years by his Department. After his retirement, he continued to write, publish, and travel to conferences. He won the Guggenheim Fellowship twice during his retirement years.

Thirty-five years after they left, Chao and his wife returned to China for a visit. On May 13th, 1973, he was received by Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) in Beijing. "We had a most enjoyable time in the spring of 1973 returning to China as natives", he wrote in the diary (Zhao & Huang 1998: 486). After his wife's death, he returned to China in 1981, and he was awarded the Honorary Professorship by Peking University. During the two brief visits, he was impressed by the flourishing work being done by Chinese linguists.

2.2 *Chao's research in linguistics in China*

Though a mathematics major at Cornell, Chao enrolled in additional courses in physics and philosophy; and he started to take a great interest in linguistics. In

1916 he wrote in the diary: "I thought that I am essentially a born linguist, mathematician and musician" (Zhao & Huang 1998: 82).

Throughout six decades, Chao published widely in Chinese and English, totaling over 190 articles and books.[15] His articles on linguistics can be roughly divided into two phases. The first phase (1915–1938) includes publications written during his student years at Cornell and the years at Tsing Hua and the Academia Sinica, in which he covered the advocacy and promotion of Romanization as well as the surveys of dialects. The second phase (1938–1976) includes textbooks inspired by his language instruction at Harvard and the grammar he had worked on during his Berkeley years.

2.2.1   *National Romanization*

Because Chinese writing is slightly phonetic, it is easy for us today to forget how the widely-used Pinyin alphabet came into being. Paralleled with the Vernacular Literature Movement, there had been movements towards the unification of the National Language. The idea of writing Chinese with an alphabet had been taken up with much vigor, and more than one practical scheme of alphabetizing had been worked out. But there were many technical difficulties as well as social and political hurdles to be surmounted before any form of an alphabet could be used as a general means of writing.

In 1916, Chao's first article "The Problem of the Chinese Language" appeared on *The Chinese Students' Monthly* in May and June issues. It includes four parts: scientific study of Chinese philology, Chinese phonetics, the teaching of Chinese as it is, and proposed reforms. Hu Shih, his Cornell friend, contributed to the third part. Chao begins by indicating that "There exists a problem of the Chinese language. […] In taking up the problem, I should like to emphasize at the outset the distinction between scientific, or historic research on the one hand, and constructive reforms on the other" (Zhao & Huang 1998: 83, Chao 2002: 668). This seminal paper sets the tone for his lifelong pursuit of language study, e.g. dialect and spoken Chinese. He points out that the pronunciation of the same character is vastly different in different dialects. He encourages linguists to investigate dialects because he claims that the interaction between spoken and written language necessitates a holistic study of language and provides the spoken language a status it deserves.

Chao's stance as an ardent advocate of Chinese language reform was unique for his time. Like Hu Shih, he advocated the reform of Chinese language and character. He maintained that there was no contradiction between guided reform and the natural development of a language. Spearheading a National Romanization

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15. See Bibliography of Yuen Ren Chao's Works in *Aspects of Chinese Sociolinguistics* (1976: 402–415).

movement, he whole-heartedly swept away all theoretical oppositions to alphabetizing the Chinese script and shaped the *Gwoyeu Romatzyh* 国语罗马字 "Chinese Romanization scheme". In 1923, he published two articles "Ten Objections to Romanizing Chinese" and "Principles for Constructing a Practical System of Romanization", in which he pointed out: "It is a Romanization of Chinese, by the Chinese, and (primarily) for the Chinese" (Zhao & Huang 1998: 122).

On September 26th, 1925, the *shù rén huì* 数人会 "Society of a Few Men" was formed at Chao's Tsing Hua home.[16] During its 22 meetings, the draft of a National Romanization scheme was developed; and the Peking dialect was chosen as the standard pronunciation.[17] The Committee on Unification of the National Language in December 1925 approved this proposal.[18] When the government in 1928 adopted Chao's proposed scheme of *Gwoyeu Romatzyh*, he was so enthusiastic that he recorded in his diary the announcement in this alphabet.

In 1959, Chao gave a series of 16 lectures on the topic of "The Problem of the Chinese Language" at the National Taiwan University. His lectures were compiled into a booklet published under the same title. For anyone interested in Chinese and its relevant problems, the publication is a must-read. Even today, many of his opinions in the booklet are not outdated, and contemporary scholars quote them.

2.2.2   *Chao's surveys of dialects*

China has many different dialects, which are unintelligible to each other if the speakers of the localities are far enough apart. But people of all provinces inherit the same classical literature, write in the same literary styles, and can communicate in writing with perfect ease without betraying their locality. There is no fundamental difference of vocabulary among the dialects. As to grammar or syntax, it is practically identical in all the dialects; in fact, even the literary idiom has about the

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16. The name *shù rén huì* came from an anecdote in the preface to *Qièyùn* 切韵 (see footnote No.50 for more). At the famous rhyme discussion, a consensus was reached by the principle of "*wǒ bèi shù rén, dìng zé dìng yi*" 我辈数人，定则定矣 [We few men decide and it is decided]. Other members of the *shù rén huì* included important linguists Liu Fu (1891–1934), Qian Xuantong (1887–1939), Li Jinxi (1890–1978), Wang Yi (ca.1875–1960), Lin Yutang (1895–1976), and Zhou Bianming (1891–1984).

17. The dialect of Peking, on account of its having been the capital of China for more than one dynasty, has the greatest prestige.

18. The Committee on Unification of the National Language was organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, to unify the spoken language of the nation. The result was a standard Dictionary of National Pronunciation, with the pronunciation given in a new alphabet of 40 letters called National Phonetic Alphabet. The form of Mandarin thus defined, so far as the sound is concerned, is called *guóyǔ* 国语 "National Language".

same syntax as the colloquial. From these considerations, it follows that a thorough knowledge of any one of the dialects gives one the key to the whole language (Chao 1925: xii).

In September 1927, when Chao was still teaching at Tsing Hua, he conducted the first survey of the Wu dialects. At that time transportation was so difficult that Chao and his assistants had to take boats, ferries, and buses to reach the villages, since trains could only reach the main areas. The recording would take as long as 8 to 9 hours a day; and to be more efficient in the field, Chao prepared ahead for one or two months. Everywhere he went, he would learn the local dialect. For instance, after two weeks in Guangzhou, he could make a speech in Cantonese. His diligence paid off and the first survey *Xiàndài wúyǔ de yánjiū* 现代吴语的研究 [Studies in the Modern Wu Dialects] was published in 1928. As the first attempt using a modern approach, it laid a foundation for the systematic investigation of Chinese dialects.

The first fieldwork at the Academia Sinica was carried out in the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi where the dialectal varieties were the richest. After nearly three months' field work in 1928, he recorded a large amount of data in Yue dialect, but those data were not published, except for the textbook *Cantonese Primer* (1947) and the article "The Zhōngshān Dialect" (1949). Early equipments like a sliding pitch pipe were used in the survey of Wu dialects, and wax cylinders in the surveys of the Yue dialect. Despite the primitive conditions, the surveys were ably handled by Chao and his assistants.

In 1932, Chao's dialect field work was interrupted by his appointment to succeed Mei Yiqi (1889–1962) as the Director of the Chinese Educational Mission in Washington, D.C., when Mei was called back to be the President of Tsing Hua University. While he was in the U.S., Chao ordered more sophisticated recording equipments for the Institute. The Chaos went back to Shanghai in the fall of 1933. In 1934, they moved to Nanjing where the Institute was relocated; and Chao soon resumed his dialect investigation. He and his assistants recorded speakers in An Hui province in 1934, and in Jiangxi and Hunan in 1935, and in Hubei province in 1936. Upon its publication in 1948, the report on the survey in Hubei attracted attention from linguists in and outside China, and it became a model for dialect surveys. Chao's table of 3,567 characters has been widely referenced for surveys in the 1980s. After his remarkable work on six surveys in several provinces and areas, he gained a thorough understanding of the sound distinctions across these areas, and he concluded that "The geographical sound variance represents the historical evolution" (1959: 99).

Chao's earliest published work includes essays and translations that introduce Chinese readers to Western science and literature. His translation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* was an early experimentation on modern spoken

Chinese. Published in 1922, it was seen as a landmark in Chinese literary history. Through his translation practice, he developed his own concepts; and he contended that fidelity should be observed as the main desideratum, but its dimensions were neither measurable nor completely independent (Chao 1976: 148–169).

Last but not least, his paper "The Non-uniqueness of Phonemic Solutions of Phonetic Systems" (1934) was a milestone in this first phase.[19] Writing in English, Chao claimed that the phonemic solutions of phonetic systems are neither unique nor definite. In the paper, he demonstrated remarkable ability to identify critical questions in linguistic theory.

In 1936, Chao's decision to decline the offer from the University of Hawaii clearly reflected his enjoyment of his work, and it summed up his two major interests in this period. "For the present, my vocation is dialect survey, and my hobby is Romanization schemes for popular education, both of which have to be done right here in the country, so I shall have to stay put as long as I am able to carry on my work" (Zhao & Huang 1998: 212–213). At that time, he did not expect that the imminent war would cause him to change his mind and move to Hawaii in 1938.

2.3 *Chao in the United States of America*

From 1938 to 1946, Chao taught Chinese at the University of Hawaii, Yale University and Harvard University. Before WWII, Oriental Departments (some were called the Department of Far Eastern Languages) were rather small. In some universities, the temporary Army Specialized Training Program (1942–1946) served to establish an institutional base for the expansion of Oriental Departments and creation of East Asian Departments. Chao was in charge of Chinese instruction for the ASTP at Harvard, and about two hundred people selected from the Army were sent there to learn Chinese. He revolutionized the teaching of Chinese, and he developed an effective pedagogical approach. Chao continued to teach Chinese at the University of California, Berkeley from 1947 until his retirement. He had always been interested in the nature of Chinese compared to Western languages. After years of preparation, he completed his monument work *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese* (1968). It has remained a classic.

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19. Chao said he was not satisfied with his Chinese title "Yīnwèi biāoyīnfǎ de duō néng xìng" 音位标音法的多能性 because it tended to confuse the theoretical work of building a system with the formal and practical work of marking the phonemes (Chao 1959: 35).

2.3.1   *Chao's language instruction in the American universities*

In the spring of 1922, Chao offered the first Chinese class at Harvard since the death of Ge Kunhua (1836–1882).[20] He was appointed to a one-year renewable position as Instructor of Chinese. In the 1920s, Chinese was typically taught by asking students to translate chapters of Classical Chinese into English.

Departing from the conventional way of merely translating the text into English, Chao taught Classical Chinese as if it were a living language, and he encouraged students to read and answer questions aloud in class. He believed that the knowledge of the spoken language is the best introduction to an appreciation of the literature. His teaching order was pronunciation first, then syntax, vocabulary, and idioms. The Chinese tones are reputed among Western speakers to be the most difficult part of the language. It is so only because from a Western point of view, tones seem to be something added because people use pitch of the voice for expression rather than as constituent parts of words. Chao compared the three layers of sound: consonant, vowels, and tones, using terminology from physics. He emphasized the importance of getting the pronunciation correct in the first weeks (Chao 1925: xv).

The highlight of Chao's teaching was the intensive ASTP program at Harvard.[21] He was happily eager and busy to teach over two hundred students at one time.[22] Many Chinese students from Harvard and MIT were hired as assistants in the drill sessions, and his audio-lingual method and direct methods made the program

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20. Chinese language was not taught on a regular basis at Harvard until 1921. In 1937 Chinese and Japanese instruction, previously offered in the Department of Semitic Languages and History, found a more appropriated home in the newly created Department of Far Eastern Languages (also referred to at the time as the Division of Far Eastern languages). In 1941, the Department offered its first doctorate, jointly with the Department of History. Most doctorate degrees awarded in Far Eastern Languages between 1941 and 1972 were in fact joint degrees in History and Far Eastern Languages.

21. Hu Shih recommended Chao to Carl J. Friedrich (1901–1984), the director of the Harvard School of Overseas Administration, saying that if he wanted to see success and effectiveness in this class, he should put it in Chao's able hand, instead of the American instructors (Hu 1970: 6). Hu Shih was appointed in Jan, 1943 as research associate and consultant of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) after his retirement from the Chinese Ambassador to the United States (Hu 2003: 521, 537). ACLS sponsored for Intensive Language Program (ILP) and cooperated closely with the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI). For the history of USAFI's involvement in language teaching and dictionary compilation, cf. Hall (1991).

22. Back in the late 20s, enrollment in Chinese language classes ranged from three to nine. In September 1959, when Chao's class of Introductory Chinese at Berkeley had 25 students, he said it was "more than ever before" (Zhao & Huang 1998: 371).

a great success. The textbook that grew out of this program, *Mandarin Primer* (1948), with accompanying character texts, is a highly concentrated body of materials summarizing the essential features of modern spoken Chinese. His daughter remembers:

> It is not an easy textbook either for the students or for the teacher. But for those who are willing to put their full effort into it from the very beginning, it is a very efficient way to gain both the active and passive use of the language. (Pian 1995: 13)

Eventually, some Army students were launched into careers in Asian studies, and they became leading sinologists: for example, Frederick W. Mote (1922–2005) of Princeton and James Crump (1921–2002) of University of Michigan. It is no exaggeration to say that Chao eased the path of Westerners who desired to learn, in the Chinese language, the thoughts and ideals of the Chinese people.

Based on his experience in dialect teaching, Chao produced another textbook, *Cantonese Primer* (1947). When participating in the Chinese dictionary project at Harvard, together with Lien Sheng Yang (1914–1990), Chao composed *The Guóyǔ zìdiǎn* 国语字典 [Concise Dictionary of Spoken Chinese] (1947), which remains the best dictionary of colloquial Chinese. Chao so much valued spoken language that he produced *Readings in Sayable Chinese* (1968) specifically to benefit people in their speech.[23]

Chao's unmatched teaching has become legendary. Zhou Zhiping (b.1947), a former director of "Middlebury Chinese Summer School" and founder of "Princeton in Beijing", reviewed Chao's feat of finding a path for Chinese language teaching in the U.S. (2015a, b). These programs of high repute adhere to Chao's ASTP pedagogy — significant attention to accurate speech, an earlier introduction to Chinese characters, teaching reading through the spoken language, and teaching Classical Chinese through modern colloquial.

2.3.2   *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese*

In both *Cantonese Primer* and *Mandarin Primer*, Chao included a chapter on grammar. Ever since then, he had been urged to write a full-length book discussing Chinese grammar. To get himself ready, he had been collecting materials, jotting down notes, and writing some articles on special topics in the grammar of spoken Chinese. He also read grammars written by others. In his autobiography, Chao recalled buying a copy of *Mǎ shì wén tōng* and finding it very exciting reading (Chao 1975: 64). Later he read grammar books written by Wang Li, Gao

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23. Chao once criticized that Hu Shih and Lu Xun (1881–1936), the father of modern Chinese literature, wrote with a vernacular language that was not sayable.

Mingkai (1911–1965), Li Jinxi,[24] and Lü Shuxiang (1904–1998). In 1954, when he went to Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship, Chao decided that he would write a book on grammar; and he would write it in a structuralist framework. He continued to collect raw materials and record live conversations during his sojourn in Taiwan in 1959. Most of the actual writing was not begun until the Fall of 1960, when the project was funded by a grant under the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which was established by Congress in 1958, following the Russian launch of the Sputnik. When *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese* (1968) got published, he was already 75 years old.

In his most cited book, Chao offered sharp insights into the nature of Chinese which can be summarized as follows: "The grammatical meaning of subject and predicate in a Chinese sentence is topic and comment, rather than actor and action" (1968:69) and "The full sentence is made up of minor sentences and minor sentences are adequate and more primary than full sentences" (p. 83). Because these perceptions have been accepted by an increasing number of scholars, the monograph continues to remain a most influential work.

The President of Chinese Linguistic Society, Shen Jiaxuan (b.1946) wrote two articles in commemoration of the 120th birthday of Yuen Ren Chao. Shen (2012) introduced in great length Chao's minor sentences and Lü Shuxiang's flowing sentences and challenged the universalness of structural recursion and a noun-verb distinction. Shen (2014) asserted that Chao insightfully indicated that Chinese logic is determined by the characteristics of Chinese grammar. These articles revived the concepts and theories raised by Chao half a century earlier.

More recently, Shen referred to Chao's work in his new book *Mingci he dongci* 名词和动词 [Nouns and Verbs] (2015) where Shen stated that while nouns and verbs are two separate syntactic categories in Western languages, they are pragmatic categories in Chinese and they are not separate entities. In other words, Chinese nouns constitute a super-noun category with verbs as a sub-category. He said that his apparently "appalling" statements were indeed based on his total agreement with great scholars, like Yuen Ren Chao, Lü Shuxiang, Wang Li and Zhu Dexi (1920–1992) (Shen 2011).

Chao contributed greatly to the standardization and spread of Mandarin speech, dialect investigation, Chinese instruction, grammar, and general linguistic theories. His distinguished career won him the highest honor as he was elected the President of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) in 1945. On Dec 31st, 1945,

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24. Li Jinxi was a friend of Chao, and also a member of the *shù rén huì* and Committee on Unification of the National Language. His *Xīn zhù guóyǔ wénfǎ* 新著国语文法 [New Grammar of the National Language] (1924) was the first grammar to systematically describe modern Chinese on English models.

he presented his presidential address "The Logical Structure of Chinese Words" which was revised and published in *Language* in 1946. A special April-June issue of *Language* was dedicated to him in 1966. He also served as the President of the American Oriental Society (AOS) and gave a presidential address "What is Correct Chinese?" in 1961. The inaugural issue of *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* was dedicated to him in 1973. Earlier, in 1948, he had been elected member of American Academy of Arts and Sciences, section Phonology and Criticism. Chao is deservedly recognized as the most eminent linguist from China.

2.4 *More than a linguist*

Chao's talent as a polyglot was well known. In the preface to Chao's first edition of *A Phonograph Course in the Chinese National Language*, Hu Shih wrote:

> Chao is a man of special talents. Firstly, he is a born polyglot. He could speak English, French and German as well as many Chinese dialects. Secondly, he is a born musician. His ears can tell the difference which is hard for others to detect. He also has a most sophisticated articulating organ that can imitate the most difficult sound. Thirdly, he is a scientific linguist. He can form systematic categorization out of disorderly and chaotic facts due to his excellent mastery of linguistic theories. (Cited in Zhao & Huang 1998: 117)

As a polyglot, Chao showed talent early in his life by his easy grasp of different dialects and languages. He said that he had always interested himself in the way people talked, and he tried to imitate them (Chao 1975: 22). At age 12, he could speak four dialects: Mandarin, Changzhou, Suzhou, and Changshu. When he met people from different dialectal areas, he liked to learn their dialect and practice by conversing with them. When he was interpreting for Russell, he usually interpreted in Standard Mandarin. But, having always been interested in various dialects, he tried interpreting in the dialects of the places where Russell gave his lectures.[25] When he conducted dialect surveys, he picked up enough of each dialect to converse with his informants. He even started to learn Tibetan during his first year at the Academia Sinica in 1929. His transcription for Yu Daoquan's (1901–1992) translated work of *Love Songs of the Sixth Dalailama Tshangs-dbyangs-rgya-mtsho* "greatly enhanced its value", according to Yu (1930: vi).

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25. Chao tried the dialect in Hangzhou and the Hunan dialect in Changsha. After one of the lectures at Changsha, a young member of the audience (possibly Mao Tse-tung) came up and asked him which county of the province he was from. The truth was that he only learned some Hunanese a week before. The young person had not realized that Chao was a speaker of Mandarin imitating Hunanese imperfectly and assumed instead that Chao was a Hunanese speaking Mandarin imperfectly (Chao 1974–1977: 63).

Chao mastered the feat of speaking in reversed way in 1930. First he recorded on tape a poem or passage uttered backwards (complete with reverse intonation) in English. The tape was then reversed and played to his astounded audience to reveal a perfectly natural English pronunciation. He performed this reversed speech on numerous occasions to amuse his appreciative audiences.

Chao liked to create puns, play with words, and talk full of wit.[26] He once created a Classical Chinese article of *Shíshì shīshì shí shī shǐ* 石室诗士食狮史 "Story of stone grotto poet: Eating lion", using 94 homophones of *shi*.[27] It was collected in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. His unprecedented creation exemplified the distinguishing effects of tones in Chinese. Chao coined a new word "stirfry" when translating his wife's book *Zhōngguó shípǔ* 中国食谱 [How to Cook and Eat in Chinese] (1945). He always included jokes during speeches, and he delighted in the appreciation of his audience.

A linguist by profession, Chao was also a philosopher, logician, mathematician, composer, translator, and writer. His musical compositions were so popular in the 1930s that he was called China's Schubert, by musician Xiao Youmei (1884–1940). The song he composed with Liu Fu[28] *Jiào wǒ rúhé bù xiǎng tā* 教我如何不想他/她 "How can I help but think of you" is a classic. Some of his songs, published in *Xīnshī gējí* 新诗歌集 [Songs of Contemporary Poems] (1928), have remained popular to this day. In his autobiography, he recorded that the highest marks he got at Cornell were two 100's and one 99 in mathematics and another 100 in astronomy. He was told some years later that he still held the highest record of overall averages at Cornell (Chao 1975: 75). He was undoubtedly one of the few who could move freely and successfully among the various disciplines in the sciences and humanities.

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26. There was one pun that was given to him by Russell. One of Russell's few popular lectures in Peking had been "Causes of the Present Chaos in China." When Chao informed Russell of the birth of their first child, Rulan, he said in reply, "Congratulations! I see that you are among the causes of the present Chaos in China." To appreciate Russell's gift of the pun, Chao named his family's three volumes of autobiography *Life with Chaos: The autobiography of a Chinese family*.

27. In 1956, he composed two more stories using quasi homophones. They were *yì yǐyí yī yì* 忆漪姨医疫 "Reminiscences of how Aunt Yi was cured" and *jì jījī jí jī jí* 记饥鸡集机脊 "Reminiscences of famished chickens assembled on the ridge of a flying machine".

28. Liu Fu, also known as Liu Bannong, was the first to record on the kymograph the four tones of Mandarin in his dissertation at the Sorbonne. Liu Fu was a founding member of the *shù rén huì*.

3.   *Wang Li — founder of the first Department of Chinese Linguistics*

Another towering figure in Chinese linguistics was Wang Li, founder of the first Chinese linguistics department. He was a student of Yuen Ren Chao at the Research Institute of Tsing Hua, and Wang was inspired by Chao to choose a career in linguistics.

3.1 *Biographical sketch*

On August 10th, 1900 Wang Li was born in a small village in what is modern Bobai county, located in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Area in the south of China. His father and grandfather were his first teachers, enlightening him in the Classics. After three years in the grade school (1911–1914), he had to leave school due to the family's poor financial condition. That was a huge blow to the young boy. He was so eager for knowledge that he decided to teach himself while helping with the house chores. One day, he discovered 14 abandoned boxes of books at a student's home, all about classic literatures, astrology and geology, with detailed amendments and annotations made by the previous owner. The student's family generously gave all 14 boxes to him.

During his ten years of self-guided study, he read extensively and grasped the spirit of scholarship. He also taught younger children at home, organized a reading club, and was appointed a teacher at a local grade school. Because of his knowledge and teaching, he, as a grade school graduate, taught at the grade school for three years. In 1924, he was encouraged by his coworkers, especially by the principal of that grade school to pursue further education. He set on the journey to Shanghai to attend college. After two years' study at two different colleges, he entered Tsing Hua University where he was taught by Yuen Ren Chao and three other distinguished professors. Among them, Chao had the greatest influence on Wang Li. Of the thirty students in the class, Wang Li was the only one who chose linguistics as a career. Both Liang Qichao and Yuen Ren Chao were his advisors on his thesis *Zhōngguó gǔ wénfǎ* 中国古文法 "Classical Chinese grammar" in 1927. Liang praised his thesis, saying it opened a new approach in the field. While Chao was very strict and critical, and commented "there is no right to conclude the absence of a grammar without a complete knowledge about that language". Wang Li kept these words as his motto because they rang in his entire life as bare truth. He once said: "Discovery of those 14 boxes of books was the first turning point in my life. The year at Tsing Hua was my second turning point when I was trained by the great masters who knew how to do research" (Wang & Zhang 2008: 46). Following advice from Chao, Wang Li went to the University of Paris to pursue his doctorate. From then on, he was determined to devote himself to linguistic study.

Wang Li learned general linguistics and experimental phonetics in Paris. His 1931 thesis *Une Prononciation chinoise de Po-pei, étudiée à l'aide de la phonétique expérimentale* constituted an experimental analysis of the Bobai dialect, written in French. In his thesis, he gave an accurate description of the dialect of his hometown and its phonological system, and he found that this dialect had the most tones among all dialects in China. He returned to China in 1932, and he accepted teaching and researching appointments at various major universities: first at Tsing Hua University and Yenching University in Beijing, the National Southwestern Associated University in Kunming during the wartime, and Sun Yat-sen University and Lingnan University in Guangdong (also known as Canton Christian College) after the war.

3.2 *Founding the first Department of Chinese Linguistics*

Under his leadership, the first Department of Chinese Linguistics was founded at Sun Yat-sen University in 1946. As the Dean of School of Humanities, Wang made a bold proposition to combine teaching and research. He split the existing Department of Chinese Language and Literature into two: a Department of Chinese Linguistics and a Department of Chinese Literature. A new generation of young talented linguists was trained and became active by the late 1940s, and led the development of Chinese linguistics into the post-1949 period. In 1952, a nationwide restructuring of universities and colleges was implemented. Financial resources, faculty members were redeployed and disciplines of universities were re-set. Colleges of liberal education covering history, education, linguistics, psychology, politics and those of finance and law were either cancelled or kept to a minimum in scale (Chen 2013: 191). In 1954, the Department of Chinese Linguistics at Sun Yat-sen University was merged into the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Peking University, where Wang was relocated and remained until the end of his life. Since then, Chinese Linguistics has become one program under the Department of Chinese Language and Literature.

3.3 *A prolific scholar and writer*

A self-taught expert, Wang Li had a stunning mastery of Classical Chinese. He said that he kept a rhyme table in mind when working on the phonetics and that it saved him much time and energy. As a prolific writer, Wang Li produced 40 books and more than 200 articles during a career spanning six decades. His non-academic writings were poetry, short literary pieces, and dozens of translations from French and other languages into Chinese. A comprehensive vision characterized his versatile scholarship. He was the only one who made permanent contributions

to almost every subfield of Chinese linguistics: modern grammar, historical grammar, historical phonology, lexicology, history of Chinese linguistics, history of Chinese prosody, and the teaching of Classical Chinese (Mei 1986: 333).

3.3.1   *Works on grammar*

In grammar, Wang Li criticized the mistake of completely copying the Western model that was ill-suited for the analysis of Chinese. His first paper *Zhōngguó wénfǎxué chūtán* 中国文法学初探 "An exploratory study of Chinese grammar" (1936) emphasized the importance of a distinction between the Classical Chinese and modern Chinese grammars, and laid a solid foundation for a new study of grammar. In his eyes, this paper was a manifesto to launch his linguistic career. His next paper, *Zhōngguó wénfǎ zhōng de xìcí* 中国文法中的系词 "The copulative particles in Chinese grammar" (1937) proved that *shì* 是 "*be*" was not a copulative particle in Old Chinese, but evolved from the demonstrative *shì* to become a copula in modern Chinese. In Chinese, especially Old Chinese, copulative particle is not a necessary sentential component. Even verbs are not always necessary in Chinese sentences. This was the first paper on historical grammar, and it set a model for later grammarians. Developing his own system, his *Zhōngguó xiàndài yǔfǎ* 中国现代语法 [Modern Chinese Grammar] (1943–1944) was first intended as one book, but recommended by poet and scholar Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) to be published as two separate ones. Writer Zhu Ziqing (1898–1948), the then chair of the Department of Chinese at Tsing Hua University, wrote a long preface to Wang Li's grammar book, titled *Zhōngguóyǔ de tèzhēng zài nàlǐ* 中国语的特征在那里 "The characteristics of Chinese".[29] Zhu gave a detailed summary of Wang Li's pioneering work and pointed out his independence without blindly following Western models. (Zhu 1948: 54–65). When the second volume of *Zhōngguó yǔfǎ lǐlùn* 中国语法理论 [Theory of Chinese Grammar] (1944–1945) was published, the companion volumes highly established him in the study of grammar. He realized that the rule of grammar should only be drawn from the language facts and empirical data. In his works he analyzed, examined and concluded the characteristic features of Chinese grammar, based on the rich data from the eighteenth century vernacular novel *Hóng lóu mèng* 红楼梦 [Dream of the Red Chamber] (1791).

The second volume of his *Hànyǔ shǐgǎo* 汉语史稿 [A Draft History of Chinese] (1957–1958) was regarded as seminal work on a diachronic study of Chinese grammar from Old Chinese to the present. Later it was published separately as

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29. Zhu Ziqing was famous for his poetry and prose writing. People seldom knew that he studied linguistics in England. This preface not only commented on the extant grammars, praised Wang Li's seminal work, but showed Zhu's profound understanding of the unique characteristics of Chinese.

Hànyǔ yǔfǎ shǐ 汉语语法史 [History of Chinese Grammar] (1989) after revisions and replenishment. Even today, this is still regarded as the most comprehensive, authoritative, and profound work in the field.

3.3.2   *Works on phonology*

Upon returning to China from Paris in 1932, Wang Li taught general linguistics and Chinese phonology at Tsing Hua University and Chinese phonology at Yenching University. His *Zhōngguó yīnyùn xué* 中国音韵学 [Studies of Chinese Phonology] (1936) was the first comprehensive treatise on the subject written in Chinese. It revealed the veil of the traditional phonology that intimidated many beginners studying Chinese. He explained traditional phonology in modern terms, commented concisely on the achievements of Qing philologists with extensive citations and introduced the Old and Middle Chinese reconstruction of Bernhard Karlgren. Inspired by Zhang Binglin, Wang Li raised his own creative proposal of *zhī*/*wēi* 支/微 distinction in Old Chinese rhyme groups. His work transformed the traditional phonology into a modern science. A revised edition was published under a new title as *Hànyǔ yīnyùn xué* 汉语音韵学 [Studies of Chinese Phonology] (1956).

His three volumes of *Hànyǔ shǐgǎo* represent his crowning achievement in historical linguistics. Its first volume, *Hanyu yuyin shi* 汉语语音史 [History of Chinese Phonetics] (1985), deals with historical phonology. It divides the history into nine chronological periods from pre-Qin to modern times and remains a comprehensive work on the history dated back from Old to Middle Chinese, and from Middle Chinese to modern. His reconstruction of Old Chinese was very influential in China and established him as one of the three giant Old Chinese phonologists.[30] An important paper for today's reader to understand his reconstructive system and method on Old Chinese rhymes is his *Xiānqín gǔyùn nǐcè wèntí* 先秦古韵拟测问题 "Problems on the reconstruction of pre-Qin rhymes" (1964). Wang Li built his own theory of Old Chinese and applied his system to mark the rhymes of two classic poetic works. The two companions *Shījīng yùndú* 诗经韵读 [Rhyme Reader of Odes] and *Chǔcí yùndú* 楚辞韵读 [Rhyme Reader of Chu Songs] were both published in 1980.[31] They offered an elaboration of the rhyming rules for both insiders and laymen to understand and grasp the Old Chinese pronunciation.

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30. The other two phonologists renowned for reconstruction of Old Chinese are Li Fang-Kuei and Zhengzhang Shangfang (b.1933).

31. The two books on rhyme readings were reprinted in *Collected Works of Wang Li*, vol. XII (2014).

3.3.3   *Works on lexicology and dictionaries*

In lexicology, Wang Li also had significant accomplishments and contributions. The third volume of his *Hànyǔ shǐgǎo* treats the development of the lexicon. It summarizes the works done by predecessors, contemporaries and the author himself, and facilitates the teaching and research in historical lexicology.

Based on his cogent criticism of the ancient lexicons and modern dictionary, Wang Li presented three principles that dictionaries should follow in his article *Lǐxiǎng de zìdiǎn* 理想的字典 "Ideal dictionary" (1945). His *Liǎoyī xiǎo zìdiǎn chūgǎo* 了一小字典初稿 "First draft of a small dictionary" (1946) was a pilot trial to apply these principles.[32] For each character, there were pronunciation, parts of speech, meaning explanations, and examples. There was also an etymological index with an old pronunciation and quoted examples of earliest uses in Classics. *Xīn xùngūxué* 新训诂学 "New exegesis" (1947) was a breakaway from an old study and advocated a new study of glosses or explanations of words in Classics. He discussed the rules in the evolution of words and word meanings in various papers.[33]

His *Tóngyuán zìdiǎn* 同源字典 [Etymological Dictionary] (1982) was a milestone work on etymology, treating 439 groups of words of same origins, and involving over 3,000 words. Invited by Zhong Hua Book Company, Wang Li started to work on *Gǔ hànyǔ zìdiǎn* 古汉语字典 [Classical Chinese Dictionary] in 1984. One year later, he finished one fourth of the dictionary. Considering his age and state of health, his several students took over and completed it. It was published in 2000 and it realized his dream of an ideal dictionary.

3.3.4   *Works on versification*

Wang Li was interested in combining language study with classical poetic meter and form. After he completed three books on grammar, he wanted to work on the grammar of poetry which included prosody. He gave a course on "grammar of poetry" and lectured on the beauty of the rhythm and meter in classical poetry when he was teaching at the National Southwestern Associated University in Kunming in 1944. One year later he began the writing but covered more topics and went deeper than the lectures given. When it came out, *Hànyǔ shīlǜxué* 汉语诗律学 [Chinese Versification] (1958) was the first book on genre study from the linguistic perspective. He not only gave a systematic and comprehensive analysis of poetic meter and rhythm; but for the first time, he explained the grammatical features in poetry, *cí* 词 poetry and *qǔ* 曲 "songs of Yuan dynasty", illustrating the differences in word orders and word choices from those in prose. It aroused a critical sensation because it broadened the study of poetic meter through a linguistic perspective.

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32. *Liǎoyī* is Wang Li's courtesy name.

33. These articles can be found in *Collected Works of Wang Li*, vol. XIX (2015).

When the modern poet Guo Xiaochuan (1919–1976) read his essay *Lüè lùn yǔyán xíngshì měi* 略论语言形式美 "On the formal beauty of language" (1962), he immediately wrote to Wang Li expressing empathy and resonance. Later Guo paid more attention to the rhythm and meter, which greatly enhanced the beauty of his poems when read aloud. During his stay in Paris, Wang Li translated the French poem *Les Fleurs du mal* by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) into classical style of Chinese poetry.[34] He showed his talent in poetry writing at a young age but being so modest that he never considered himself a poet.

3.3.5   *Textbooks on Classical Chinese*

Wang Li was a master at integrating teaching with research. As mentioned above, most of his books began as syllabi for his courses.[35] He was so gifted that he could turn the boring grammatical lectures into vivid and interesting ones, attracting not only linguistic students but also students from Chinese literature. He wrote many textbooks and articles on teaching. *Gǔdài hànyǔ* 古代汉语 [Classical Chinese] (1962–1964) is a textbook compiled under his leadership, combining not only the selected readings, but also high frequency words, descriptions of grammar, and essays on various aspects of traditional culture. It is the earliest work with this mosaic layout, and it continues to be an influential college textbook.

3.3.6   *Works on language reform*

Wang Li was generous and willing to put his linguistic expertise at the service of society at large. As an advisor to the State Commission on Language Reform in 1950s, he worked actively on the reform of characters, standardization and spread of Mandarin. He not only wrote articles urging the importance of simplification of characters, but he also participated in the design and implementation of Pinyin spelling scheme. He even compiled booklets to teach Mandarin to speakers of Wu dialects and Cantonese.

Wang Li trained many famous linguists, and he was generous to offer a hand to students in need. In 1985, he donated the royalty from his published *Collected Works* and set up the "Wang Li Prize in Linguistics" at Peking University to inspire young scholars.

I now end this section with the quotes from two eulogies. *In Memoriam* written by Tsu-lin Mei (b.1933): "Wang Li devoted his entire life to the advancement

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34. Talented as he was, Wang Li said in the prologue *wèi xìn shīqíng jù bié cháng, píngshēng zì jiè nòng cí zhāng* 为信诗情具别肠，平生自戒弄词章 [I believe that only people who have special sentiment could compose poems. Therefore I have been refraining myself from writing poems for my entire life].

35. Wang Li often said *jiǎng yì mén kè, xiě yì běn shū* 讲一门课，写一本书 [When a course is given, a textbook is written]. (Wang & Zhang 2008: 146).

of linguistics in China. Linguistics made him a great scholar, and he in turn made Chinese linguistics a modern discipline" (Mei 1986: 336). *In Memoriam* written by Lü Shuxiang: "The reason why Wang Li could achieve so much in linguistics was due to his solid foundations in traditional Chinese philology and his training in scientific Western way. He could treat and employ the traditional heritage in a critical manner" (Lü 1986).[36]

3.4 *Wang Li's history of Chinese linguistics*

Wang Li was the first scholar to work on the history of Chinese linguistics. In 1962, he taught the course of "History of Chinese Linguistics" at Peking University. His lecture notes were first published as a series of articles in the Journal *Zhōngguó yǔwén* (1963, 1964), and later as a book *Zhōngguó yǔyánxué shǐ* 中国语言学史 [History of Chinese Linguistics] (1981).

According to Wang Li, the history of Chinese linguistics could be roughly divided into four periods: the study of meaning from the 3rd century B.C. to the 5th century A.D.; the study of sound from the 5th to the 17th century; a comprehensive study during the 17th to the 19th century; and the emergence and development of grammar in the late 19th century to the mid 20th century. While other divisions according to specific historical periods or focus of study are possible, Wang Li's division is the most widely accepted. He absorbs the traditional legacy with unbiased criticisms concluded at the end of each chapter. From his summary of history, readers could see his mastery in Classical Chinese, historical phonology, and grammar. In phonology, he stressed the work of Qian-Jia scholars, and the reconstruction of ancient pronunciation by Bernard Karlgren. His own extensive work in the same field gave him credentials to include a just comment on their strengths and weaknesses. In grammar, he emphasized *Mǎ shì wén tōng* and he attached critical importance to Ma's exploratory work. Careful readers would find that the history was closely tied to his thinking and became part of his framing.

3.4.1 *The study of meaning*

The Han dynasty saw the popularity of the Confucian canon and scripture reading. The study of characters, or *xiǎo xué*, was destined to be subordinate at its very beginning. Characters are the building blocks in numerous volumes of scriptures and Classics. Therefore, they became the object studied by early philologists dating back to the Former Han (also called Western Han, 202 B.C.–8 A.D.). The purpose of *xiǎo xué* differs from modern linguistics in its full commitment to scripture reading. There are three major areas of study in *xiǎo xué*: the shapes, sounds and semantic glosses of graphs. The distinction of the three

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36. www.ziliaoku.org/rmrb/1986-05-15-4

kinds of treatises is not very clear-cut, because few deals only with the shape. And many treat both the sound and meaning of characters. According to Wang Li, the catalogues made by *Sìkù quánshū zǒngmù tíyào* 四库全书总目提要 [Critical Catalogue of the Qing Imperial Library] are based on the genre rather than the content (Wang 2015: 328). Though the terms might be borrowed for the sake of convenience, readers should bear in mind that the early study of sound and meaning were no equivalent to the contemporary linguistic definition of phonology and semantics. In addition to the purpose and the material being studied, i.e., the characters, there were critical differences in methodology.

China's long tradition in philology has seen emergence of influential works, some of which have become classics in the field and have played a dominant role for a long time. Wang (2013a: 5) lists four monumental treatises on the study of meaning during the Han period. *Ěryǎ* 尔雅 [Examples of Refined Usage],[37] the earliest lexicographic work, contains brief definitions of some 4,300 words and phrases arranged by subject category. Like a thesaurus, a common word explains a group of synonyms. Although its authorship and dates remain unsettled,[38] it has had a considerable impact on the interpretation of the Classics, and on the development of the language itself. *Ěryǎ* continues to interest scholars up to modern times as evidenced by the many commentaries and corrections.

One of the best known commentaries, *Ěryǎ zhù* 尔雅注 [Commentary to the Ěryǎ] was written by Guo Pu (276–324) in the Jin dynasty (265–420). He stated in his preface that his interest started at a young age, and it took him nearly twenty years to study *Ěryǎ*. He decided to annotate it because he believed that no previous annotators' work was thorough and that they had many mistakes and missed points (Guo 1983: 7).

The second treatise on the study of meaning was the earliest dialect geography, the *Fāngyán* 方言 [Dialects] by Yang Xiong (53 B.C.–18 A.D.),[39] a learned philosopher and poet. Besides the ready legacy from previous materials about languages in different areas, he travelled to record dialectal varieties. It took him 27 years to compile the work of fifteen volumes (the later version had thirteen). It includes more than 2,300 words collected from the spoken language of 14 geographical areas. Following the formula of *Ěryǎ*, it lists the words of similar meanings arranged by subject categories. The uniqueness is that Yang Xiong pointed out the fine

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37. Separately, *ěr* means "near, close to", and *yǎ* means "elegant and refined language". *Ěryǎ* together means nearly standard language, i.e., using common language to explain dialects and special language.

38. The consensus is that the *Ěryǎ* was not made by one person or at one time and it was finalized at the end of Warring States (770–476 B.C.) through the work of generations of scholars.

39. Some say his year of birth was 58 B.C.

distinctions between usages of different geographical regions,[40] as well as the commonly used language that was based on the court and capital. The limitation of the work is that he used characters to record the pronunciation but that could not reflect the phonetic variance (Ji & Wang 1992). All in all, it offers a new perspective to look at the distinction between synonyms; and it creatively enriches the analysis of the meaning of words. In his preface to *Fāngyán zhù* 方言注 [Commentary to the Fāngyán], Guo Pu states that with this precious book in hand, people could know other places without actually being there; and they could name things without asking help (Guo 1983: 284).

The first major Chinese lexicon on the study of shape was *Shuō wén jiě zì* 说文解字 [Explaining Single-component Graphs and Analyzing Compound Characters], authored by Xu Shen (ca.58–148?) of Han dynasty. It was the earliest comprehensive dictionary-like work to have survived.[41] By the Han period, *xíngshēng zì* 形声字 "a phonogram consisting of one ideographic and one phonetic element" achieved a predominant position. Both the semantic and phonological make-ups are essential to an understanding of how the Chinese writing system works. In total, *Shuō wén jiě zì* has 14 chapters and treats 9,353 characters arranged in 540 radicals (or classifiers) (Xu 1983: 63). It was innovative to arrange in this method instead of the semantic category adopted by the first two treatises. The method was called *xíngxùn* 形训 "explaining the meaning in terms of the shape". Because Chinese words are shape-based rather than phonetic-based, it is enormously helpful for understanding the history and etymology of Chinese characters. The analysis of the meaning was based on the shape so it belonged to the catalogue of *Zì shū* 字书 "books on characters" in *Sìkù quánshū zǒngmù tíyào*.

Xu Shen was the first to make systematic use of the ideographic parts as radicals. Without his providing graphs in *zhuànshū* 篆书 "seal script"[42] style and its accompanying analysis, it would be impossible to comprehend the actual meaning of characters, because the modern *lìshū* 隶书 "clerical script"[43] style is much simplified and has evolved far away from its primitive pictorial roots. Unavoidably, his

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40. An example goes like this. *Dǎng* 党, *xiǎo* 晓, *zhé* 哲, all mean "to know". In Chǔ state people used "*dǎng*", or "*xiǎo*", while in geographic borders between Qí and Sòng, people preferred to use "*zhé*" (Yang 1983: 284).

41. Some said that the book was the completed in 100 A.D., but presented to the emperor only in 121 A.D. by the author's son. Others said that the compilation took him 22 years from 100 to 121 A.D.

42. *Zhuànshū* "seal script" got its name from its widespread use on seals.

43. *Lìshū* was formerly known as "chancery script", or "clerical script" from its association with various types of clerks employed by the government.

over-dependence on the shape caused him to take words too literally or to guess etymologies out of a fancied or conceived reading of the shape. However, this did not depreciate his influence. His system of 540 radicals has ever since served as a model for dictionary compilers for nearly 2,000 years. In the preface and the first paragraph of the prologue, Xu Shen introduced six methods whereby Chinese characters were coined and eight shapes of writing since the unification of the entire country under Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259–210 B.C.). Motivated to clear up the confusion caused by the disagreements between old and new school of Classics scholars, he adopted an effective approach in categorization and interpretation of graphs (Xu 1983: 378). This preface was considered by some to be the first linguistic essay, by its own definition.

Shortly after *Shuō wén jiě zì*, Liu Xi (life dates unknown) of Eastern Han period, compiled the first etymological dictionary, the *Shì míng* 释名 [Explaining Names] (ca. 200 A.D.) to address objects that people named but didn't know how the names came into being (Liu 1983: 385).[44] He used rhyming puns in both the literary and the spoken languages of his day to trace the origins of 1,500 words under 27 subject categories such as heaven, earth, body parts, kinship, food and drink, boats, and mourning rites, etc.[45] He believed that the meaning of a character could be guessed based on its pronunciation. Though his *shēngxùn* 声训 "explaining the meaning in terms of the pronunciation" method was not so reliable, his attempt shed light on the phonological structure of Old Chinese before the third century A.D. (Wang 2013a: 7). But due to the asymmetry between the evolution of meaning and that of sound, *Shì míng* encountered difficulties when giving casual and far-fetched explanations.[46]

In summary, the Han period saw the development of the earliest study of characters and their respective meanings. In addition to the advocacy of Confucian and Classics reading, the language *per se* led to the early obsession with glosses. Chinese has no inflections, nor is it phonetic-based. The earliest writing had a basically pictographic origin and each character represented a single syllable. Grammatical

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44. In the preface, Liu says that names of objects belong to different categories. For objects that people daily call but know nothing about their origins, he compiles the dictionary under 27 categories to discuss their origins.

45. It gives the meaning of the graph, then the sound, followed by an explanation of the shape or an etymological analysis. An example is like this. *Jiàn* 涧 means "the water between hills". Sounding like *jiān* 间 "between", it means that "the creek is between the two hills" (Liu 1983: 389).

46. Some graphs hold on to the same pronunciation though their meaning has changed, or other words whose pronunciation undergoes changes but their meaning remains the same. A far-fetching example is *Zhì, shí yě, chóng shí zhī yě* 痔，食也，虫食之也 [Hemorrhoids, which sound like eating, are caused by bug bites] (Liu 1983: 421).

elements were particularly hard to represent in pictorial form (Norman 1988: 59). The need to study the sound elements arose when Sanskrit, a phonetic-based language, was encountered during the sutra translation. So phonology came five centuries later and the first systematic grammar appeared at the end of the 19th century.

3.4.2   *The study of sound*

The interest in sound arose during Northern and Southern dynasties (420–589) when the first wave of foreign influence struck China. Buddhism was introduced into China and Buddhists were inspired to understand Indian phonetics and create a phonological diagram to learn Sanskrit.[47] Also, poetry and prosody were of such a fashion that there was a pressing need for analyzing the rhyme and discovering the rhythm. Wang Li claimed that there was already a cutting of syllables into two segments in the 2nd century A.D., known as the *shēngmǔ* 声母 "initial" and the *yùnmǔ* 韵母 "final" in modern times. It was the poet Shen Yue (441–513) who first identified the four tones, i.e., *píng* 平 "even", *shǎng* 上 "rising", *qù* 去 "departing/going" and *rù* 入 "entering", and to prescribe prosodic rules for poetry composition (2013a: 8).

3.4.2.1 *Earliest rhyme book Qièyùn*

The *Qièyùn* [Standard Rhyme Dictionary][48] by Lu Fayan (life dates unknown) appeared in 601 A.D. It had 195 rhyme rubrics and systematized the *fǎnqiè* 反切 "the alliterator-rhymer spelling system" formula which used the principles of *shuāngshēng* 双声 "alliteration" and *diéyùn* 叠韵 "rhyme" to specify the pronunciation of a syllable with two characters, the first showing the initial, and the second, the final.[49] As the result of contact with learned Buddhist scholars from India, *fǎnqiè* remained the standard method until the twentieth century. It intrigued Qing philologists and modern historical linguists into reconstructing the pronunciation of Old Chinese by working back from the sounds of Middle Chinese.

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47. Buddhists regarded understanding Chan/Zen as ultimate enlightenment, and understanding phonetics as primary enlightenment. They saw the understanding of phonology as a necessary pathway to attain the higher enlightenment of Chan/Zen Buddhism.

48. *Qiè* means correct, normalized. Lu Fayan named his book *Qièyùn* to declare that it is a normalized and standard rhyme dictionary.

49. An example of the *fǎnqiè* segmentation goes like this. The graph *dong* 东 "east" is cut as *de* 德 "virtue" and *hong* 红 "red" in which *d* is the initial (that alliterated with the glossed graph) and *ong* is the final (that rhymed with the glossed graph). So *dong* ：*d*e + h*ong* = *dong*. *Fǎnqiè* segmentation was a revolution compared to the previous use of homophones or near-homophones.

Lu's *Qièyùn* is a lost document. An augmented edition of the *Qièyùn*, the *Guǎngyùn* 广韵 [Extension of Qièyùn], appeared in the year 1008 where *Qièyùn xù* 切韵序 "Preface to Qièyùn" was extant. Lu Fayan at the beginning of the preface recalled the famous rhyme discussion at his home in Chang'an (modern Xi'an), the capital of Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) periods.[50] He said that this seminal lexicon of five volumes was not his own creation but a record of those eight impressive minds at the discussion. The dominance of *Qièyùn* and its formula kept scholars away from studying the real language for the next 700 years.

3.4.2.2 *Living language study*

It was not until the 13th to 17th centuries that the study of Chinese began to turn to the living language. The Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) witnessed a rapid rise of the opera-theater that had a major impact on the sound studies. *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* 中原音韵 [Sounds and Rhymes of the Central Plains],[51] completed in 1324 by Zhou Deqing (1277–1365) and published in 1341, was the first rhyme book that depicted the live language in the northern area. Breaking the traditional practice, the author did not use the *fǎnqiè* formula, nor did he provide the initial consonant or meaning interpretations. It treats 5,866 characters, arranged into 19 rhyme groups according to the rhyming practice of the *běiqǔ* 北曲 "northern songs". His rhyme table made great contributions to the theory of opera and *qǔ* "songs" study through the elaborate discussions about the system, prosody, composition, and singing techniques. His focus on the actual sound in real language led to the discovery that the pronunciation in the Yuan period had much similarity with modern Mandarin (Wang 2013a: 9).[52] Therefore, *Zhōngyuán yīnyùn* remains to be an important source to study the history of Mandarin.

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50. Eight scholars came to spend the night and they started a discussion when the dinner feast came to an end, among whom, were Yan Zhitui (531–591?), Xiao Gai (ca.535–610). One of the scholars, Wei Yanyuan (life dates unknown) said to Fayan: "We are debating heatedly about the differences between old and present sound and rhymes. There were so many disagreements. Why not take some notes? We few men decide and it is decided." Fayan made an outline based on the discussion. But he did not start working on it until over ten years later when he was dismissed from his officialdom and returned to a private life of study and contemplation.

51. Central Plains refers to the Yellow River area if taken widely. Its narrow meaning is the area of Henan (south of the Yellow River). Zhou declared that the language of the Central Plains should be used as the norm and standard when he was consulted about the rhymes of Yuan Opera (Zhou 1960: 1–6).

52. Compared to those in the Tang or Song dynasties, the four tones of "level, rising, departing/ going and entering" in the Yuan period underwent great changes. There are two subcategories in level and no more entering. Entering is distributed in the other three tones.

Ming period (1368–1644) was the transition from Yuan to Qing in sound study. Another book intended to break the traditional *Qièyùn* formula was the *Hóngwǔ zhèngyùn* 洪武正韵 [The Correct Rhymes of the Hóngwǔ Reign] (1375). The authors' ambition to correct old rhymes with the pronunciation in Central Plains was not realized due to different reasons (Deng 2002: 197). So it was criticized to be a rhyme table mixing old and new, northern and southern sound. But it is still a good source to study Mandarin and its formation.

Scholars of the late Ming period dug deeper into the initial, rhyme onset, place and manner of articulation, and tones. They began to notice the distinguishing effects of the mouth shape during the articulation. The concept of *sìhū* 四呼 "four vowel onset types" was developed gradually and used to categorize all the medials or onsets. It had a significant meaning and continues to be used in classifying modern Pinyin system.[53]

To sum up, the introduction of Buddhism into China had a profound impact on the study of language. In addition to the above-mentioned influence on phonology and rhyme dictionaries, it also influenced the development of logical thinking. The logical thinking of the intellectuals in the Tang period when Buddhism reached its peak was more or less affected by the religion. It reflected in the structure of sentences in summarization and integration. Sentences and discourses were complete and coherent as well as concise. From the Tang period to mid-19th century, syntax didn't undergo much change. Only after the Vernacular Literature Movement, it has experienced dramatic changes, deeply influenced by Western grammars (Wang 2013a: 461–463).

3.4.3   *A comprehensive study of Chinese in Qing era*

This period was the heyday of philological studies in all respects. During the Qianlong and early Jiaqing reigns from 1796 to 1820, *kǎojùxué* 考据学 "evidential studies" flourished and the Qian-Jia evidential scholarship reached a new height. A great deal was achieved in systemizing, authenticating, and annotating an enormous corpus of classic texts (Ge 2015: 31). In the study of Old Chinese sound, beginning with the great master Gu Yanwu (1613–1682), the Qing philologists made a sustained effort to classify the rhyme categories of Odes.

3.4.3.1 *Official dictionaries*

Kāngxī zìdiǎn 康熙字典 [The Kāngxī Dictionary] (1716), the first comprehensive and closest to a modern dictionary, was composed under the auspice of

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the emperor.[54] It took thirty compilers five years to finish working on the project. It treats 47,035 graphs and 1,995 variants and still serves as an indispensable tool for sinologists. The 214 radicals of the dictionary have been followed by all Chinese and foreign makers of Chinese dictionaries. Wang Li (2013a: 9) compared the dictionary to the four previous ones that adopted the same radical arrangement, and pointed out its greatest advantage was an exhaustive enumeration for the example uses of the characters as well as their first occurrence in Classics. In spite of its inadequacy in many respects, the system has gained an unearned increment through its sheer vogue.

3.4.3.2 *Evidential studies*

The control of Qing rulers towards the culture and intellectual thoughts resulted in an escape from the reality and a renewed fascination in textual studies called *Hàn xué* 汉学 "Han learning".

As a representative of the commentary works,[55] *Shuō wén jiě zì zhù* 说文解 字注 [Commentary to the Shuō wén jiě zì] by Duan Yucai (1735–1815) has been highly acknowledged as "better than the original". Duan spent thirty years annotating the Han scholar Xu Shen's magnum opus *Shuō wén jiě zì*. His exhaustive quotation of ancient literature augmented his analysis of the meaning Xu Shen had attributed to the graphs. He traced their expanded and derived meaning as well. His efforts to establish the original pronunciation of the graphs led to a new discovery in the phonology of Old Chinese. Graphs which contain the same phonetic element should belong to the same rhyme category. Another great philologist of his time Wang Niansun (1744–1832), claimed that "Duan's commentary work has been peerless in the past 1,700 years".[56] Wang Li (2013a: 10) especially praised Duan's scholarship shown in his critical and historical perspectives in commenting *Shuō wén jiě zì*.

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54. It was the first time the name *zìdiǎn* 字典 "dictionary" was used.

55. Other important commentaries and amendments are *Shuō wén jiě zì yìzhèng* 说文解字义 证, authored by Gui Fu (1736–1805), *Shuō wén jùdòu* 说文句读 by Wang Yun (1784–1854), and *Shuō wén tōngxùn dìngshēng* 说文通训定声 by Zhu Junsheng (1788–1858).

56. Wang Niansun believed that the Classics could only be understood when the correct meaning and pronunciation of the graphs used in the ancient texts are known. He claims in the preface to *Shuō wén jiě zì zhù*, "The study of graphs, *xiǎo xué*, is done when the meaning and pronunciation are understood; the study of Classics is done when the study of graphs is understood" (Duan 1981: 1).

Wang Niansun, too, made numerous annotations and emendations on classical texts.[57] His most prominent work was *Guǎngyǎ shūzhèng* 广雅疏证 [Commentary to Guǎngyǎ] which took him nearly ten years to complete, at the rate of commenting on three graphs a day. He rectified many earlier errors on graphs and supplemented missing places. Another thirty years were dedicated to rectifying this commentary, and 463 items were further revised. His meticulous and thorough knowledge about form, sound, and meaning of graphs in both ancient and contemporary periods enabled him to accomplish a work of notable magnitude. Duan Yucai admired him as the only one who could easily get the meaning by looking at the ancient pronunciation of graphs.[58] According to Wang Li (2015: 320), the merits of the two Qing scholars were their adherence to the pronunciation instead of the mere shape of characters. They quoted enough evidence and examples to prove, thus their conclusions were more credible than those far-fetched ones drawn only from the similarity in shape.

3.4.3.3 *Old Chinese pronunciation*

Qing scholars excelled unprecedentedly in studying the pre-Qin pronunciation. At the beginning of Qing era, the master on Classics, Gu Yanwu opened a new chapter in the study of the rhymes of Odes. He compiled five books on the study of Old Chinese pronunciation and classified the old rhymes into ten rhyme groups. Later scholars built on his work and came up with more rhyme groups. Based on his lecture notes in the 1960s at Peking University, Wang Li wrote an entire book *Qīngdài gǔyīnxué* 清代古音学 [Qing Dynasty Studies of Ancient Pronunciation] (2013b). There are twelve chapters introducing in detail fifteen prominent figures in the study of Old Chinese pronunciation on rhyme groups and the initials. Wang Li (2013a: 11) thinks that the number of rhyme groups does not matter too much. It only shows the difference in scope but the belonging of certain characters to certain groups is an agreed conclusion.

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57. Wang Niansun's son, Wang Yinzhi (1766–1834), also a philologist, wrote a book Jīngyì shù wén 经义述闻 "Account of what I have heard from my father concerning the interpretation of the Classics". Due to the father and son's outstanding achievements in philology, people like to mention them together as "Wang and son from Gāoyóu (their birthplace, a town in Jiangsu Province)".

58. In the preface to *Guǎngyǎ shūzhèng*, Duan Yucai comments: "Huaizu (Wang Niansun's courtesy name) can get the meaning of Classics through ancient pronunciation. He is the only scholar who excels at this in the whole nation!" (Wang 2004: 1) The method is also called *yīn shēng qiú yì* 因声求义 "the pronunciation of a graph is seen as a vehicle of concepts and its meaning can be speculated through its pronunciation".

To sum up, Qing period saw serious and flourishing works in dictionary compilation, Old Chinese phonological system and classic exegesis. A historical developmental perspective was established.[59] Qian-Jia scholars inherited the best of their predecessors, equipped with a solid *Hàn xué* background, and were honest and passionate in their intellectual pursuits. They advanced *xiǎo xué* to an unprecedented height to understand ancient thoughts and classic literature.

Once again, Qian-Jia scholars' devotion to the Classics led to the negligence of the living language and blindness to alien perspectives. A series of significant questions were raised, but much of their work had to wait for Western linguists like Bernard Karlgren or Western-trained Chinese linguists before it could be interpreted in phonetic terms. Chao claims that by studying the sounds of modern dialects and comparing them with the systematization of traditional Chinese phonology, Karlgren had made a reconstruction in all detail (except the actual melodic values of the tones) of the ancient Chinese pronunciation of about 600 A.D., which, after some revisions, has gained wide acceptance among most Occidental and the majority of Chinese scholars (Chao 1961 [¹1948]: 4).

3.4.4   *The first indigenous Chinese grammar*

Grammars did not have a place in the philological tradition. The focus of traditional training in China was on reading and reciting through which grammar was acquired subconsciously. "The development of grammar studies was initially tied to the activities of Western missionaries, who wrote numerous teaching grammars and language textbooks" (Gianninoto 2014: 137). Other than the earliest grammars written by Spanish missionaries in collaboration with native speakers, two treatises in Qing period were a necessary prelude: *Zhùzì biàn lüè* 助字辨略 [Compendium of Grammatical Particles] (1711) by Liu Qi (life dates unknown) and the *Jīng zhuàn shì cí* 经传释词 [Explanations of Words in the Classics and the Commentaries] (1798) by Wang Yinzhi (Lepschy 2013 [1994]: 22). Adroit at using textual research, Wang Yinzhi gave elaborate explanation and categorization of *xūzì* 虚字 "empty words, or grammatical particles" in Classics (Wang 1984). Though the work followed the philological tradition, focusing mainly on the meaning interpretation, the abundant evidence and convincing conclusion ensured

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59. In the preface to *Guǎngyǎ shūzhèng*, Duan Yucai explains the essence of *xiǎo xué* as the study of graphs which includes the form, pronunciation and meaning, interdependent on one another. "There are form, pronunciation and meaning in *xiǎo xué*. The other two can be understood if one is known. But they are all changing. Thus there are forms old and new, pronunciations old and new, and meanings old and new, interdependent on one another. The other five can be understood if one is known" (Wang 2004: 1).

its authenticity among the *literati* of the 19th century. It was regarded as the main source of inspiration for the first indigenous grammar *Mǎ shì wén tōng* (Chappell & Peyraube 2014:111).

The first comprehensive grammar *Mǎ shì wén tōng* was modeled entirely on grammars of Latin. Its author Ma Jianzhong was the first Chinese to earn a baccalaureate from a French university. After a professional career as a diplomat, Ma devoted the last decade of his life to writing the first grammar.[60] Before its publication, the Chinese had no idea of a noun-verb division. Ma points out that subject and predicate are the two most important components in a sentence. He also points out that in Chinese there are many sentences without subjects, and that adjectives can directly act as predicates (Ma 1935 [¹1898]). However, his bias that "Ancients do better than contemporaries in writing" resulted in an array of 7,326 example sentences only from Classical Chinese, and it prevented a thorough understanding of the nature of modern Chinese.

This period is viewed as an infant phase of writing grammars under Indo-European frameworks without much regard to the characteristics of Chinese *per se*. The limitation of the grammarian is his adoption of a "band-aid approach" for some analyses which shows his over-dependence on the borrowed Western framework. Ma has been criticized for the distortion of the linguistic reality to allow for the aptness of the borrowed models. Yet the book had a significant historical value, and it laid a solid foundation for later scholars to make serious efforts on grammar (Guo 1998).

4.   *Institutional platforms and the relevance to contemporary linguistics*

Unquestionably, with the rise of general linguistics in the Western academia, Chinese linguistics became a science and a discipline, no longer under the shadow of exegetics. In this section I shall discuss the status of Chinese linguistic academia in and outside China. A comparison of the institutional platforms where the two linguists played on will encourage the future practices of the profession.

4.1 *Current status of linguistic programs*

When an academic discipline grows to a respectable scale and depth, there is generally a call for a summary of the academic practices, research methodologies, and thoughts of the pioneers in the field. A historical review above on the two

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60. Some say the grammar was possibly co-written with his brother, Ma Xiangbo (1840–1939) who was a Chinese Jesuit priest, scholar and educator, the founder of the modern Fudan University.

millennia's philological tradition facilitates an understanding of the present status of linguistics in China — its purpose, scope and special problems, and a search for betterment of the discipline.

Chinese linguistics has flourished since the 1970s. There are now more researchers than ever in our history, and the names are endless. At the beginning of 21st century, linguists pressed to re-make linguistics into a primary discipline to accommodate its faster growth and to ensure its future expansion.

In Chinese universities, linguistics remains in a secondary program either in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature (simply called the Chinese Department) or in the Department of Foreign Languages. There are few undergraduate programs in linguistics. Only master and doctoral programs in linguistics are offered in some universities.

In November 2009, 49 universities and institutions participated in a symposium on the "Construction of Linguistics as a Primary Discipline" at Huazhong Normal University. At the meeting, scholars called for the establishment of Linguistics as a primary discipline in and by itself, i.e., a union of linguists from both departments and undergraduate training in linguistics.

After the symposium, four manifesto-like articles were published in the Journal *Yǔyán kēxué* 语言科学 [Linguistic Sciences] in 2010. They started from presenting the historical trajectory of linguistics as a discipline, and claimed the feasibility of liberating it from the secondary status under the Chinese Department (Liu & Zhang 2010, Lu & Shen 2010, Yang & Xu 2010, You 2010). These articles voiced the consensus among Chinese linguists to put an end to the subordination of linguistics. They unanimously pointed out the problematic separation of linguistics in two departments. For instance, linguists in the Chinese Department know Chinese very well but do not know much of English or other languages. This narrowness limits their further development in the globalized setting. Inability to write or publish their research in English prevents them from being known by other international professionals. Linguists in the Department of Foreign Languages work on English or other languages. They mainly import international voices to China by translating the latest work from the West for their Chinese colleagues. But due to the lack of an in-depth understanding about the long philological tradition, they are unable to produce original and convincing theories.

We may say, then, that establishment of an independent Department of Linguistics would raise its status, expand its community and train more talents. But whether it will improve the quality or give birth to more innovative theories remains to be seen.

4.2 *Institutional platforms for Chao and Wang*

It is worthwhile to pause and examine the institutional platforms on which Chao and Wang developed their career. The stages where they played the roles of modern linguists bore little resemblance to today's circumstances.

During the Sino-Japanese War, Chao left China in his prime to seek a living in the United States. He was hired on a year-to-year basis from one university to another from 1938 to 1946. At that time, Oriental Departments that hosted him were rather small. Their expansion and rise to eminence had much to do with America's wartime training program. At the University of California, Berkeley, where Chao worked from 1947 until his retirement and beyond, the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures was one of the first academic departments devoted to the study of Asia established in the United States.

When Chao first arrived at Berkeley, there was no Department of Linguistics. Occasionally Chao and his colleagues gave lectures on general linguistics. By the 1960s — in the wake of an unprecedented expansion in the postwar era of area studies programs in American academia — the University of California, Berkeley and the department cemented its national preeminence in the study of East Asia. The number of doctoral degrees granted in Asian languages reached twenty-two in 1968. By that time, Chao had already retired for eight years. It is regrettable that Chao was not made fuller use of in that capacity. He was more like a lone farmer who was growing a crop that was not the local market's most urgent need.

Chao's close friend, Hu Shih, a great historian and philosopher, could not find a permanent position at any American universities. Like a big fish in a small pond, he felt the frustration of not proving his capability. Tired of the academic jealousy and parochialism in American sinologist circles, Hu Shih finally returned to Taiwan to become president of the Academia Sinica, where he remained until his death.

When Chao was invited to give lectures in Taiwan in 1959, Hu Shih expressed that "young people look forward to Chao's instruction", hoping that "Chao will come back to train the youths" (Zhao & Huang 1998: 375). Partly sharing Hu's sentiment, partly moved by Hu's words, Chao planned to follow Hu's suit and work at the Academia Sinica after retirement. But writing on different projects kept him busy at his Berkeley home.

Chao's collaborator and early colleague at the Academia Sinica, Li Fang-Kuei had a similar experience. At Chao's recommendation, Li took over the dictionary project at Harvard in 1946, after Chao had left. Like Chao, who was lukewarm to the project, Li soon found the dictionary composition boring and left to work at Yale on a visiting professorship from 1948 to 1949. From there, he was invited to work at the University of Washington in Seattle, which changed his plan of returning to China. Li offered Chinese instruction and Chinese linguistics training for

twenty years from 1949 to 1969, but there were much fewer linguists trained than experts on Chinese literature. He summarized his career as researching in China and teaching in America (Li 2003: 40). It was a great regret to have left the Institute where he devoted so much on non-Chinese languages. Outside China, linguists working on Chinese are the minority, and their work is of only passing interest to Westerners watching from the shores. Now there is a void at Chao's home department at Berkeley but there might not be much enthusiasm to recruit one. The same vacancy is found in other institutions.

Though Chao and Li spent most of their energies in language teaching, the development of teaching materials, and overall supervision of language instruction at their departments, their work did not receive the credit it deserved. Mote recalled that the departmental philosophy at Princeton University was that language teaching should not be relegated solely to "native informants" or to "scientific linguists" but ideally should be taught by fully qualified professors who also would teach other subjects (2010: 244).

Compared to Chao, Wang Li, who trained a generation of leading linguists, had more followers and colleagues in China. He had directly and indirectly mentored over three thousand disciples. Being in the best community where he could exchange with like-minded scholars facilitated his work on every subfield in linguistics. On May 21st, 1981, Chao was invited to talk at the Institute of Linguistics at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. At the beginning of his speech, he modestly called himself an "out-of-date linguist", meaning "out of touch" with colleagues in China. During his visits, Chao was impressed by the blooming domestic scholarship in Chinese linguistics.

Largely published in English, Chao's success and contributions were well recognized in the Western academia. His eldest daughter, Rulan Chao Pian (1922–2013) said that Chao was probably better known as a composer in China (Pian 1995: 2). When asked about the reception of his work in China, Chao said that there were not many copies of his publications and he had not received criticism.[61] His grammar was translated into Chinese ten years after its publication. The *Hànyǔ kǒuyǔ yǔfǎ* 汉语口语语法 version translated by Lü Shuxiang was published in mainland China in 1979 and the *Zhōngguóhuà de wénfǎ* 中国话的文法 version translated by Ding Bangxin (b.1936) was published in Hong Kong in 1980. The time was not ripe for its full appreciation. That was the reason for no criticism received during his lifetime. Fortunately scholars like Shen Jiaxuan (2012, 2014, and 2015) brought Chao's work to the appreciative attention of scholarship.

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61. See Chao 1974–1977: 194.

5. *Conclusion: A call for innovative theory*

There must be a solid foundation in the historian research as the base for any branch of linguistics to flourish. The weakness revealed in the history of Chinese linguistics, as often in any other humanistic studies, is a lack of theory of enduring importance. In *Zhèngmíng piān* 正名篇 [Terminology], the great philosopher Xun Zi (ca. 310–220 B.C.) raised a theory of concept and *yuē dìng sú chéng* 约定俗成 "conventionalism".[62] He was the first to come up with the most detailed philosophy of language and illustrate the social nature of language (Dubs 1927, Mei 1951).

The *xiǎo xué* scholarly tradition, which only served the purpose of better understanding the Classics, greatly hindered the pursuit and production of theories. *Xiǎo xué* scholars seldom challenged the authority to utter their own voice. They worshipped the Classics and became the slaves to collect, select, elaborate, and interpret for the "ghosts" in Classics. Another reason was the material for scholars to learn and quote to prove a point was too extensive to exhaust. Scholars waited for decades to grasp some limited resources. Most of them could only begin to comment at their senior age, even though they started their scholarship at a younger age.

Lastly, more than a decade's gap of no international academic or cultural communication worsened the lagging of theoretical development and methodological innovation. During the end of 1950s to the early 1970s, with the advent of generative grammar, many new theories were raised and advanced in every realm of Western linguistics. However, most of the Chinese scholars were lingering on the structural linguistics that was rampant, roughly speaking in 1930–1960. That was a cut-off that would take decades to remedy.

But in any aspect, compared to their predecessors, contemporary linguists are more in touch with their Western colleagues and better equipped with abundant theories and skills. Some have received preliminary international recognition. There is a long way to go before we have a climate of theoretical thinking and produce really powerful theories. We are expecting more linguistic theoreticians or theoretical linguistic work by a native Chinese with a significant impact on a world-wide scale.

In *The American Scholar*, the American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) stated that a scholar should not be "the parrot of other men's thinking" (1893: 23). By that time, "our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close" (p. 22). The Chinese scholar would do well to heed this advice. The theoretical awareness should be implanted into

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62. Xun Zi explained the meaning of names and its relationship with the objects in the world. According to him, names were not intrinsically appropriate for the objects they referred to. But once usage was determined by convention, to depart from it is probably wrong.

the scholarly minds. This could not be achieved easily merely through any formal integration or reshuffle of the faculties from both departments.

One hundred years of linguistic practice is relatively short. No profound theory is generated within a short time. Those names and their works were remembered because of their decades of dedication. Retrospective reflection shows that the promise of the discipline is not guaranteed by any institutional reform, but by the people, i.e., the quality of the players on the field and whether they can freely switch between science and humanities, East and West, like Chao and Wang. Joseph H. Greenberg (1915–2001) once pointed out that linguistics has invariably served as a model for some other social science and humanistic discipline (Greenberg 1973: 47). His words still hold true, and it is even more demanding today, not only in Chinese, but in linguistics universally. Crisis will arise if the scholars are not open-minded, or unaware of what others within the field are doing, and also what others outside the field are doing, such as computer science, cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, and neuroscience. Interdisciplinary collaboration and data-related humanistic inquiries have never been as indispensable as in the present academia.

To learn from Chao and Wang, scholars can successfully combine linguistic theory with practicing the study of language. The world is changing so fast today that we should not be fettered by traditions or established philosophies. The interest in language is still sparked, as long as the language is alive. The need to explore it will never die out.

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SUMMARY

Prompted by Western science in late 19th century, Chinese linguistics gradually moved to a new direction after two thousand years of philological tradition centered on rhetoric and textual exegesis. Through the intense efforts of a few scholars in the early twentieth century, linguistic study in China became a science and a discipline. Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) and Wang Li (1900–1986) were first-generation linguists who led the movement to apply the methodology of modern linguistics to the systematic study of Chinese. This paper investigates the trend setting achievements of these founders of the discipline, and it introduces their biographical and scholarly backgrounds. It also provides a brief history of philology through the lens of Wang Li who was the first historian of Chinese linguistics. Contemporary linguists need both a critical mind to understand the philological legacy of Chinese and an open mind to welcome new interdisciplinary approaches that could produce innovative theories and facilitate the growth of the discipline. Moreover, this paper expands the history of linguistics by introducing linguistic features not found in Indo-European languages, thereby making the history of linguistics more inclusive than it has previously been. Consequently, this paper contributes to a rethinking of the definition of language.

RÉSUMÉ

La linguistique chinoise, favorisée par la science occidentale à la fin du XIXe siècle, a graduellement changé de direction, après deux mille ans de traduction philologique centrés sur la rhétorique et l'exégèse textuelle. À travers les intenses efforts de quelques savants au début du XXe siècle, l'étude linguistique en Chine est devenue une science et une discipline. Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) et Wang Li (1900–1986) ont fait partie de la première génération de linguistes ayant dirigé le mouvement d'application de la méthodologie de la linguistique moderne à l'étude systématique du chinois. Cet article met l'accent sur la tendance qui fait le bilan des réalisations de ces fondateurs de la discipline et présente leur biographie et leur formation. L'article fournit également une brève histoire de la philologie à travers le prisme de Wang Li, premier historien de la linguistique chinoise. Les linguistes contemporains ont besoin à la fois d'un esprit critique, afin de comprendre l'héritage philologique du chinois, et d'un esprit ouvert afin d'accueillir de nouvelles approches interdisciplinaires qui pourraient produire des théories innovatrices et faciliter le développement de la discipline. De plus, cet article enrichit l'histoire de la linguistique en y introduisant des traits linguistiques qui ne se trouvent pas dans les langues indo-européennes, rendant de cette manière l'histoire de la linguistique plus inclusive qu'elle n'a été jusque-là. En conséquence, cet article contribue à une nouvelle réflexion de la définition de la langue.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Von der westlichen Wissenschaft seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert angeregt, entwickelte sich die chinesische Sprachwissenschaft allmählich in eine neue Richtung, nach einer philologischen Tradition von zweitausend Jahren, die auf Rhetorik und Textauslegung ausgerichtet war. Durch die intensiven Bemühungen einiger Wissenschaftler zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts wurde die Linguistik zu einer Wissenschaft und zu einer Disziplin. Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) und Wang Li (1900–1986) waren Sprachwissenschaftler der ersten Stunde und standen an der Spitze der Bewegung, die Methodik der modernen Linguistik auf die systematische Untersuchung des Chinesischen anzuwenden. Der vorliegende Beitrag würdigt die richtungsweisenden Leistungen dieser Begründer der Disziplin und skizziert ihren biographischen und fachlichen Hintergrund. Darüber hinaus bietet er eine kurze Geschichte der Philologie aus der Perspektive von Wang Li, des ersten Historiographen der chinesischen Sprachwissenschaft. Linguisten der Gegenwart müssen sowohl über ein kritisches Bewusstsein verfügen, um das philologische Vermächtnis des Chinesischen zu verstehen, als auch über die notwendige Aufgeschlossenheit, um neue interdisziplinäre Ansätze aufzugreifen, die innovative Theorien hervorbringen und die Entwicklung der Disziplin befördern könnten. Und schließlich ergänzt der Beitrag die Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft durch die Einführung sprachlicher Merkmale, die in indoeuropäischen Sprachen nicht vorhanden sind. Die Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft wird dadurch umfassender, als sie zuvor war. Damit trägt der Beitrag dazu bei, die Definition von Sprache neu zu durchdenken.

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