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**A CULTURAL HEIRLOOM DEMOLISHED –
CONTEMPLATING THE FUTURE OF THE CHINESE SCRIPT**
被糟蹋了的文化瑰寶——中華文字如何去從？*

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Owing perhaps to predictions of the imminent rise of China, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a “China fervor” is taking the world by storm: worldwide, the rush is on to acquire Chinese language and learn Chinese characters, a trend that shows no signs of abating. But in the rush to master the simplified characters in use in mainland China, how many learners are genuinely aware that what they are acquiring is but the carcass of a cultural heirloom, an empty shell of a script, the tragic result of a systematic dismantling of Chinese folkways by cultural agents of the Chinese Communist Party?

The onset of this movement is documented in Yuzhang Wu’s “On Simplifying the Chinese Script”, published in the April 7, 1955 issue of the *People’s Daily*:

Chinese block characters are difficult to learn, difficult to write, and difficult to remember... The difficulty of Chinese character acquisition has led to primary and secondary school education being longer than is necessary. Furthermore, high school and college graduates are still found to be misreading, miswriting, and misusing characters—the difficulties presented by character instruction stand in the way of government efforts to promote education and build a more civilized society...

True, China’s large illiterate masses have been a problem throughout history, and any increase in literacy rate is likely to be in the national interest. But is the difficulty of writing and remembering characters really foremost among the causes of illiteracy? Can the difficulty of character instruction really be linked to the failure to promote education and civilized society? Even if we were to acknowledge the fact that block characters are structurally complex, the solution lies not in altering the characters themselves, but in devising more creative methods of instruction. To ignore the more obvious aspect of instruction methodology and push instead to radically alter the form of characters in use for thousands of years is, to say the least, preposterous.

Wu (1955) writes:

In as early as 1940, we were instructed by Chairman Mao to bring a degree of reform to the Chinese script (see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. II, p. 701). In recent years, the Chairman has made clear that Chinese script reform is to follow the worldwide trend of romanized spelling. In other words, Chinese characters need to be recast as alphabetized words... But before full romanization is achieved, we must first seek to inventory and simplify the block characters currently in use, so as to remove impediments to reading, writing and language instruction. The simplification of block characters is the first step to Chinese language reform.

We can see from this passage that the promotion of simplified characters was carried out in part to pander to Chairman Mao’s personal preferences—a politically-motivated maneuver that is hardly justifiable. The end result, the full

* From *Asia Times Online* <www.atChinese.com>, April 3, 2006.

romanization of the Chinese script, would add insult to injury to the Chinese orthographic tradition.

In 1952, a “Chinese Script Reform Committee” was formed, charged with the research and design of simplified characters, and the formulation of a Chinese romanization system. In 1955, the committee published a “Chinese Character Simplification Scheme”, which included an explanatory text and three tables: “Table of 798 Simplified Characters”, “Table of 400 Obsolete Character Variants”, and “Table of Simplified Radicals in Handwritten Form”. Over a thousand Chinese characters were to undergo simplification according to the new scheme: the characters for “beard” (鬚鬚) would be simplified to the nonsense string 胡須 “barbarian must”; “noodles” (麵) would now share a character (面) with “face”; and the character for “clown” (丑) is now identical to the word for “ugly”.

As for phasing out traditional character variants, Wu (1955) writes that “those traditional characters to be phased out will be treated as archaic script, to be used only in specialized contexts, in reference to ancient works. It may be worthwhile to compile a *Dictionary of Archaic Characters* for the use of specialists in classical literature”. Orthography is an important link in the transmission of culture. Granted, over time scripts may become obsolete, just as old technologies are replaced by newer ones, and as this happens, the older, more dated versions are relegated to reference dictionaries and museums—repositories to which only specialists have access. But gradual elimination over time is different from what is being proposed here by Wu, which involves “the total elimination of traditional characters for which a simplified character is in place, or for which a different character variant has been selected as standard”, and the compulsory “simplification of handwritten character radicals”. Let us explore this issue further using the six principles of character formation.

Chinese characters are constructed using six design principles: pictographic representation, ideographic representation, ideographic compounding, phono-semantic compounding, metaphorical extension and phonetic loan—the “six principles” of character formation (六書) that are held in highest regard. As such, any alterations to existing form, including the elimination of character variants and the simplification of radicals, must be in compliance with the “six principles” —for as we know, with the Chinese script, the addition or omission of a stroke in any character will easily result in misrepresentation. In the dispute over whether to adopt the artificially mandated changes to the Chinese writing system, we should be considering not the issue of whether the changes are practical, but rather whether it is right or wrong.

Wu (1955) goes on to say that:

The masses have had a history of simplifying the strokes of block characters to make writing less tedious—simplified characters of this nature are an unspoken norm, and are in wide circulation... While the ruling classes of each period have sought to promote “standard” characters and challenge the legality of simplified characters, the general populace has been more accepting of character simplification, as we can see from the large number of simplified characters in use in informal correspondences. Which is why we now choose to designate as standard the characters of simplified form that have long been used by the masses and loved by the masses, and use these simplified characters in publishing and print media, so as to make the task of learning and writing the Chinese script less daunting—this is clearly in the interest of the people.

We do use non-standard character variants and simplified characters in communications of an informal nature, but their scope is limited to messages and

correspondences between close friends and family—to use such characters in formal writing would be considered inappropriate. Promoting simplified characters to formal status would be the equivalent of writing a college thesis using the abbreviated symbols and emoticons of cellphone text messaging.

Wu (1955) claims that “while we aim to restrict the use of traditional characters, they will continue to be preserved as an archaic script, to be used by those in higher education, research institutions, and academic publishing”. But this is tantamount to reinforcing social class divisions: the upper classes will be able to read both traditional and simplified characters, whereas the working class has but an understanding of simplified characters. Not only does this create unfairness in society, it also leads to a dilemma for foreign learners and overseas Chinese who wish to master the Chinese language: should they have to align themselves with either the upper class or the working class before they can decide what type of script to learn? Should these non-native learners choose to become academics or researchers who work with traditional characters, would they then become less capable of reading popular fiction? Would those who opt for the script of the masses be at a loss when it comes to reading texts of a more serious nature?

The Chinese communist master plan of half a century ago was to adopt simplified characters as a transitional measure—a compromise—before finally moving on to the ultimate goal of script reform: the full romanization of Chinese orthography. In other words, abolish one of the most unique writing systems in the world, so that the Chinese language can “follow the worldwide trend of romanized spelling”. The first step was the design of a Chinese romanization system: *Hanyu Pinyin*. Between 1955 and 1957, the People’s Republic of China’s Script Reform Committee devised the *Hanyu Pinyin* romanization for Modern Standard Chinese, which was approved by the National People’s Congress in 1958 and registered with the International Standards Organization (Document ISO 7098) in 1982.

To quote Wu (1955), “After the Chinese script is romanized, exemplary works of classical literature will eventually be converted into romanized form. That way, the Chinese classics will be understood by those who are illiterate, and those who may be literate but do not understand the literary language.” To evaluate the validity of this claim, let us look at the following story by Yuen-ren Chao, “Tale of the Lion-eating Poet”:

CHARACTER	PINYIN	ENGLISH
石室詩士施氏， 嗜獅， 誓食十獅。 氏時時適市視獅。 十時， 適十獅適市。 是時， 適施氏適市。 氏視是十獅， 恃矢勢， 使是十獅逝世。 氏拾是十獅屍， 適石室。 石室濕， 氏使侍拭石室。 石室拭，	Shíshì shīshì Shī-Shì, shì shī, shì shí shí shī. Shì shíshí shì shì shì shī. Shí shí, shì shí shī shì shì. Shì shí, shì Shī-Shì shì shì. Shì shì shì shí shī, shì shǐ shì, shǐ shì shí shī shìshì. Shì shí shì shí shī shī, shì shíshì. Shíshì shī, Shì shǐ shì shì shíshì. Shíshì shì, Shì shǐ shìshí shì shí shī.	Poet Shi, who lived in a stone den, loved to eat lions, and vowed to eat ten lions. He often went to the market to survey lions. At ten o'clock, ten lions happened to appear at the market. At this time, Mr. Shi happened to arrive at the market. He looked at those ten lions, then, with the use of arrows, caused those ten lions to die. He bundled up the ten lion carcasses and went to the stone den. The stone den was damp. He asked his servant to wipe the stone den. After the stone den was wiped dry, he then tried to eat those ten lions.

氏始試食是十獅。 食時， 始識是十獅， 實十石獅屍。 試釋是事。	Shí shí, shǐ shí shì shí shī, shí shí shí shī shī. Shì shì shì shì.	When he was eating, he realized that those ten lions were in fact ten stone lion carcasses. Try explaining that!
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As we can see from the table above, whereas the plot is transparent in the character version of the story, meaning is harder to come by in the romanized version, which consists of repetitive strings of the syllable “shi”. The futility of romanization is clear to see; using romanized letters to transcribe Classical Chinese would be unthinkable! Difficult as it is, with the use of block characters, we can at least guess at the meaning of the text through character form, but if the text is transliterated, all we are left with is an endless drone—how could this possibly help those with no knowledge of literary Chinese to understand classical texts?

When we speak of cultural heritage, we are referring not only to the content of classical literary works—the script with which these works are recorded counts also as cultural inheritance. It is in this way that Chinese characters are different from western alphabets, whose purpose is solely to record sound; each block character is a picture, a self-contained world rich in meaning. The Chinese communists however have chosen to corrupt this thousand-year-old tool used by the Chinese people for recording thought, speech and action, and replace it with a set of phony-looking pseudo-characters. Many caught in the recent “China fervor” fail to realize that what they are devoting their efforts to learning is but the deformed carcass of a once glorious script.

Earlier it was argued that traditional characters were “difficult to write and difficult to remember”, which, even if true, should be solved not by altering character form, but by updating instruction methodology. The prevalence of character misuse is another concern, due partly to large-scale homophony in the Chinese character set, but made worse by the widespread use of computer input methods. For Chinese romanization, much like the phonetic symbols *Zhuyin Fuhao*, were designed to be used only as a transcription aid in the teaching of beginner-level Chinese, and not for computer input. Repackaged as a computer input method, convenient though it may seem at first, with time the user will find it increasingly difficult to remember how to write characters once they are away from the computer screen—which is why it is important to have at our disposal an input method that is convenient yet at the same time reinforces our memory of character form. The *Hanzi Shuwei Gongju* (Chinese Character Digital Tools), developed by Swiss-based Indonesian-Chinese Ch’iang-kuo Chou out of the Array input method for traditional Chinese bundled with Microsoft Windows, is one such input method—not only can it prevent character memory loss from lack of handwriting practice due to long-term use of word processing (the user would not be able to input a character that he/she cannot write—memory of stroke order is required for the input of each character), it also allows for instant character lookup from print and electronic dictionaries. Its ease of use in the search for a particular character out of hundreds, thousands or millions, be it huge lists of names or pages of text, makes it an especially effective and user-friendly tool*.

The major flaw of character simplification is that it is seeking to transform a script based on six time-honored principles of character formation into a tool for phonetic transcription, much like the letters of the Roman alphabet. Not only is this embarrassingly inappropriate, it is also utter destruction of a precious cultural heritage,

putting an end to the art of calligraphy, depriving each character of its artistic value and robbing it of the meaning embedded within its form. It is a cultural scam, deceiving non-Chinese learners who do not know any better, and manipulating native Chinese into butchering an art form that is the distillation of thousands of years of ancestral wisdom.

Choosing to go the route of character simplification is cultural suicide—not only will China bring harm to itself, it will drag other Chinese-speaking societies down with it. Mongolia is a nation that once went down the path of romanization, but is now working hard to restore its ancestral script. Half a century on, can the Chinese of today bear to sit idly by as language policy continues down this erroneous path?

NOTES:

* The Array Input Method (IME), developed by Taipei-based Ming-teh Liao, encodes character sub-radicals as coordinates on a computer keyboard (subradicals are not the same as radicals, although there is obviously overlap between the two). The coordinates serve to rank each character, giving the character set a sequence much like the alphabetical order found in a European language index. And as each block character is issued a unique identification code, this IME does away with the tediousness and disorderliness of character lookup in traditional print dictionaries. Furthermore, when applied to mobile text messaging, each character can be called up using two to eight keystrokes, and the 2,700 most commonly-used characters require no more than three keystrokes—a remarkable achievement that ought to be applauded by Chinese worldwide!

中文原文

被糟蹋了的文化瑰寶：中華文字如何去從？

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或許受到中國崛起論的鼓舞，21世紀初始，國際上掀起波濤洶湧的中國熱。一股學習漢語、漢字的熱切企圖有如燎原星火，一發不可收拾。然而有多少學習中國大陸簡體漢字的人曾經意識到，他們汲汲所學其實是一堆文字殘骸？又有多少人知曉，大陸上通行這些被肢解後的文字屍體是共產黨御用文人踐踏文化瑰寶的慘澹結果？

1955年4月7日人民日報刊出吳玉章一篇“關於漢字簡化問題”的文字。吳文指出“…由於漢字在學習、書寫和記憶方面的艱難…中小學所占年數比較長，主要原因是由於學習文字所需要的時間佔得太多了。而且就在中學和大學畢業以後，很多人仍然要常常讀錯字、寫錯字，講錯字…漢字教學上的困難直接影響到我國教育的普及和人民文化水準的提高…”

中國歷代有廣大的文盲群眾，識字率能夠提高，自然是國家之福。然而漢字的難寫、難記絕不是文盲眾多的第一原因，而影響到教育普及與文化水準，不必然是漢字教學困難所致。即便是漢字本身的難度應受撻伐，也不應在文字本身下手，該考量的是，如何運用諸多彈性可行的教學方法教導學子。不研發適當的教學法而大費周章地對數千年流傳下來的文字進行革命，令人匪夷所思。

吳玉章指出，“…早在1940年，毛主席就指示我們：文字必須在一定條件下加以改革（毛澤東選集第二卷701頁）。近年來，毛主席更進一步指出了中國文字改革要走世界文字共同的拼音方向。這就是說必須把漢字逐漸改變成爲拼音文字。…在漢字拼音化以前，首先適當地整理和簡化現在的漢字，使它儘可能減少在教學、閱讀、書寫和使用上的困難，就有迫切的需要。漢字的簡化是漢字改革的第一步。”這段話說明，簡化漢字的部份原因是以迎合毛澤東的個人意志爲依歸，在理由薄弱，實在看不出必要性的情況下，以政治手段強力干預的結果。而將漢字拼音化的企圖，豈只是對中華文字巨大的褻瀆！

1952年成立的“中國文字改革委員會”專事研究、整理簡化漢字和擬定拼音文字方案。首先推出“漢字簡化方案草案”，內容包括總說明，及三個表：“798個漢字簡化表”、“擬廢除的400個異體字表”以及“漢字偏旁手寫簡化表”等。實行此一方案，可以簡化一千多個較常用的漢字。根據簡化表，“胡須”代表男人臉上的粗毛，人的顏“面”成了可以下鍋的吃食，而帶給人們歡樂的丑角又與美“丑”何干？

在廢字的議題上，吳玉章寫道：“…被廢除的繁體字應做爲古字，僅在翻譯古書等特殊場合使用。而且將來可以考慮編一種『古字典』，專門搜集這種古字，以供研究古書的人參考。”文字是文化傳承的重要工具，經長時間淘洗，某些物品、

技術… 逐漸流失，某些字詞勢必隨之消逝。這些不再存在的字、詞或許只能在大辭典、博物館裡尋得，也只有專門人員才接觸得到，然而“已經有了簡體或在同字異體中已經選定了一個的字，我們建議把原來的字一律廢除”的說法，以及“漢字偏旁手寫簡化表”都必須與中華文字形成的六個規則一併討論。

“象形、指事、會意、形聲、轉注、假借”六書是讓歷代世人驚嘆的漢字形成原則。同字異體的汰選與偏旁的簡化均須無條件地接受六書規律的檢驗。以此為據，漢字的多一撇少一劃都屬錯別字，任何人為、蓄意的文字更動已不再是可行與不可行的爭議，而是一項明顯的錯誤。

吳玉章又言：“很久以來，人民群眾就創造了許多筆劃簡化、便於書寫的簡體字，約定俗成，在民間已普遍流行。… 歷代的統治階級，一向不承認簡體字的合法地位，提倡所謂“正字”，但是廣大人民並不受其拘束，直到現在我們絕大多數人在書寫上都在使用簡體字。現在我們把這種群眾所創造而為群眾喜見樂用的簡體字作為正字，並且用來印刷書報，以減少學習和使用文字的困難，是完全符合人民利益的。”

平時人們的溝通書寫的確有些約定俗成的簡體字，這些簡字的運用通常存在於近親好友之間的書信傳遞或紙條通知，真正嚴肅書寫時，這些簡字就只是別字了。若是非要把簡字“扶正”，便如同以手機上的簡訊語言寫作論文那般。而“… 漢字（此處指正字）的使用範圍雖然將要相應縮小，但是仍將做為一種古典文字永久地保存下來，供高等學校、科學機關和專門書刊使用。”此一說法，明顯將人分出等級。某一階層的少數人看懂正體字，另一階層的多數人就只能看簡體字。這種措施不但對國民不公平，在一個國家通行兩種官方文字的情況下，意欲學習漢字的華僑或非華人，在學習之初是否要先驗明正身，先把自己歸類於哪一階層？而這些不在中國生長的學習者，如果是學術研究的專門人員是否將有較差的閱讀大眾小說的能力？一般出於各種不同理由的漢字學習者意欲閱讀嚴肅書刊時，是否注定就要面對讀不懂的挑戰？

按半個世紀前中共對文字處理的計劃，簡體字其實是文字改革的權宜與中繼，最終目的乃是將漢字拼音化。把人類史上絕無僅有的特殊文字徹底消滅，以便“走世界文字共同的拼音方向”是當初的謀算。漢語拼音是中共漢字拉丁化方案的第一步，1955 至 1957 年文字改革時，由文字改革委員會研究制定，做為漢字的一種普通話音標，1958 年的全國人民代表大會批准公佈該方案，並於 1982 年取得國際標準化組織 ISO 7098 號文件的認證許可。

“改用拼音文字之後，古代的優秀著作，可以逐步翻譯成為拼音文字。這樣可以使得現在不識字的人，以及雖然認字但讀不懂古書的人也能讀懂古書…”（吳玉章語）。在判斷這句話的真偽之前，吾人不妨先讀讀趙元任的“施氏食獅史”：

石室詩士施氏，嗜獅，誓食十獅。
氏時時適市視獅。
十時，適十獅適市。
是時，適施氏適市。
氏視是十獅，恃矢勢，使是十獅逝世。

氏拾是十獅屍，適石室。
石室濕，氏使侍拭石室。
石室拭，氏始試食是十獅尸。
食時，始識是十獅，實十石獅屍。
試釋是事。

這個小故事若以拼音寫出，全篇就只是個 shi 字。拼音不僅不適合文言文，根本就是荒謬一場。文言文有時光是讀過也無法了解其意，看到了漢字，至少有個忖度，全改成拼音，就只是嗡嗡的一片聲響，怎麼可能讓“雖然認字但讀不懂古書的人也能讀懂古書”？！

文化遺產不僅存在於古書裡，正體字本身即是文化遺產。中華文字不是西方字母，不能只是記音的符號。漢字的每個小方塊裡都有乾坤，都是一幅畫，都是富含意義的創作。中共把華人千百年來表達思言行的結晶，篡改成四不像的畸形撇捺，隨著這一波的中國熱，不知情的漢字學習者正孜孜矻矻地練習著漢字殘骸。

前文提及，所謂“漢字難寫、難記”的說法，即便屬實，需要改變的是教學法，而非文字本身。當今錯別字橫行的問題，除了因漢字有許多同音字而容易混淆之外，更是電腦普遍使用後所衍生的困擾。漢字拼音如同注音符號，最多只能讓不會說漢語的初學者做為音標使用；若當成電腦輸入法，一開始自有其方便性，時日一久，只要離開電腦必須手寫時，恐怕會面臨忘記怎麼寫字的尷尬。據此，一套使用方便又能讓人不忘記如何手寫的輸入法就有其必要性。旅居瑞士數十年，出生於印尼的華僑周強國先生，以原本就內建於 Word 裡的行列輸入法為基礎所研發的“漢字數位工具”，不但能夠防止因長期以電腦輸字而忘記如何徒手書寫（不會寫的字無法輸入，行列法趨使人必須牢記書寫的筆劃順序），更能從一般字典或電腦字典裡瞬間尋字；在上百、上千、上萬的名單覓找特定的姓名，或必須尋查某個字詞在某書的某頁時，運用這套文書工具的簡易與快速，令人嘆為觀止（註）。

簡體字的盲點在於，企圖將以六種方式組成的漢字，如同西方字母一般，轉變成只記錄發音的符號，結果是畫虎不成反類犬，不但嚴重糟蹋了中華文字瑰寶、扼殺書法藝術，使得漢字的美感盡失，了無意義，更是文化上的一大騙局，在不知情的非華人學習漢字的同時，華人竟渾然不覺自己是如何恣意操弄這經過多少日月錘鍊的絕世結晶。

簡體字的書寫是個自殺又需有陪葬的惡行，也曾把文字拼音化了的外蒙正在恢復他們原有的特殊字體，難道當今華人就要眼看著進行了半個世紀的錯誤繼續進行下去？

註：起始於台北廖明德先生的行列輸入法便是將字根以座標方式在鍵盤上加以編號（字根可能與部首重疊，卻不等於部首）。數字如同字母含有先後順序，次序編排則相當於西洋書籍內附索引的作用。當每個字有了自己所屬的“身分證字號”時，所有翻查中文字典的不快與混亂終將消失。此外，手機簡訊的操作，輸入最少兩個，最多八個數字便可完成一個字，最令人驚喜的是，2700 個最常使用的漢字只要三鍵即成。這項劃時代的創舉值得全體華人深入關切。

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