

CURRENT TASKS OF REFORMING THE WRITTEN LANGUAGE¹

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Current tasks of reforming the Chinese written language involve the simplification of the Chinese (Han)² characters, popularization of the common speech (*putonghua*)³ and the drawing up and putting into practice of the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet.

The first task is the simplification of the Chinese characters. In January 1956 the State Council published the

¹This is a speech delivered at a meeting sponsored by the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, January 10, 1958.

²In this book Han is used interchangeably with Chinese. Strictly speaking, Han is the language of the Han nationality, the most numerous of the nationalities in China. Although some of China's minority nationalities have their own written languages, the most widely used is the Han; hence the word Chinese here actually means Han.

³Formerly known as the "National Language" or Mandarin, the most widely spoken form of Chinese which takes the Peking pronunciation as standard. Here, Chinese terms are spelt according to the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet described on pp. 48-52 in this book. The names of persons and places are still spelt according to Wade System.

Scheme for Simplifying Chinese Characters. This scheme falls into three parts. The first is a list of 230 simplified characters, which came into use when the scheme was published. The second is a list of 285 simplified characters, of which 95 came into use on a trial basis in June 1956. The third is a list of 54 simplified radicals.¹ Thirty characters derived from the radicals in this list also came into use on a trial basis, when the scheme was published. In all, the number of simplified characters now adopted by newspapers and magazines totals 355.

In the two years since the publication of the scheme, the simplified characters have been used in newspapers, magazines, textbooks and books in general, gaining a wide appeal. The broad mass of the people have found them useful and convenient. The simplification has rendered a great service, particularly to children and adults who have begun to learn the characters. When a school teacher in Honan told his pupils that the character 豐 (*feng* meaning abundant) in 豐收 (*fengshou* meaning abundant or good harvest) could be simplified into 丰 — three horizontal strokes and one vertical stroke — the pupils were so delighted that they clapped and cheered. A worker in Tientsin said he spent half a year in learning three characters: 盡 (*jin* meaning exhaust), 邊 (*bian* meaning margin), and 辦 (*ban* meaning do), but still could not remember them. When these characters were simplified into 尽, 边, 办, he could remember them right away. Comrade Li Feng-lien's² peasant brother

¹ A radical is a component part of a character common to a class of characters. For example, 江 (river), 浪 (waves), 湿 (wet) and 洗 (wash) all have the radical 氵 (water).

² Li Feng-lien is a nationally-known model worker.

wrote her from his home village saying that the peasants found difficulty in learning characters. Those which they most often used were complicated and difficult to write, such as 農 (*nong* meaning peasant), 穀 (*gu* meaning unhusked rice), 麵 (*mian* meaning flour), 麥 (*mai* meaning wheat), and 雜糧 (*zaliang* meaning miscellaneous grains). Comrade Li Feng-lien sent her brother a copy of the simplified characters which made him very happy. He replied that these new characters were so much easier to learn and he wished she had sent the book to him earlier.

It is clear that the simplified characters are easier to learn and to write than the characters in their original forms. It is, therefore, natural that the masses, including the workers, peasants, school pupils and school teachers, enthusiastically receive the simplified characters.

To intellectuals like us who, for decades, have been in constant touch with the characters, the memory of our early school-days has grown dim. Those were days when we were scolded, or even beaten on the palm of the hand by the teacher if we wrote the characters incorrectly. To us, therefore, it does not matter whether the characters are written in a complicated or a simple way. We are indifferent or even unaccustomed to the simplified characters, feeling rather unhappy about them. On this point, I agree with Mr. Li Chu-chen.¹ In an article in the *Language Reform Monthly*, Mr. Li Chu-chen wrote:

Every time the question of the reform of Chinese characters is brought up, somebody raises an objec-

¹ Li Chu-chen is a well-known industrialist and Minister of Light Industry.

tion, or even stubbornly opposes it for this or that reason. Some say that the characters are not difficult. I will say that such a person is like one who, as soon as his wounds are healed, forgets the pain he suffered. He forgets what he suffered when he first learned the *Three-Character Classics* and the *One-Thousand Characters*.¹ If he will but recall his bitter experience in learning characters, and consider the interests of the children and the illiterates by placing himself in their place, he will not dissent or object so strongly.

In the same article, Mr. Li further criticized those people who opposed simplification. He said that since the publication of the scheme, some people had declared that "they would become illiterates." Such regrets or misgivings are unnecessary. Many of the simplified characters are familiar to us. How can we become "illiterates"? Of course, some characters may be unfamiliar. But if we use a little mental effort, the difficulties will be overcome. In the interest of the broad mass of the working people and the millions of children, the intellectuals should not begrudge the little extra thinking involved.

Mr. Li likes the simplified forms of his own name, 李燭塵, 烛 (*chu*) for 燭 and 尘 (*chen*) for 塵. I think this is the correct way of looking at this question. Since the simplification of the characters is in the interest of the whole people, we intellectuals should actively support the work instead of remaining passive. We should consider the question of the language reform from the standpoint of the six hundred million people and not from personal habit or temporary convenience.

¹ Primers used in old-style Chinese schools.

In the early period of the rectification campaign, a number of rightists launched vicious attacks on the reform of the written language, alleging that the simplification of the Chinese characters was a failure and that the masses opposed it. They demanded that the State Council rescind its order and cancel the scheme for simplification. Of course, the rightists had an ulterior motive in their attack on the language reform. They used this as a pretext to assail the Party and the government. But it was also true that they opposed the language reform. The simplification of the characters is a good thing which is in the interest of the people. The rightists who opposed the people would naturally oppose it.

From the standpoint of the people, we should affirm definitely that simplification is a good thing, being in the interest of the people and being enthusiastically received by them. Trial use in the past two years has proved that the scheme is workable. It should be given emphatic support.

Does this mean that there is no defect in the work of simplification? Does this mean that none of the simplified characters listed in the scheme has been found unsuitable? Not at all. We must point out that the policy adopted in this simplification work is correct, as has been borne out by the experience of the past two years. But in practical work, thorough consideration has not been given in certain cases. Experience shows that a few simplified characters are either inappropriate in use or likely to result in ambiguity. In the case of these few characters which have been inappropriately simplified and proved defective in use, other simplified forms should be devised or the original forms retained.

In the Scheme for Simplifying Chinese Characters published by the State Council in January 1956, the 230 simplified characters in the first list have been put into use; no decision has yet been made on the 285 simplified characters in the second list and the 54 simplified radicals in the third list, and opinions on their use are still being solicited. As to the 230 simplified characters in the first list, should any of them be found inadvisable, necessary changes will be made. The Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language is now asking for suggestions from different quarters to help it carry out the revision work. You may send your suggestions, if any, to that committee. They will be given careful consideration, and further decision will be made.

At present, there exists a certain lack of consistency in the use of simplified characters. There are some who freely coin simplified characters which nobody except themselves can make out. This state of affairs is, of course, undesirable and should be properly controlled. A man may write any way he likes in a notebook or personal letter. That is his own business which concerns no one else. But a bulletin or notice is for all to see. It should be written in a standard form. Unrestrained use of simplified characters must be prevented especially in printed matter or typewritten documents. I hope that in the fields of journalism and publication and in secretarial work, attention will be paid to this aspect.

Some people put the blame on the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language for this lack of consistency in the use of simplified characters. Of course, we can criticize the committee for not having done enough publicity on the simplification and for allowing this confusion in the use of simplified characters. On

the other hand, however, we should admit that the process of coining simplified characters has been going on all the time. The simplified characters which we all accept today were first coined by a few people. This process will go on and develop; it cannot be stopped.

The history of Chinese writing tells us that from the time of the oracle bone inscriptions, a character may have had more than one form. If this is lack of consistency, then it has come down from ancient times. We may say that today the characters have many more forms than before. The main reason is that nowadays the mass of the people have begun to master the written language and urgently demand that the characters be reformed—a situation which never existed in any period of our history. The general tendency in the evolution of characters is towards simplification. As characters are difficult to write, the people have continually created many simplified alternative constructions. In spite of the fact that the former rulers refused to accept the simplified forms, calling them “wrong words” or “vulgar words,” these forms persisted among the people and had a wide appeal. We should say, therefore, that long before the establishment of the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language, the people had all along been doing the reforming. The committee’s work is only to collect and arrange in order what has been created by the people and, after thorough discussion, popularize the results.

We have also adopted a number of Chinese characters which have been simplified by the Japanese. It can be seen that the lack of consistency in the use of simplified characters has not been caused by the simplification work. Instead, the Scheme for Simplifying Chinese Characters

aims at bringing things into order. Only by taking active measures in simplification will the lack of consistency be gradually eradicated.

There is another question: Will the simplification adversely affect the spread of Chinese calligraphy and interfere with our appreciation of it? I don't think so. Calligraphy is an art; naturally it will not be restricted by the simplification. Simplified characters are used mainly in printing. We cannot compel everybody to write according to the scheme. Simplification, therefore, will not adversely affect the art of Chinese calligraphy. At the same time, we should welcome the writing of simplified characters by our calligraphers so that these simplified forms will appear more artistic.

(2)

The second task is the popularization of the common speech (*putonghua*). Among the Han people, a great diversity of dialects exists—the diversity being mainly in pronunciation. People of different areas, each speaking their own dialect, can hardly understand one another. People of the same province (for example, northern and southern Fukien; northern and southern Kiangsu) find it difficult to carry on conversation. This diversity in dialects has an unfavourable effect on the political, economic and cultural life of our people. From time to time, government workers are transferred from the north to the south, university students in the south are appointed to places in the north, and workers in the coastal cities go to the interior to reinforce their fellow-workers in industrial construction. Without a common speech, we

shall, to greater or less extent, meet with difficulties in our national construction. It often happens that the listener fails to understand an important report or an important class lecture due to the dialectal barrier. Radio and the cinema are powerful publicity instruments. But as our common speech has not yet been made universal, their effectiveness in the districts where only local dialects are spoken is inevitably limited. Since liberation, China has achieved a national unification unknown before. The people throughout the country are striving, under the leadership of the Communist Party and the People's Government, to attain the common goal of building socialism. They feel more and more the urgent need of a common language. It is, therefore, an important political task to popularize vigorously the common speech with the Peking pronunciation as the standard.

Progress has been made to a certain extent in the popularization of the common speech since the National Conference for Reforming the Chinese Written Language, held in October 1955. At the end of 1957, there were, among the language teachers of the primary, secondary and normal schools in the whole country, 721,000 who had been trained in the phonetics of the common speech. A large number of primary and secondary schools have begun to use the common speech in teaching. More than two million people listen to the radio programme on the teaching of phonetics in the common speech, sponsored by the Central People's Broadcasting Station. Chang Hsi-jo, Minister of Education, reported that on an inspection tour in Sian, he found many primary school pupils there speaking the common speech very well. This shows that if we attach importance to this work and popularize it earnestly, we shall meet with success. We hope that in a

comparatively short period the education departments in different places will be able to complete the training of the entire body of language teachers in the primary and secondary schools so that the primary and secondary schools in the country can all begin to teach and learn the common speech.

To popularize the common speech with Peking pronunciation as the standard does not mean that we want all the Han people to speak exactly like Peking people. This is impossible and unnecessary. Peking pronunciation is a standard to which we can orientate ourselves. In practical popularization and in teaching and learning, however, demands are different for different persons. For example, we make stricter demands of radio announcers, cinema and stage actors and actresses, and language teachers in normal schools. Not so of the people in general. For the middle-aged or older, it is not necessary to make even a general demand. Thus, obstruction to the popularization of the common speech will be reduced to a minimum and confidence and interest in learning it will be increased. Where shall the common speech be popularized? I think it should be done first in the schools, and vigorously among the children and the young people.

Popularization of the common speech has as its aim the removal of the barrier of the dialects. The answer to the question whether popularization of the common speech means prohibiting or abolishing the dialects is definitely "No!" Dialects will exist for a long time. They cannot be prohibited by administrative order, nor can they be abolished by artificial measures. In popularizing the common speech, distinctions should be made between old and young people; between the activities on a national scale and those of a local nature; between the present and

the future. There should be no generalization. On the other hand, those who can speak only the common speech should learn the local dialects so that they will be able to make close contact with the working people in the districts where only local dialects are spoken.

It is an immensely difficult task to unify the dialects of the six hundred million Han people. To make it a reality, long and tireless efforts are required. Just how long it will take will depend upon how we work and how communications, economy and culture develop. But if we keep on working in earnest, we shall certainly fulfil our task. We should have such confidence. I hope we will all do more publicity work to create an atmosphere favourable to the popularization of the common speech. We should also, from time to time, arrange oratorical contests in the common speech, and give encouragement to those students who speak it well, and to those teachers who teach it well. In short, we should try more ways and means in our publicity work, change social atmosphere to facilitate the popularization of the common speech.

(3)

The third task is to draw up and popularize the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet. It should be made clear at the outset that the scheme is to annotate the characters phonetically and to popularize the common speech. It is not to replace the Chinese characters. Its first function is to give the pronunciation of these characters.

Are characters difficult to learn? Is the phonetic alphabet necessary to help in learning them? On these

questions views still differ. Some say the phonetic alphabet is not easy, but that some foreign languages also are difficult. On this question, each nation has to judge by its own standard. Chinese characters annotated with the phonetic alphabet are, of course, easier to learn than without annotation. As to foreign languages, if we begin to study them only after we have mastered Chinese through decades of effort, we shall feel it more difficult to learn than Chinese. It is always more difficult to learn the language of another nation than to learn the mother tongue. Russian is rather difficult to learn, but the Russian people feel it is easier than English or German. The question of whether it is easy or difficult to learn the phonetic alphabet is entirely different from the question of whether it is easy or difficult to learn a foreign language. The two should not be confused. I think we should admit that Chinese characters are difficult to read and write and therefore difficult to remember. Not only children beginning to learn characters, but some adults who have studied many years still do not know a number of characters or may mispronounce them. Now we simplify the number of strokes of the characters on the one hand, and, on the other hand, annotate them with a phonetic alphabet. These measures have the purpose of lessening the difficulty of reading and writing so as to enable the great mass of the people to master them more easily. That the efficiency of teaching and learning characters can be raised by using a phonetic alphabet has been proved by the experience of the quick method of learning characters in the past, and the method of teaching *zhuyin zimu* (phonetic transcript) practised in the primary schools at present. I hope that after the National People's Congress has approved the Scheme for

a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet,¹ annotation of the characters can be adopted in the language textbooks for primary schools and the textbooks for eliminating illiteracy in the districts where Northern dialects are spoken. It is certain that great advantages will accrue to the teaching of characters in the primary schools and the work of eliminating illiteracy.

The second function of the scheme is to transcribe the common speech, serving as a useful means of teaching and learning the common speech. In learning the common speech, listening and repeating are not enough. One easily forgets. To attain good results, it is necessary to have a set of phonetic symbols which can be used to compile phonetic reading material and pronouncing dictionaries so that learners may refer to them to correct their pronunciation. In the past, the lack of a universal and relatively satisfactory phonetic method has been a great handicap to the popularization of the common speech. Pending the final decision on the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet, the system of *zhuyin zimu* will continue to be in use. Although the latter has been in existence for forty years and was popularized in primary schools by governments in the past, it has been forgotten by most of its students. Now only a few people know the phonetic transcript. In future, we shall adopt the Latin alphabet for the Chinese phonetic alphabet. Being in wide use in scientific and technological fields and in constant day-to-day usage, it will be easily remembered. The adoption of such an alphabet will, therefore, greatly facilitate the popularization of the common speech.

¹This scheme was later passed by the First National People's Congress at its fifth session on February 11, 1958.

The third function of the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet is to serve as a common basis on which the various minority nationalities in the country may create or reform their written languages. Of the nearly fifty nationalities in China, a large number still have no written language of their own. Some of them have written languages which need improvement. Among those nationalities having written languages, besides the Hans who have Han characters, there are the nationalities who use the Tibetan alphabet, Mongolian alphabet, Arabic alphabet, Korean Ŭnmun alphabet, or other kinds of alphabet. What kind of alphabet should be used as a basis when these minority nationalities create or reform their written languages? Can the Han characters be taken as a common basis for the written languages of the various nationalities? Such an attempt had been made, but it failed, proving that this was impractical. If each of the dozens of nationalities should adopt an alphabet of its own, it will hamper mutual learning and exchange of experience among them. It will also necessitate the making of different sets of printing, typing and telegraphic equipment which will adversely affect the development of culture and education of these minorities. Many nationalities have expressed the hope that they will adopt the same alphabet as the Han people to facilitate cultural exchange, the learning of the Han language and the adoption of Han terminology and technical terms.

A few years ago, indecision as to the kind of alphabet that should be adopted for the Han language had an adverse effect on the creation or reform of the written languages of some other nationalities. Now, about a score of nationalities in southwest China have created their own written languages based on the Latin alphabet. But they

do not feel assured because our scheme has not yet been finally decided. The Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet should, therefore, no longer be delayed, or it will affect the plan of other nationalities. Since it has been decided to use the Latin alphabet as the Chinese phonetic alphabet, we should decide on a principle: that in future when the other nationalities create or reform their written languages, they should in principle take the Latin alphabet as the basis, and as much uniformity as possible should be attained with the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet in the pronunciation and use of the alphabet. It can be foreseen that the formulation of the scheme will greatly help the creation or reform of the languages of the minority nationalities, and increase mutual learning and contacts among the various nationalities.

The fourth function of the scheme is to help foreigners to learn Chinese and thus to promote international cultural exchange. As China's position in international affairs is rising with each passing day, more and more people, and primarily the people of our fraternal socialist countries and the friendly Asian and African countries, desire to learn Chinese. The chief difficulty they encounter is in learning the characters, and some feel that the task is almost hopeless. Now that we have a scheme for a phonetic alphabet, we can use this alphabet to compile textbooks, dictionaries and other reading materials for the people of other countries to learn Chinese. This will help them overcome difficulties. The special class for foreign students in Peking University has adopted the first draft of the scheme for a phonetic alphabet in teaching and learning, and has produced good results, showing that the scheme has its merits in this respect, and is far superior to the old method of learning the Han characters

and the early method of *zhuyin zimu* (phonetic transcript). When our foreign friends have mastered our spoken language, they can pursue their studies further in characters and written language by using this alphabet as a means of phonetic annotation. They will find it much easier than without a phonetic alphabet. This is the scheme's contribution to the promotion of international cultural exchange.

The scheme also has other uses. For example, it can be used to transliterate the names of foreign persons and places and scientific and technological terms and the names of Chinese persons and places in documents, books and newspapers intended for foreign readers, and to compile indices, etc.

It is not an exaggeration to say that, considering the uses we have listed, the formulation of the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet is a great event in the cultural life of the Chinese people.

Chinese written language has a history of roughly 3,500 years, counting from the time of the oracle bone inscriptions. Over this long span of time, the characters have undergone many changes: forms have been simplified, new characters added, and a part of the old characters have disappeared. The early characters were ideographs. Later there were phonetic ideographs — the form we mostly use today, but due to the gradual changes in pronunciation over the ages, the sound radicals of many phonetic ideographs lost their function of indicating the sound. For example, the character 江 (now pronounced “jiang,” meaning “river”) and the character 河 (now pronounced “he,” also meaning “river”) are no longer pronounced “gong” and “ke” as the ancients pronounced them. As Lu Hsun said, the characters “have become

ideographs which no longer resemble the forms, or phonetic ideographs which no longer indicate the sound.”

Since it is difficult to denote the pronunciation from the appearance of the characters, other methods had to be found. One of them is *zhiyin* (直音) which is to give pronunciation of a character by using another character of the same sound; in other words, the homophones mutually indicate the sound. This method often meets with difficulty. Another character of the same sound may not be found; or, if found, it may be an unfamiliar character which does not help in denoting the sound. Another method is *fanqie* (反切) which is phonetic transcription. In this method, the pronunciation of a character is denoted by means of two characters, the first with the same consonant and the second with the same vowel as the character annotated. *Fanqie* may be said to be the beginning of phonetics. However, as the pronunciation in different areas in China varies widely, the same two characters may be pronounced quite differently from one area to another. This further increases the possibility of divergence or error in either *zhiyin* or *fanqie*. Moreover, in either method, the prerequisite is an adequate vocabulary, which beginners, children or adults can hardly possess.

After the Revolution of 1911, *zhuyin zimu* (注音字母), a system of phonetic transcript, was introduced. This was the first phonetic alphabet formally promulgated by the government and popularized in the primary and secondary schools. This phonetic transcript made a certain contribution to the teaching and learning of characters and the standardization of pronunciation. In spite of its shortcomings, in the light of our present knowledge (its obvious inadequacy, compared with the Latin

alphabet, to serve as a common basis for the languages of the minority nationalities or as a means of promoting international cultural exchange), we should acknowledge its historical achievement. Also, *zhuyin zimu* played the role of a pioneer in the forty-year-old movement for a phonetic alphabet. One of the main functions of the present Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet is to annotate pronunciation of characters. In this respect, the scheme is a successor to the traditions of *zhiyin*, *fanqie* and *zhuyin zimu* and has been built on their foundations.

Another aspect in the historical development of the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet is that the adoption of the Latin alphabet to annotate the pronunciation of characters dates back 350 years ago. In 1605, Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit missionary in China, used the Latin alphabet to annotate the pronunciation of Chinese characters. In 1625, Nicolas Trigault, a French missionary, published a book entitled 西儒耳目資 *Xi Ru Er Mu Zi* (*A Guide for Western Scholars*) in which he described his method of annotating the pronunciation of characters with the Latin alphabet. They had their purpose in serving the needs of foreigners in the study of the Chinese spoken and written language. After the Opium War, more and more businessmen and missionaries came to China from the imperialist countries. To facilitate their learning of the Chinese language or to propagate their religion, they drew up various systems for a Chinese phonetic alphabet. Of these, the most popular were the Post Office System and the Wade System.¹ Systems for

¹ Thomas Francis Wade, an Englishman, drew up a phonetic alphabet for the Chinese language in 1867 which has been widely, almost generally, used by foreigners in transcribing Chinese, and is still in current use.

phonetic alphabets for the various local dialects were also drawn up, of which the alphabet for the southern Fukien vernacular (the phonetic system for Latinized Amoy dialect) had the largest influence. A great number of books were published using this system, which, as we know, is still understood by many people in and around Amoy, and still used by many in corresponding with their relatives living abroad. From 1892 onwards with the publication of *Qieyin Xinzi* 切音新字 (New Phonetic Alphabet) by Lu Chuang-chang, a considerable number of patriotic people actively sponsored the reform of the written language and introduced various phonetic systems. In 1926, Chien Hsuan-tung, Li Chin-hsi and Chao Yuan-jen (Y. R. Chao) drew up the Gwoyeu Romatzyh (National Romanized Writing) which was published by the then Ta Hsueh Yuan (Ministry of Education and Research) at Nanking in 1928. In 1931 appeared the Latinxua Sin Wenz (New Latinized Writing) framed by Chu Chiu-pai and Wu Yu-chang. The two last-mentioned systems were relatively complete systems of Latinized phonetic alphabets for the Chinese language devised by the Chinese themselves. In discussing the present scheme for a phonetic alphabet, we must acknowledge their contributions.

The Draft Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet as now published has been developed on the basis of the old *zhiyin*, *fanqie* and various other phonetic systems. As far as the adoption of a Latin alphabet is concerned, its history may be traced back 350 years. The scheme may be said to be a summing-up of the sixty years' experience of the Chinese people in their efforts to devise a phonetic alphabet. It is really more comprehensive than any of the Latinized phonetic alphabets which existed in the past or

are still in current use. In February 1956, the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language published the first draft scheme for a phonetic alphabet. Wide discussion of this scheme by people in different walks of life was organized by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and by the committees of the local people's political consultative conferences. It was again and again examined, discussed and revised by the Committee for Examining and Revising the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet set up under the State Council. Having been considered at an enlarged meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the C.P.P.C.C. in October 1957, it was passed at the 60th Plenary Session of the State Council on November 1 of the same year. The State Council also decided to publish the scheme in the newspapers and prepared to submit it to the next session of the National People's Congress for discussion and approval. It is not difficult to see that the government takes a responsible and careful attitude towards this question. It has never been, as the rightist Chang Po-chun alleged, a matter carried through by a handful of persons behind closed doors and "discussed only by a few enthusiasts."

Will the adoption of the Latin alphabet in the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet be harmful to the patriotism of the Chinese people? Can we not devise an alphabet ourselves or continue to use the *zhuyin zimu* (phonetic transcript)? Beginning from 1952, the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language spent nearly three years in an attempt to create an alphabet—including the revision of the *zhuyin zimu*. The attempt had to be given up as no satisfactory result could be obtained. The Latin alphabet was then adopted.

At present, more than sixty countries use the Latin alphabet as symbols for writing, including Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Albania, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Viet Nam, Indonesia and three Union members of the U.S.S.R. — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In adopting the Latin alphabet, these countries made necessary adjustments and improvements to suit the needs of their own national languages. So, the Latin alphabet has become each nation's own alphabet. In another respect, we can say that the Latin alphabet is a set of symbols of international usage, and no country can claim it as its own. We cannot say that Frenchmen use the English alphabet any more than we can say that Englishmen use the French alphabet. We can say only that Frenchmen use the French alphabet and the Englishmen use the English alphabet. Likewise, when we adopt the Latin alphabet, in which we make necessary adjustments to suit the needs of the Chinese language, it becomes the phonetic alphabet of our language and is no longer the alphabet of ancient Latin, still less the alphabet of any foreign country. An alphabet is a means of transcribing pronunciation. We make it serve us just as we make trains, steamships, automobiles and aeroplanes serve us. (And, from the point of origin, all these are imported.) It is also like using Arabic numerals for counting and calculating, the Gregorian calendar and the Christian era for recording the year, kilometres for measuring distance, and kilogrammes for measuring weight. The adoption of the Latin alphabet will, therefore, not be harmful to the patriotism of our people.

One remaining question with which we are all much concerned is the future of Chinese characters. We all

agree that as a written record they have made indelible contributions to history. As to whether or not they will remain permanently unchanged, whether they will change on the basis of their original forms, or whether they will be replaced by a phonetic language—Latin letters or other phonetic scripts—we need not draw a hasty conclusion. Any language is, however, subject to change, as evidenced by the changes of the characters in the past. There will be changes in future. We can also say that there will be a day when the languages—written and spoken—of the different peoples of the world will gradually be blended into one. The trend in the development of the languages of mankind is that they gradually approach one another until, at long last, there will be no wide difference. This is a good and not a bad anticipation. As to what scheme will be adopted, it is too early to conjecture. On the question of the future of the Chinese language, there may be various views. We can bring them out for discussion and debate. I shall not dwell upon it any further since it does not fall within the scope of the task of the language reform.

What has been described in the foregoing has to do with the three tasks in the current work of the reform of the written language which the government has been carrying out. We hope this work will receive the support of all. Language reform is a vital matter concerning the people of the whole country, on which the government takes well-considered measures. We are ready to hear the views of people in all walks of life so that we may collect useful suggestions and strive together to make this work a success. Any shortcoming will be corrected as soon as it is discovered—this is the policy of the Party and the government in doing any kind of

work, and so with the work of the language reform. In the past, our publicity work on language reform was unsatisfactory. Many people did not understand, or were confused about the question. We hope that all will join in the publicity work to remove the misunderstanding and will render active support and help to push ahead and not hold back this task. We hope that by so doing the Chinese written language will be steadily and vigorously reformed to enable the six hundred million Chinese people to shake off their backward cultural state and to achieve greater, faster, better and more economical results in building socialism.