Several Issues We Should Pay Attention to When Discussing the Trend of Simplification of Chinese Characters

Weijie Liu[*]

School of Literature and Journalism, Weifang University, Weifang 261061, China

txlwj@126.com

[*]corresponding author

Abstract: For more than half a century, the trend of simplification of Chinese characters has been overemphasized. Although this is beneficial to the character reform, it can not hide the multiplication of Chinese characters. In fact, simplification mainly occurred during the evolution of typefaces, that is to say, among different typefaces, the late typeface was often much simplified than the typeface from which it came. The simplification phenomenon is not prominent in the same typeface, and simplification is mainly spontaneous rather than artificial. As more and more people have realized the defects of simplified Chinese characters, it is only a matter of time before traditional Chinese characters are restored. Of course, Chinese characters could be simplified, but they should only be simplified one-to-one, not many-to-one.

When it comes to the law of the development and evolution of Chinese characters, the trend of simplification is the most talked about and the most familiar to listeners. To prove that simplification is the most important rule in the development and evolution of Chinese characters is undoubtedly a strong theoretical support for the artificial simplification of Chinese characters. However, since the 1950s, the law of simplification has been overemphasized. On the contrary, other laws of the development of Chinese characters have been ignored. Simplification is only one of the many trends in the development of Chinese characters. Even in terms of simplification, it is very complicated in itself, and there are a number of issues that deserve our attention.

1. While The Chinese Characters Are Simplified, They Also Show A Very Obvious Phenomenon of Multiplication. In Many Cases, The Degree of Multiplication Is Much Higher Than Simplification.

In the development and evolution of Chinese characters, multiplication is a very prominent one.

The main way to multiply is to add strokes and components. The purpose of adding strokes is either to make the glyphic structure more symmetrical and beautiful (such as the character "保"), or to distinguish characters with similar shapes (such as the character "玉"); The addition of components is mainly for the accuracy of pronunciation and meaning. The character added a stroke or strokes is still the same with the original one, at most it can be regarded as the relationship between variant characters or ancient and modern characters; However, many new characters were generated by adding components. The ancient characters were few, a character unavoidably bore the duty of several words, so it is difficult to distinguish or determine which word it is. The accuracy of the language expression is greatly improved after the new characters are differentiated. The ancients, like the modern ones, did not like to write multi-structured characters with more strokes, but in order to express the language accurately, they did not care about their hard work, and this is different from the modern people.

The added components may indicate meaning or sound, while the differentiated characters are mainly phonograms and Associative compounds. We know that the majority of new characters produced in later generations are phonograms, and they once accounted for more than 90% of the total number of Chinese characters.[i] From the proportion of phonograms, we can see that the degree

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[i] The proportion of phonograms in current Chinese characters has been reduced because many phonograms are no longer

of multiplication is high.

Before the 1980s, some people did not recognize differentiation as multiplication. After entering the 1990s, the situation has completely changed. Differentiation is just achieved through multiplication, and it does not make sense to say that differentiation is not multiplication.

2. When Did the Simplification Occur?

As commentators often point out, after the Chinese characters changed from big seal to small seal, the form was greatly simplified, so did from small seal to official script and from official script to regular script. That's exactly right. This is a very important finding, and it tells us when simplification usually happened.

Obviously, simplification mainly occurred in the progress of the change of typefaces, that is to say, among different typefaces, the late typeface was often much simplified than the typeface from which it came. However, the regular script has been formed for more a thousand years.[ii] In such a long period of time, especially after the books were widely published, the regular script has been very stable and has changed very little, although many variants and vulgar characters have been produced. Hence, we are faced with some questions: In such a long period of time with the regular script as the standard script, why did governments of all ages use it so tirelessly without simplifying it, and why did the ancients write the traditional characters without being so impatient as we are? How did they manage to do that? How much space is there to simplify Chinese characters in the same typeface?

Surely, simplified Chinese characters have existed since ancient times, and many people have found examples from oracle-bone inscriptions. However, as many scholars have pointed out, Chinese characters of any age in ancient times have the distinction between elegant characters and vulgar characters[iii], but they are used in different occasions. The use of elegant and vulgar characters in ancient times was very strict. Vulgar characters could be used in unimportant occasions, but they were never used in formal occasions. In ancient times, those who did not use elegant characters were even punished by law, especially in the Han Dynasty. A large number of manuscripts of ancient scholars have now been photocopied and published, and if we compare their official copies with manuscripts, we will find that the vulgar characters in the manuscripts have become elegant ones. On the contrary, at present, the "standard character", which is based on vulgar characters, is used in all kinds of situations. which is actually not appropriate.

In April 1960, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China stated in the "*Instructions on Promoting Phonetic Literacy*", "Many of the existing Chinese characters must be further simplified, so that each character has as few as ten strokes or no more than ten strokes, with as simple and clear a rule as possible. The characters that are difficult to write, difficult to recognize, and easy to miswrite and misremember will be gradually eliminated." Until the 1990s, there were still people who advocated simplifying the characters with more than 15 strokes[1]. It seems that the simplification of Chinese characters could be endless. As mentioned above, simplification occurred mainly in the process of typeface evolution, and was not prominent in the same typeface. But from the 1950s, Chinese characters were just simplified blindly, and the characters with certain strokes were not allowed to exist. Facts have proven that this is not feasible. If we know what happened to the Second Chinese Character Simplification Scheme (Draft) ("second simplification "), which contains a small number of simplified characters, we will know that when "first simplification" was published, people felt no less strongly about it than "second simplification".

3. How Did Simplification Happen?

Looking at the development history of Chinese characters for thousands of years, we can clearly see that that the simplification of Chinese characters has been largely spontaneous, with little

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phonograms after simplification.

[ii] Even from the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, when the regular script has become very mature, it has been over 1400 years.

[iii] See Qiu Xigui's *Summary of Philology*.

artificial intervention. The only exception was the reorganization of small seal in the Qin dynasty, but that was more than two thousand years ago. Li Si and others collated small seal in order to unify the characters and put an end to the serious chaos of characters in the Warring States period. The main practice was to adopt and change the characters used before Qin united China. The Qin script has faithfully inherited the tradition of the Shang Dynasty and the Zhou Dynasty for more than one thousand years. Moreover, the later official script originated from small seal, the regular script was based on official script, and the regular script formed a strict self-contained system in more than one thousand years. The long-formed system is delicate, but fragile, and any small change could do a lot of damage to the system, which could take another thousand years to repair. Therefore, we should treasure and treat this system kindly.

But our simplification is artificial and is enforced by force. This is unlike any other time in history.[iv] Because the simplification mainly follows the principle of "follow the custom and follow the simplicity", a large number of vulgar characters are given the status of the upright character, and then these vulgar characters become the standard character, which is also different from any period in history.

While telling us what are standard characters and non-standard characters, relevant authorities have also told us the basis of current standard characters, that is, some character lists appeared after 1955, but they have not told us why standard characters should be standard and why nonstandard characters should not be standard. A compass is a tool for drawing circles, and a mold is for casting objects. Therefore, the characters 規 and 範 contain the meaning of correctness and standard. However, the word "standard" in "standard characters" has nothing to do with standard and correctness, it seems to have the meaning of stipulation only. Otherwise, why are the more justified traditional characters and variant characters nonstandard?

In fact, as long as it conforms to the development law of Chinese characters and does not cause fatal harm to the Chinese character system, Chinese characters might be artificially simplify. However, the simplification in the 1950s is not the case. Because the purpose of simplification has proven to be an unachievable hypothesis, all work around this hypothesis inevitably lose its basis. Although the purpose of simplification can be summarized into several, the main purpose is to pinyinize Chinese characters. Simplified characters are only an intermediate stage of the transition to pinyin, so simplifying characters from the beginning is only an expedient measure. In this way, it is hard to avoid the situation of simplification for simplification's sake, which makes it impossible to implement the formulated principles, and it is too hasty and not prudent to simplify Chinese characters.

China has always attached great importance to the problem of writing, and does not rule out human intervention in writing. It is mainly manifested in orthography (ancient orthography has completely different meanings from what people call "orthography" today). Of course, "orthographic" and "custom characters" are relative. They may be transformed into each other. However, the promotion of traditional characters to normal characters has always occurred naturally. Today, however, many common characters are forced to become orthographic

Conclusion

The truth is, we can never completely avoid traditional Chinese characters, no matter whether we appreciate or study calligraphy, or read ancient books, or study traditional culture. Even walking on the street, we often encounter traditional Chinese characters. In this way, whether we like it or not, we must know (at least some) traditional Chinese characters. But what we learnt from primary school is simplified character, any traditional character we meet may be new character. If we want to know its sound meaning, we have to relearn it. If what we learnt at the beginning is traditional Chinese, there is no need to waste time and energy. And when we learn traditional Chinese characters, the memory of the best time has been missed, and the effect is half the effort. This is against the original intention of simplifying Chinese characters, but the consequences must be borne

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[iv] Although there have been many movements of character reform since the late Qing Dynasty, they all ended in failure.

by us. Some people seem to think that mastering traditional Chinese characters is a very simple matter. The characters in Hong Kong and Taiwan are traditional characters, but people there have no problem reading simplified characters. The reason is that it is easy to understand simplified characters after mastering traditional characters, but difficult to understand traditional characters after simplified characters.

The idea of freedom of use of traditional and simplified characters has been put forward, which has been taken into account by those who support traditional characters and those who support simplified characters, but still met with opposition. Nowadays, simplified Chinese characters are widely used. Some people say it is impossible to restore traditional Chinese characters. In fact, there is no need to say so absolutely, nothing is impossible. After all, more and more people have realized the shortcomings of simplified words. If traditional Chinese characters shall be restored someday, the sooner the better. Although history cannot be assumed, it does not prevent us from trying to imagine how much trouble it would have saved if we had simplified Chinese characters one by one instead of many to one.

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