

History of the Formation of Baihua

Khasanova Feruza^a

Tashkent State University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: In the world of linguistics, today the study of language based on the principles of diachrony and synchrony is indicated by the urgent task. The history of the Chinese language has been almost forty centuries, and two branches of the same language, Wenyan and Baihua, experienced periods of gradual development. Changes associated with Chinese grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics cause a lot of controversy and are now of great practical importance. This article analyses in detail the dating of the history of the Chinese language Baihua. Early sources on Baihua are characterized, and the difference between the classical Wenyan language and Baihua is revealed.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the realm of world linguistics, the historical development of Wenyan is scrutinised from various perspectives. Presently, it is evident that there are challenges not only in examining the grammatical structure of Wenyan and Baihua languages but also in delving into their methodological, semantic-pragmatic, linguacultural, and cognitive-conceptual features. These investigations reveal a theoretical gap in the lexico-grammatical formation of Baihua and the diachronic aspects of its evolution.

The Chinese language's development and its periodization in Chinese linguistics have been explored in the works of renowned Chinese linguists such as Wang Li, Lu Shuxiang, Xu Shi-yi, Hu Zhuan, Jiang Lan-shen, Zhu Qing-ji, Hu Shi, among others. It is acknowledged that there are studies in the field of Chinese linguistics that are, to varying extents, connected to Baihua language and its history. Notable are the scholarly works of Wang Li (1980), Hu Ju-an (1983), Jiang Liansheng (2000), and Xu Shi-i (2015) dedicated to analysing this issue. Hu Ju-an, for instance, contends that the ancient Chinese language encompasses not only Wenyan but also Baihua. It is recognised that the criteria for periodizing Wenyan and Baihua languages differ among linguists. Some advocate relying on lexical-semantic criteria and identifying stages based on changes in word composition. Others, like Chiang

Lian-sheng in his monograph "Reflections on the Ancient Baihua," argue against dividing the history of the Chinese language into two periods: pre-"May 4th, 1919" movement – ancient Chinese, and post-"May 4th, 1919" movement – Modern Chinese.

In Lu Shuxiang's work, "Essays on Chinese Grammar," it is emphasised that linguistic changes of a particular period can be discerned in the language of written sources. Additionally, it is noted that during each period, there existed its own distinct language in circulation. Lu Shuxiang indicates that written monuments of the Wenyan language and those referred to as "白话文 baihuawen – used by the broad masses" were markedly different from each other.

2 ANALYSIS

It is evident that when periodizing Chinese, consideration should be given not only to Wenyan but also to the Baihua language. Similar to Wenyan, Baihua language plays a significant role in the periodization of ancient Chinese. It is crucial to recognise that in ancient China, the classical literary language of Wenyan and the language of daily communication, Baihua, coexisted for an extended period. Sources written in these languages exhibit radical differences lexically, grammatically, and

^a<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0839-3649>

stylistically, underscoring the importance of studying the periodization of Baihua language. Like any other language, the Baihua language (白话 *bái huà*) has a history of formation. According to information provided by the Chinese linguist Liu Shuxiang in the scientific work "Essay on the Grammar of the Chinese Language," by the time of the 周 Zhou and 秦 Qing dynasties in China, a gap had emerged between the written and spoken languages. Writers began to utilise the language of the 周 Zhou and 秦 Qing period. Consequently, the written classical language Wenyan (文言文 *wén yán wén*), also known as "古文 *gǔ wén*" (old written literary language), emerged, while the spoken language became known as 白话文 *bái huà wén* (common language). Other sinologists arrived at the same conclusion, giving rise to two branches of ancient Chinese: Wenyan and Baihua.

Ancient Classical Wenyan is a language with origins dating back to a spoken language predating the Qing Dynasty (221-206 BC). According to M.Kh. Makhmudkhodjaev, a founder of the Uzbek school of Chinese studies, "wenyan (文言) was used from the 7th-6th centuries BC until the May 4 movement of 1919 (approximately 27 centuries)." In the lexicosemantic analysis of the term 文言文 *wényánwén* (wenyan), meanings such as "an article written in a written language" are revealed. 言 *yán* denotes describing, characterising, writing, and reflecting, while another component 文 *wén* signifies work or article. 文言文 *wényánwén* can be translated as "writing an article in a written language," indicating that Wenyan is a written literary language.

According to S. Mustafayeva, Wenyan gradually distanced itself from the oral form after the Han Dynasty, especially during the Tang Dynasty when the gap between Wenyan and the spoken language of Baihua widened significantly. By the early twentieth century, after the May 4th Movement, Baihua replaced Wenyan as the dominant language.

Zh.T. Ziyamukhamedov acknowledges that Wenyan is the language of classical Chinese literature, prevailing in China until 1919. In modern times, it has been succeeded by Baihua, a modern written literary language (a national written language). Therefore, Wenyan is not only an ancient language but also a classical Chinese literary language. Chinese classical literature was predominantly written in Wenyan. Although Wenyan is an ancient language, it has not evolved in response to societal changes. Conversely, Baihua has adapted and improved with the times, serving as a language of

oral communication that reflects the social changes of its period. Baihua was officially recognised as a national language on May 4, 1919, and both Wenyan and Baihua used traditional hieroglyphs.

Wenyan and Baihua, ancient Chinese languages, differed significantly not only in application but also in lexical and grammatical features. According to M. V. Sofronov, Wenyan's linguistic foundation is ancient Chinese, while Baihua's linguistic foundation is medieval Chinese. This stems from Baihua existing only in oral form before the Middle Ages, and sources in this language emerged only during the Middle Ages. Despite coexisting in society, Wenyan and Baihua were markedly distinct. Various approaches exist regarding the periodization of ancient Chinese, some based on phonetic features and others on grammatical structure. However, Wenyan and Baihua's linguistic differences must be considered in the chronology of ancient Chinese language development.

Jian Lansheng, in his book "古代白话略" ("Description of Ancient Baihua"), emphasises the inseparable connection between ancient oral speech and the history of the Chinese language. The traditional division of Chinese language education into "ancient Chinese" and "modern Chinese" before the May 4th Movement overlooks the distinctions between Wenyan and Baihua, lacking clear distinctions in the historical stages of Chinese language development.

Chinese linguist 王力 Wang Li, in his book 汉语史稿 (History of the Chinese Language), divides the Chinese language into three periods: ancient, medieval, and modern. The ancient period spans from prehistoric times to the end of the 3rd century AD, the medieval period covers the 4th to the 12th century AD, and the modern Chinese period spans from the 12th century to the present day.

In his works, Xu Shi-i draws attention to the significant vocabulary differences between Wenyan and Baihua, suggesting that only Baihua should be considered in the chronology. He outlines the emergence and functioning of the Baihua language chronologically: 1. The period of the emergence of Baihua (露头) from the times of 秦 Qin and 汉 Han to the 唐 Tang period, i.e., from 207 BC to 618 AD. 2. The period of Baihua's development (发展) from 唐 Tang to the 明 Ming period, i.e., from 618 to 1368. 3. The late period of Baihua (成熟) covering the Ming to the end of 清 Qing times, i.e., from 1368 to 1911. Based on the analysis of literary sources written in the Baihua language from the 3rd century BC, including

Bianwen, Huaben, Pinghua, Jugongdiao, Jiaju, and novels, the history of this language can be divided into three periods:

The period of formation of the Baihua language - from 207 BC to 618 AD.

The period of development of the Baihua language - from 618 to 1368.

The period of perfection of the Baihua language - from 1368 to 1911.

Lexico-grammatical features of the Chinese Baihua language can be studied through texts of various genres such as Bianwen, Huaben, Pinghua, Jugongdiao, Jiaju, and novels. These sources are crucial for understanding the historical development, features, and differences of Baihua from the classical Wenyan language.

Ancient Baihua language sources, including oral folk art examples before the Tang Dynasty, reveal two notable features: difficulty in reading and a distinctive style characteristic of that period, sharply differing from the linguistic style of subsequent periods.

One significant monument in the Baihua language is the Dunhuang Bianwen, written during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Though elements of Wenyan are present, the yulu genre sources from this period show fewer borrowed words from Wenyan. Bianwens, narrated by monks following the Buddha's teachings, exhibit characteristics close to oral creativity, emphasizing their unique position in ancient Chinese Baihua.

Research on the history of the Baihua language identifies sources such as literary works recorded from oral speech (e.g., Donghuan Bianwen, Huaben, Pinghua of the Song Yuan era), precise sources recorded for specific needs (e.g., Neo-Confucian yulu, Buddhist yulu, diplomatic records), and Baihua materials in works written in Wenyan.

Analyzing the Pinghua genre "新编五代史平话" (The History of the Formation of the History of Five Dynasties) reveals features of the Baihua language. For example, early texts show a predominance of Wenyan elements, while later texts exhibit more frequent use of Baihua elements, indicating linguistic evolution.

The Baihua language's written monuments also include a translation of the sutra "太子須達拏經" ("Sutra about the Prince of Sudan"), providing insights into grammatical laws and linguistic changes in ancient Chinese.

During the Ming and Chin dynasties, Baihua sources played a crucial role in creating modern Chinese grammar. Works such as "水浒传" ("River Ponds"), "三国" ("Three Kingdoms"), "西游记" ("Journey to the West"), and "红楼梦" ("Dream in Red Terem") written in ancient Baihua reflected linguistic richness and dialectal diversity.

The widespread use of Baihua in medieval China was facilitated by Pinghua, Tang dynasty stories, and novels from the Ming and Chin dynasties. The transition from Wenyan to Baihua gained momentum after the May 4th Movement of 1919, marking the official recognition of Baihua as a national language.

Language reform during the May 4th Movement led to protests against Wenyan, and publications like "新青年" ("New Youth") played a pivotal role. Efforts were made to simplify characters, and alphabetic writing was introduced, but it proved ineffective due to the diversity of languages and dialects in China.

The vocabulary of the Baihua language was enriched through the creation of new words and borrowing from foreign languages. Periodicals like "无锡白话报" ("Wuxi Baihua Newspaper") and "北京白话报" (Beijing Baihua Newspaper) played a crucial role in the rapid dissemination of new foreign words.

Despite attempts at writing reform, including simplifying characters and introducing alphabetic writing, the transition to an alphabetic script was unsuccessful in China. The 拼音字母 alphabet aided in reading characters but didn't become an autonomous means of writing.

In conclusion, the study of ancient Baihua language sources provides valuable insights into the historical development and unique features of the language. These sources, spanning different genres and periods, offer a rich tapestry of linguistic evolution in China.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Several literary written sources in the Baihua language, dating back to the 3rd century BC, are acknowledged as ancient Baihua sources: Bianwen, Huaben, Pinghua, Yulu, Zhugongdiao, and Zazui. Based on the analysis of these sources, Chinese linguist Xu Shi-yi proposed a periodization for the formation and development of the Baihua language: the formation period (207 BC to 618 AD), the

development period (618 to 1368), the maturity period (1368 to 1911), and the period of official use (1911 to 1955). However, Xu Shi-yi did not include the "transitional period" from 1919 to 1955 when Baihua transitioned to Putonghua as the official literary language. In this dissertation, the term "transitional period" is introduced to Chinese linguistics, signifying a critical phase.

During the Song Dynasty, Baihua became the language of mass Chinese folk literature and later served as the foundation for written literature and the novel genre. By the 14th century, works like "水浒传" (River Pools), "三国" (The Kingdom), "西游记" (Journey to the West), and "红楼梦" (Dream in the Red Chamber) were written in Baihua, influencing the theoretical foundations of modern Chinese vocabulary and grammar. These novels favored polysyllabic lexical units and incorporated lexical items from specific dialects.

In the early 19th century, there was a gradual displacement of Wenyan by Baihua, with Baihua entering journalism at the end of the Qing dynasty. Baihua, being simpler and more understandable than Wenyan, began to dominate periodicals, leading to a period of diglossia - the coexistence of Wenyan and Baihua.

From the May 4th Movement in 1919 until the transition to Putonghua in 1955, a "buffer zone" or "transition period" emerged in Chinese linguistics, marked by significant reforms. Phonetic alphabets, simplification of written characters, the development of dialectology, and the introduction of punctuation in newspapers characterized this fruitful period. Baihua gained prominence in newspapers, magazines, and periodicals during this time.

Despite efforts to transition to alphabetic writing, including the creation of several alphabets, the idea proved ineffective as these systems couldn't capture the polyphonic nature of the Chinese language. The alphabets were used only to aid in reading hieroglyphs.

The enrichment of Baihua's vocabulary was influenced by the creation of new words, the introduction of terms in medicine, chemistry, and psychology through borrowing foreign words, and the translation of foreign scientific and literary sources.

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