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II

Romanization without Rome

China's Latin New Script and Soviet Central Asia

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In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in how things tie together rather than stay apart. The growing awareness of historically fluid, moveable boundaries has sparked new interpretations of Asia. Some of these connections are currently colliding in innovative ways. In search of a narrative that builds less on the indictment of any single state or past colonial power, humanists and social scientists turn their gaze to the inner and global dynamics of Asia—and even of multiple Asias. Still coming to light, the overlay of old and new linkages across its tight and vast regions has led critics to choose different bars of comparison. Some argue for Asia as a method (Takeuchi 2005; Frank 1988; Chen 2010), i.e., articulating its historical formation as not a resistance to the outside but an unfulfilled path. Others turn to the borderlands and divided continents as a window into proprietary histories (Perdue 2005; Struve 2004; Lewis and Wigen 1997). Meanwhile, there are still those who prefer the analysis of national entities writ large. In this last instance, China is garnering special attention as a possible new breed of global power that differs in kind from the European and American variety of recent centuries.

The Place of Language and the Language of Place

Amidst this vibrant conversation, drawing from disciplines as varied as geography, history, anthropology, and philosophy, language as a unit of analysis, however, is notably missing. Space and place have been the primary categories for analyzing the different scales of social and political expressivity across national and regional terrains. How language operates as a place-determinant, or index for spatialization, however, often trails behind these categories, where it functions largely as an example. Language is seen to reinforce, but not steer, the terms for thinking about places. In this way, many take language as a mode of representation or aspect of phenomenology that fits into an existing landscape. In the formative period of linguistic anthropology, for example, the adaptation of a people to their environment is reflected in, but not determined by, the particular development of their lexicon (Boas 1911). For the human geographer commenting on that tradition, words represent, “contain and intensify [a] feeling” that is already there, in contrast to demarcated spaces that can “hold emotions” as the physical threshold of their emergence (Tuan 1977, 107; cf. Massey 2009). Philosophers, distinct from both perspectives, are drawn more to the general conditions of linguistic being, or coming into being in language, than the specific histories that transform them into extended social processes (Tuan 1977, 1991; Casey 1993, 1997). Serving larger claims about the gains and perils of where one’s subjectivity is always already lodged, then, the significance of language has been made accessory to other assumptions about one’s subordination to, or affective investment in, a given place or setting. Taking either place or language as where the other happens, their material and institutional imbrication is often left out of purview.

Departing from these approaches, I suggest that learning how to use a language—spoken or written—entails a great many more social obstacles that only begin with the recognition of language as a given mode of perception or a common tool. To be born into a language, and to use it, are two different things. Knowing how a language is or should be written—and spoken—does not always coincide with the place where one belongs or disbelongs. When not met, such material or epistemological thresholds can disrupt or set the limits of geographical experiences and imagination, as is evident in how language has been—and is—at the heart of most inter-Asian connections. This is true whether one considers the eighth-century translation of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan, the rendering of the Qur’an from Arabic into Javanese

or Urdu in periods of religious and cultural expansion, the call to use old Chaghatai classics and heroic epics to reinvent a Turkic lingua franca for Central Asia in the nineteenth century, the lasting impact of British and Dutch colonial language policies on post-colonial India and Indonesia, the long-standing informal use of Malay as the language of trade, travel, and Islamization, written Chinese as the former lingua franca of East Asia and Vietnam, or the Japanese imperialization project in Korea and Taiwan—whereby the colonial subject is required not only to speak and write but also to “think” in the Japanese language. In all cases, it is not just the circumstance of translation that guides these processes. The degree and type of language access provides a pivotal lens through which to see anew the histories, textures, voluntary, and forced linkages that throw distant places into new relief.

Taking this as a point of departure, the following discussion has two objectives. First, it introduces an important layer of resolution to the picture of sounds and scripts against the generally accepted place-dominant narratives in current Sinophone studies. In recent years, references have been made to China’s historically complex landscape of languages and tongues in conversations about ethnic and cultural diversity within, or against, a professed Han-dominant—or pure Chinese—tradition. I have argued that this ecology is organized around various dissents and complicities among native speakers and languages, even though these dynamics are often misread as the exclusion of local tongues from national languages (Tsu 2010). Drawing attention to the fact that the simple polarization of the haves and the have-nots no longer serves our understanding of the evolving, contemporary terms of language, I introduced “literary governance” as a differentiating conceptual tool that accounts for, but is not limited to, the stakes of Sinocentrism versus anti-Sinocentrism (Tsu 2010). This move shifts away from the familiar post-colonial explanations and related critiques of centrism. It focuses on the underlying global reality that neither place nor language can be taken for granted as a reliable measure for engaging the other, as though one can be fixed while the other is put into motion.

This recognition poses a new set of questions about language and place and, implicitly, how language corresponds to geographical areas at all in what has been known as “Area Studies.” In particular, I construct an interconnected view of two script movements. One is Dunganese, a Sinitic language that has been written exclusively in non-Sinitic scripts. Insulated from the turmoil of mainland China’s language reforms in the twentieth century, but not from

that of the former Soviet Union, Dunganese is a Northern Sinitic dialect that is spoken by the descendants of the Chinese Muslims who fled the border into Russian Central Asia in the 1870s. As a Sino-Tibetan minority language in present day Kyrgyzstan, it had existed, like many Turkic dialects in the former Soviet Central Asia, largely as an oral tradition. It did not acquire a script system—in fact, several—until after the 1920s under the Soviet pursuit of a multinational and -lingual empire. The development of a writing system for Dunganese, and its subsequent literary output, charted a course of linguistic survival that persisted between the cracks of standardization and nationalization, on the one hand, and speech and writing, on the other. It has engendered literary themes and sensibilities that do not align with the prevailing paths in reading diasporic writers. As a case in point, the poetry of the Dunganese poet Iasyr Shivaza (1906–1988) that I examine is expressive of the geopolitics of socialist brotherhood, rather than a perennial stake in Chineseness.¹ To date, the centrality of Chineseness has been widely assumed in discussions of displaced Sinitic writers.

The unique development of Dunganese, moreover, was far from marginal in impact. Little discussed by scholars of China or Sinophone studies, Dunganese forged a crucial link, across the Soviet border, to one of the most contentious alphabetization experiments in twentieth century China—the Romanization of the Chinese language in the movement known as Latinxua Sin Wenz (Mair 1990; DeFrancis 1952). It raises new questions about the measure of the Sinophone—i.e., Chinese-language or -speaking—and its significance when generated out of the place, unbound to the Chinese-speaking world. Though the Dunganese' exemplarity is rare, its message is not singular. Amidst the plethora of bilingual and multiscriptive paths that are now coming into light and reshaping our criteria for understanding the scope of Chinese diaspora, language has emerged from these processes as a most crucial common denominator. It compels us to grasp the relationship between place and language in a more intertwined, precise way than ever before, urging us to consider it as a mutually invested process of the *language-becoming of place*, and *the place-becoming of language*. Language does not just fit into a place, as if the latter is a physical container, given in advance. Place grows from language too as a new origin, insofar as speakers of a language can reshape any sense of place through their linguistic presence and practice.

This consideration forms the second objective of my analysis. While the Sino-Islamic example carries an intrinsic value from both linguistic and

historical perspectives, its empirical specificity draws attention to a core interpretive issue. Linguistic survival is often assumed to be an instance of social precarity, a minoritarian act after the fact of nationalism, colonialism, or other occasions for redress. Reinforcing this view, conversations about language and diasporic culture often build on highly emotionally charged notions of deprivation like nostalgia and homelessness, with no further questions asked about the material constitution of those affective determinants. One consequence of this propensity is that the gain and privation of a rightful place like an ancestral home is writ large as a most visible token of loss. Meanwhile, the increasingly common circumstance of secondary and tertiary language acquisitions remains more or less unseen, even as they make and break places as people move from one host environment to the next for various reasons. Instead of accounting for this new reality, strategies for linguistic survival are interpreted almost exclusively in light of disempowerment or standardization, rather than their ongoing constructivist evolution. As language changes hands and place, it becomes something one has to repeatedly earn and create, rather than own. The following analysis of sounds and scripts, then, shifts the focus from an identity-driven pathos to the structuring power of linguistic materiality, in the very writing systems that embody both fixity and change.

The Latinization of Chinese

The fact that during the great Muslim rebellion of the 1870s thousands of Dungan refugees fled from the Gansu Corridor into Russian Central Asia was filed away in my mind as a minor bit of information when I first learned about it long ago . . . Chinese and Western scholars have long been battling the nonsense that Chinese characters are pictographic or ideographic and that the language can only be written with the traditional script and not with an alphabetic one . . . one of the things that cinched the claim that Chinese *can* be written alphabetically was my discovery that descendants of those Dungan refugees were actually writing that way. For over half a century the seventy thousand Chinese speakers in Russian Central Asia have been publishing newspapers, scholarly works, and all sorts of literature in a simple script based first on the Latin and later on the Russian script. (DeFrancis 1993)²

John DeFrancis was the one of the first Sinologists in the English-speaking world to take note of the minority language that is practiced in the Central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Before him, and since the

late nineteenth century, the Dungans have been well documented by Soviet linguists and ethnographers as a unique ethnic community that observes Sinitic customs and speaks dialects from northwestern China (Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer 1992, 1967).³ In the 1920s and 1930s, this knowledge played a pivotal role in state language planning and the nationalization of minority languages under the indigenization language policy of the former U.S.S.R. The development of the first systematized writing system for Dunganese followed the post-imperial and centralization imperatives of in the Bolshevik and Stalinist eras. During this de- and re-Russification process that pursued a strategy of divide and conquer, Dunganese was brought into the turmoil of nationalizing the various Turkic minority languages in Central Asia. Its linguistic evolution bears testimony to these historical vicissitudes. While the Soviet Union's main concern was to thwart the processes of pan-Turkism and Islamization, few ethnic groups—including those that are not Turkic in origin—were left unaffected. By 1934, the new alphabet was used by seventy nationalities, forty of which had no writing proper writing systems before 1917 (Shprintsin 330). By 1936, all of the Soviet nationalities in Central Asia as well as the small peoples of northern and northeastern Siberia had received an alphabetic script (Allès 2005).⁴

Dunganese is an element (Riedlinger 1989, 167) in this larger picture. Comprised of 15,000 speakers, it has since grown to the current-day number of around 120,000.⁵ Between 1927 and 1954, Dunganese, despite its oral Sinitic form, was converted from the Arabic script to Latin letters, then from Latin to Cyrillic. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, its linguistic, literary, and cultural vitality came to be fostered under state-sponsored initiatives (Huskey 1995).⁶ Historically speaking, one cannot talk about the Dungans without referring to the vast and diverse world that is Islamic Chinese. From Southeast Asia to Central Asia, the influences reflect the proximity of Malay and Arabic cultures. The most direct source of the Dungans in the former Soviet territory are the Chinese Muslims in China, loosely encompassed by the ethnic designation, Hui. During the course of 130 years of Hui exodus from northwestern China into different parts of present-day Central Europe, the movement outwards included the Chinese Muslims from provinces and regions such as Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. A greater number of dialects existed among them, which can be further identified according to prefectural and local clusters. Their dispersion covers a large geographical area, though they have generally held themselves apart from one another and settled in small communities.

A distinction exists between Muslims within the Chinese territory, who are called "Hui," and those who are called "Dungan" and reside in the three Central Asian Republics. The distinction was an official classification under the Soviet state. The Dungans informally refer to themselves as "Hui Hui" "Old Huis" ("lao Hui ren"), or "Central Plains people" ("Zhongyuan ren," i.e., Chinese) (Hu 2006). A further distinction, and even mutual dislike, persists between the Dungans who speak the Gansu dialect and those who speak the Shaanxi dialect. The Dungans are the descendants of the Muslim rebels who revolted in northwestern China in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1877–78 and 1881–1884, the Chinese Muslims fled across the border via Xinjiang to Russia after their failed uprisings in Shaanxi and Gansu. Having made the decision of, according to one Russian traveller to their settlement, "either stay[ing] under the oppressive, much-hated Manchu rule or move to Russia," they migrated in two waves, further subdivided into four groups (Rimsky-Korsakoff et al. 1992). The history of their exile constitutes a core part of their identity. Descendants of the group led by the Muslim leader Bai Yanhu from Shaanxi continue to commemorate his heroism in folklore and the oral songs, while the Chinese statesman Zuo Zongtang, who was responsible for crushing the Muslim rebels and their subsequent genocide, is still ominously evoked in popular nursery rhymes.

The Dungan population grew quickly under the Soviet policies of birth planning. In 1907, there were about 18,000 Chinese Muslims in the Republics. In 1979, the number reached over 50,000. Currently, the population is estimated to be 120,000 (Lin 2008). By the time Russia officially surveyed its ethnic minorities in the 1920s, the group was officially recorded as Dungan, though some speculations still exist as to where the term originated. Benefiting from the Soviet policy of unity in diversity, they were given their own classification in the 1926 census (DeFrancis 1952).

Before the mid-1980s, Dunganese was a subject of Russian studies rather than Chinese studies in mainland Chinese scholarship. When the Chinese scholars began to study the Dungans in the 1990s, they relied mostly on the earlier Soviet ethnography. How to classify the scholarship entailed some thought. Originally part of Soviet Sinology, the Dungans were studied as one of the ethnic minorities of the former Soviet Union. Its confinement to the niche of national language history is similar to that of the Latinxua Sin Wenz movement in China in the 1930s, which is still narrated mainly as an internalist account of the modern Chinese language reform. As was the policy under

Stalin, the Dungans were permitted to have their own writing system, though it took a few tries. Current-day Dungan writing system comprises 33 Cyrillic letters and 5 supplementary letters to accommodate phonemes that are found only in the speech of the Chinese Muslims. The development of the Dungan alphabet, significantly, was the first Soviet attempt to alphabetize a northwestern Chinese language—or any Chinese language or dialect, for that matter (Shprintsin 1974).⁷ The renowned Soviet sinologist A. A. Dragunov defined Dunganese as a different language from Chinese in 1938 (though he included examples from it in his 1952 grammar of modern Chinese), then called it a “colonial dialect” of Shaanxi and Gansu Mandarin in 1952 (Dragunov 1952, Wexler 2011).

Despite its physical appearance, Dunganese is written almost entirely with the dialectal properties and lexicon of Shaanxi and Gansu speech. It is important to note, however, that Latinized Dunganese was set to the standard of the Gansu topolect, even though its speakers are from both the Gansu and Shaanxi provinces, each with their numerous dialectal varieties. A few words of Russian, Arabic, and Persian entered its vocabulary over time, but overall the language remains heavily rooted in the oral speech of the countryside of northwestern China. In some cases, colloquial usage from the late Qing period, some of which are no longer extant in China today, is still vividly evident in Dunganese. Some references are from a 13th-century colloquial Chinese language teaching text, *Lao Qida*, which was written for Korean traders during the time of the Mongol conquest. Other notable characteristics like reversed binomes, such as “caishu” for “shucaì” (vegetable), can be found in popularly performed and read vernacular fiction like *Shuibuzhuan* (Chang 2010).

As most of the early migrants had little literacy to begin with, written Chinese was and remains difficult to master, leaving the oral tradition as the primary means to keep the folk customs alive. The early Dungans, like in many rural parts of China, were largely illiterate peasants. Illiteracy, in fact, was almost 100% in 1926. The Dungans would have been part of the targeted audience for the many linguistic reforms and mass mobilization movements in China. But their exile insulated them from the vicissitudes and experimentation of China’s language standardization reforms. In the absence of centralized Chinese cultural influence, the oral forms that were transmitted in Dungan culture took on a stronger Islamicist color, especially with regard to customs and moral conduct. One example is the figure Han Xin, a general in the second century B.C.E. at the founding of the Han dynasty who was

portrayed sympathetically in the *Shiji* as a would-be hero with a few fatal flaws (Li 2011). The forgiving tone did not carry over into the Dungan universe. Han Xin’s loss of Liu Ban’s trust was sternly interpreted as the result of his lack of moral integrity. Details in the narratives about Han Xin were accordingly altered, as an otherwise passing episode was highlighted. Instead of his culpability in political intrigues, Han’s greater moral crime, in one version, was to have violated the teachings of the Koran by intruding upon a naked woman in her bath (Chang 2010).

Many folk tales such as the one adapted from the *Shiji* circulated widely among the Dungans. They helped to pass on a tradition that otherwise had no written ties to the place of origin. At the same time, the circumstance of being outside of China means, importantly, that they also missed the vernacular revolution that changed the course of modern China. With little literacy to tie them to a classical tradition, the Dungan language survived without the constraints of Chinese nationalism. While they were hardly literate in elite classical Chinese, the Dungans also did not have to unburden themselves of a tradition to which they had little access. They were, in fact, the quintessential peasant speakers who became highly valorized during the heated debates of mass literature and arts throughout the Communist period, much controversy of which centered on materializing the spoken style in the written medium. Their language is, as one critic recently points out, more peasant than the peasant writer par excellence of the 1940s and 1950, Zhao Shuli.

This comparison, however, does not reveal the wide gulf between the two linguistic worlds. Modern Dungan writers acknowledge their relationship to written Chinese with distant passion rather than persistent nostalgia, an issue we will consider later in the case of Iasyr Shivaza. When the process of movement has taken them so far away from even the usual diasporic frontiers, neither old notions of nostalgia nor ready-made definitions of exile can capture their experience, let alone integrate it into a coherent cartography of Sinophone writings. This makes them quite distinct from the well-studied diasporic writers in Southeast Asia (Li Yongping, Zhang Guixing), Taiwan (Kim Chu Ng), Europe (Gao Xingjian, François Cheng), and North America (Ha Jin, Lin Yutang), to name a few representatives. In contrast to the Dungans, these writers’ decision to use, or not use, the Chinese linguistic written medium is often interpreted as expressed gestures of cultural belonging or disbelonging. In all instances, however, their mastery of a literary language—Chinese, French, or English—is not in question. Literacy is generally a distant

issue in literary studies. That literary studies, by definition, pay attention to mainly accomplished usages of language, however, actually obfuscates an issue that is most unique and central to the study of extra-national literatures and cultures: what happens when the basic access to writing and literacy is neither given nor native?

The disjuncture between speech sounds and written script, then, not only problematizes language itself. It also forces a drift in the accepted practice of attaching language to a place. Around the same time that the Latinization of Dunganese got underway, topolects from southern China were being transcribed en masse in the Latinxua Sin Wenz movement in China. The language problem was not merely a question of the high and the low. A unified solution was not feasible and split, instead, into separate tracks of reform for the oral and the written. Nationalism charted a linguistic course that was materializing against the full concretization of space, territories, nations, and places, even as it was recruited in their making.

The Latinization of Dunganese and Latinxua Sin Wenz, though separately propagated, shared their roots in the Soviet literacy campaigns. It was the Latinization campaign for the Chinese laborers in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk that sparked the subsequent movement in China. From 1930 to 1932, in fact, the literacy campaign in the Soviet East explicitly observed directives to target not only the small peoples of the north and the Finns and the Chuvash, but also the Chinese and Korean languages (King 1997). The idea was that the Soviet Latinization campaign would continue beyond its borders. It was imagined to be an instrument of proletariat internationalism, for sure, and the hope was to start a new cultural revolution: "Not the twenty million strong population of Korea, but the 170 thousand strong population of the Soviet Union should become the advance-guard of the cultural revolution of the Korean people" (Martin 2001, 199). Of the five Chinese topolects that were originally slated for their own alphabets—Guandong, Fujian, Shandong, Jiangsu, Jiangxi—however, only the Shandong scheme was approved and implemented.

Irrespective of the intended audience, Sin Wenz and Dunganese partook in a transnational and -regional language movement that overwrote the native constraints of language and place. Indigenous sounds married foreign systems of transcription as a matter of expediency. No strings were attached, at least not the kind that one cannot sever. Concurrent alphabetization movements were sweeping through non-alphabetic parts of the world. Not only China,

but also Japan, Turkey, Russia, Southeast Asia, Persia, and parts of the Middle East were embroiled in debates about the future of their writing systems. Alphabetization was distinct from other types of technological assimilations of the West. It was a practical matter, to be separated from the stakes of culturalist debates. The project was pursued, in effect, as a process of westernization without the West, Romanization without Rome. This important distinction is uniquely demonstrated in the modern history of language script standardization, and can be better understood with a closer look at the Chinese Latinization project.

As is well known, in 1929–1930, Qu Qiubai (Strakhov), an important figure in the Chinese Communist Party, collaborated with Soviet linguists A. A. Dragunov and V. S. Kolokolov to devise a system to aid quick literacy. Other Chinese collaborators, also members of the CCP, included Wu Yuzhang (Burenin), Xiao San (Emi Siao), Lin Boju (Komissarov), and Wang Xiangbao (Martynov). Sin Wenz had six goals: (1) to offer a purely phonetic script; (2) to be fully in sync with any spoken language; (3) to be simple and accessible; (4) to facilitate internationalization; (5) to accommodate media and communication technology such as printing, typewriting, telegraphy, cataloguing, and Chinese character retrieval systems; (6) to minimize the amount of time, expense, and mental effort that is needed in reading, writing, and printing (Xin wenzi rumen 1936, 14).

Admittedly, Qu was less trained as a linguist than his Soviet and Chinese colleagues (Peng 1982).⁸ But his ideological perspective offered a trenchant critique of the "national language" that captured the general tenor of the debate in China. How Chinese was to be romanized was not merely a question of convenience. Whether China was better off going with the Communist or the Nationalist vision also divided the conversation on how best to modernize the Chinese script. When the Nationalists proposed a return to the use of literary Chinese during the neoconservative swing to the New Life Movement in 1934, language politics was catapulted to the forefront of cultural wars. The battle over language standardization was not a Chinese problem, Qu underscores, but emblematic of the fate of all national languages. The national interest to extend and consolidate its sphere of influence at home as well as abroad inevitably steered the debate.

While a language system tends to evolve toward simplicity the longer it is in use, Qu laments, this was not the case in China. In an early draft of the Latinxua Sin Wenz proposal that was published in Moscow in 1930, he

points out that the Chinese language had been resistant to such a change.⁹ Despite the long-standing problem of widespread illiteracy among peasants in the countryside, the written Chinese script has been beyond their reach. It was enshrined as a symbol of cultural elitism. Meanwhile, divergences between regional dialects and topolects grew by the day, and people from the north can barely understand those from the south. The written language has not evolved to mend these gaps, even less to give regional speech its due recognition.

In a 1931 essay, explaining why China should turn to full-scale vernacularization, Qu invites his Chinese readers to consider an analogous situation: "Imagine you're in London. You come across its largest newspaper publishing house only to find that everything they publish is in Latin, Old English, Middle English, and so on. But no modern English—the one language you hear on the streets. How would you feel about that?" (Qu 1985a) At Qu's injunction, the reader would have been struck by the strangeness of the scene. It would not be, though, because the city was in a foreign country where people spoke a foreign language. Place was not the issue. Instead, the problem would be that, despite the fact that they spoke a vastly different language and observed different customs half a world away, the English had the same problem as the Chinese: the palpable disconnect between the spoken and the printed word. This lapse is meant to strike one as absurd. Falling behind speech, Qu shows by way of the English example, writing systems lapse in everyday utility, becoming calcified and inert to the passage of time. The problem, importantly, was not place bound or unique to any part of the world. Neither was the solution.

At the time of Qu's writing, the point was already well made. A contentious project to revise the elitist, classical written medium according to the needs of everyday speech had begun in the late nineteenth century. Inspired partly by Japan's advancement and partly by China's hard won lessons in dealing with the modern world, the Chinese language reform was a key issue in the debates on regional fragmentation, westernization, and modernization. That what people spoke did not match what they wrote, however, was only one facet of the problem. The widening gulf between what people speak on the ground and what the literati wish to salvage as a written literary language threatened to hold off a true linguistic revolution. Added to the problem is the tremendous difficulty of mastering the Chinese script itself. Even if one could rely on a common written language to bridge the regional gaps, the complex and unsystematic nature of the Chinese character construction made written mastery a privilege reserved for only the few.

Qu's recount of the problem plaguing the Chinese language was not new. But he pushed the problem of China's vast regional differences to center stage. Seeing it through a Marxist lens, Qu held that before national unity is accomplished in the economic sense, one cannot ignore the different speeds of advancement and the reality of local roots in China's hinterland. Against the prevailing sentiment of romanizing only Mandarin, the national language (*guoyu*), Qu proposed a digraphic system as a transitional measure. In short, Sin Wenz would provide the phonetic means for any dialect to easily transcribe into a writing system, alongside the standard language. Regional writings would be marked for local place use only, as "auxiliary scripts" (*fuzhu wenzi*). National language, also romanized in Sin Wenz, would meanwhile maintain its national and international stature as China's "primary script system" (*zhuyao de wenzi*) (Qu 1953).¹⁰ Thus there would be the New Shanghai Script, New Beijing Script, New Fujian Script, or the New Guangzhou Script, but only one New China Script.

In a series of articles published after completing the blueprint for Sin Wenz, Qu pressed further on the script question. This time he took it beyond the frontlines of linguistic reform and used it to attack the residual cultural conservatism that had held China back from making true progress. He targeted the state of New Literature, by then twelve years old since the May Fourth Movement's early declaration to vernacularize modern literature for the people. The linguistic imperative, formally expressed by Hu Shi in 1918, of a new vernacular alongside a new literature was a core platform. Looking back on this recent history, Qu's diagnosis was unforgiving. He pointed out the egregious failure in bringing about a true vernacular revolution that was sworn to the masses. Recalling the initial goals stated by the leaders of New Literature, like Cai Yuanpei, Hu Shi, and Chen Duxiu, Qu saw only a trail of broken promises (Qu 1953).¹¹ Despite these intellectuals' call for using the "language of the soil," or native speech, at the end of the day they found it hard to imagine everyday language penetrating the walls of elite institutions of learning like Beijing University, where all three critics held posts. When it came down to it, Qu charged, they were unwilling to abandon the classics. Not only were these revered texts written in the literary Chinese that no average person could understand (Qian Quantong 1918).¹² The feudalistic social and political doctrines they conveyed also remained untouched. Conceding half-heartedly to the use of the vernacular, the intellectual reformers saw only yet another venue for reinforcing the learned tradition of the canon. Qu took on all the

important figures at the time for their complicity in this process. For him, New Literature was thus bred from a half-realized vernacular and a still revered classical language. It was nothing less than a caricature, a monstrous half-breed “somewhere between a horse and a donkey.”¹³ It could neither commit itself to a living or human speech (*renhua*) nor return to embrace a language of the dead (*guihua*).

Apart from making a familiar indictment of the May Fourth’s incomplete project, Qu articulates important insights. The appropriate approach to a national language, for him, is not to homogenize all tongues irrespective of their origins. Language standardization cannot afford to overlook how languages vary spatially, or are place-dependent, in the first place. The negative impact on the development of local literatures is only half of the problem. More importantly, it would not serve the interest of the nationalization project itself for two main reasons: (1) a unifying script system does not spell one standard to reign over the rest, but entails a communicable system. By communicability, however, Qu does not refer to an unconditional, universal access. He clearly recognizes that two speakers in Guangzhou or Fujian would prefer the New Script that is local and place-appropriate to those provinces over the New China Script; (2) what matters is to devise a script system in which any single place identity can be represented, but not to the exclusion of other place-specific languages. Without the material inscription to give durability to their spoken languages, there is no room for places in the question of unification. Linguistic nationalization itself would ring hollow when it will have no differences to recruit, no places with which to connect. This distinction and co-implication is key to managing the tension between difference and unity. To render Qu’s argument into a simple formulation: language becomes place at the same time that place emerges through language. Any prospect of China’s linguistic modernization has to account for these two coterminous imperatives. Nationalism is not all or nothing. In order to have a mandate, it has to maintain its own incompleteness, in which the possibility of dissent is also its greatest source of legitimacy.

Only a few, in Qu’s opinion, grasped the importance of the language question in this light. Zhao Yuanren, for instance, inventor of the Gwoyeu Romatzyh—the rival system to Sin Wenz that was officially promulgated in 1928—was a worthy foe in this regard. But even he, Qu pointed out, failed to prioritize the needs of local realities and, instead, put the cart before the horse (Qu 1953, 662–672).¹⁴ First, Zhao decided to keep rather than to abolish the four tones that were particular to the pronunciation of Mandarin. While the

dialects that were spoken in Jiangsu or Zhejiang provinces can have seven or eight tones, and Guangdong nine, Gwoyeu Romatzyh can only accommodate four. Second, one of Gwoyeu Romatzyh’s distinguishing features is to provide a physical indicator of the tonal marks (Wu and Zhong 2006, 61).¹⁵ Given that the system requires this physical feature, it favors speakers from the north who are already familiar with Mandarin, and excludes those from the south, where the greatest dialectal variations and most urgent need for representation are. Examples include consonants that are prevalent in the southern dialects, which resembles the tonal features of ancient Chinese: “z,” “c,” “s,” and “j.” In Mandarin, the same sounds are made in retroflex with a curling or concave position of the tongue: “zh,” “ch,” “sh,” and “jh.” Qu points out the undue influence of western phonology in Zhao’s use of “j” to represent the Chinese phoneme “ㄐ.”

For his part, Zhao saw things differently. Romanization was a task for linguistic science, not an instigator of class revolution. That Mandarin was chosen as the national standard was a pragmatic choice, not the elitist sleight of hand that it was made out to be. During the imperial days, the use of Mandarin in official correspondence at court was “regarded as a convenience rather than a matter of prestige” (Zhao 1980, 103–121).¹⁶ Similarly, there was no shame in speaking in a dialect that is not from the north. It was more of an inconvenience than stigma (Zhao 1961, 712).¹⁷ Furthermore, Zhao explains, the idea of a dialect, or “speech of a locality” (*fangyan*), is an unfortunate misnomer. Suggesting an etymological relation to locality and place, it assumes that language must be attached to a certain place (*difang*), and that any difference between the languages is primarily due to the difference in place. A dialect, Zhao suggests to the contrary, should be more broadly conceived. In the more dramatic cases, a Shandong dialect and a Wenzhou dialect can be as different as Spanish and French. Just as often, though, dialects reflect more the styles of speaking. When seen as a style rather than topolectal divergence, dialects are no longer geographically bound. It can be an idiom that is particular to a social or economic class; i.e., the latest urban slang or immigrant idiolect. According to Zhao’s more expansive notion, then, a dialect needs more than one axis of differentiation. A taxonomy that separates topolects and dialects according to fixed places of nativity fails to grasp the relation between language and place on this fundamental level. It acknowledges the fact of distance, but not the process of distanciation that aligns places with languages, and connects languages to places.

In light of Zhao's observations, the radicalism of Qu's ideological position now seems limited. His espousal of the given fact of linguistic variety and local distinction, in fact, does not go far enough. Regional Latinization is promoted as a parallel, but ultimately restricted, track next to the national script. There may be many local standards, in other words, but only in the service of one national standardization. What he fails to seize on, then, is the very geographic-dominant assumption that underlies both the national standard and the related possibility of regional standards. While he recognized the good of the alphabet as the linguistic medium that can facilitate both national and regional romanizations, he did not see how linguistic diversity fundamentally changes how a dialect is brought into relief as a concept and practice. Zhao's notion of dialect can be more minimally understood as a portable style of self-representation that is intrinsic to any speaker or user of language. He cites as an example the Cockney dialect, which is based on class rather than place. Throughout his various essays on the topic, in fact, one discerns an important thread. What Zhao suggests, and what Qu was unable to see, was that the real problem lies in how the historical coexistence of Mandarin and regional speech came to be seen as a matter of elitism versus massification, intellectual versus the people, oppressive standard versus place-based dialects. By overidentifying dialects with place, Zhao notes, one overlooks how dialectal distinctions are recruited from a greater spectrum of social distinctions, where a particular style of speech can just well express class or cultural markers. A place-based notion of dialects conceals the social and economic factors that animate linguistic differences and raise their stakes. In an unwitting move, Qu did more to put Mandarin on an elitist pedestal than anyone he could have blamed.

Indeed, the technical difference between Gwoyue Romatzyh and Latinxua Sin Wenz is much smaller than the ideological differences behind them. Zhao and Qu were not the only voices in the debate. Other linguists and political reformers defended the strengths and weaknesses of the two systems. They impassioned opinions came in the forms of readers' comments, pamphlets, manuals, scholarly journals, and other venues that foretold the coming script revolution. People commented on the comments of the commentators, and the opinions filled the pages of widely circulated newspapers and journals. It was a revolution in the real sense, as there was also the greater fear of what widespread literacy would unleash in the masses during the volatile and divided Warlord Era (1916–1928). For instance, Zhang Zuolin, military

warlord of Manchuria, banned even the teaching of the auxiliary system National Phonetic Alphabet, promulgated in 1918, and ordered the return to literary Chinese in the publication of school textbooks. The pull between conservatism and reformism, not to mention between divided regional and political loyalties, personal and institutional squabbles, thwarted any successful and lasting implementation. Emotions ran high, but the enormity of the challenge only strengthened the resolve of the committed. A special August issue of *National Language Monthly* (*Guoyu yuekan*) came out in 1922 in strong support of Romanization. Its cover design captures the revolutionary fervor with a provocative image. At the center, soldiers, clad in the uniform of the Republican army, wield weapons that are modeled on the symbols of the National Phonetic Alphabet (*zhuyin fuhao*). They are slaughtering their way through a horde of bloodied traditional Chinese characters, which are written in the ancient seal-script style. On the other side, the masses watch from a cool distance, as they stand united behind a row of Latin letters that spell out "Roman script" in Gwoyue Romatzyh.

The Alphabetic Revolution of the East

Despite the setbacks and fallouts, the will to overhaul the Chinese writing system persisted. To understand this commitment, one has to appreciate how far the conversation has come. The alphabetization of the Chinese script has been, strictly speaking, more than 400 years in the making. It was at first a foreign affair. From the Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century to Russian Sinologists in the nineteenth century, non-native learners of Chinese played a pioneering role in tackling the complex system. While Chinese philologists since the second century have been organizing and reorganizing this body of scripts through the identification of more basic, commonly shared character components and phonetic rhymes, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the Chinese themselves began to seriously contemplate writing Chinese in an altogether different notation system. The advent of nationalism in the early twentieth century selectively shaped these initial stirrings with the powerful impetus of modernity. Together with nationalism, the two currents inspired ideas to overhaul the 5,000 year-old writing system. The ambition was to promote literacy on an unprecedented scale and—what was perhaps most urgently felt—to participate and influence the international informational network in the areas of printing, telegraphy, postal system, and typewriting.

The Chinese script revolution was the longest revolution of the twentieth century. The late Qing script reformers made the first indigenous proposals, the Nationalists made it an explicit agenda soon after the founding of the Republic, and the Communists returned to the issue mere months after the founding of the People's Republic of China (Mills 1956).¹⁸ Latinxua Sin Wenz was introduced into China in 1933–1934. In a declaration signed by 688 progressive intellectual and cultural figures, Sin Wenz was embraced as the best vehicle for national salvation: “Script is like a means of transportation. The Chinese script is like a monocycle, Gwoyeu Romatzyh a steamship, and Sin Wenz the airplane. Once you take a seat on the plane to spread the message of national salvation, you will realize that not only does Sin Wenz not stand in the way of China’s unification. It has the real power to mobilize the masses to save our dying country” (Cai 1989). Despite the turmoil of the War of Resistance against Japan, the development of Sin Wenz continued between 1937 and 1942 under battle fire in key cities like Hong Kong, Shanghai, Chongqing, Yan’an, Hankou, and Guangzhou. It joined the cause of national salvation and became one of its main platforms for mass mobilization. The movement reached as far as San Francisco, Lyon, and Xinjiang, and spilled over into Southeast Asia in places like Bangkok, Singapore, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, and the Philippines (Ni Haishu 1948).¹⁹ As modern China contemplated the future and shape of its writing system in the 1920s and 1930s, the twin prospects of nationalization and internationalization hung in the balance. Unlike previous centuries, the Chinese script came closer than ever before to embrace alphabetization. For people like Qu and Zhao, the question was not if but how.

The historical forces that made Latinxua Sin Wenz possible in the 1930s, however, were not drawn from the internal impulse of China’s state-building alone. Nor was it entirely accurate to attribute it, as Qu did, to the May Fourth ideals of enlightenment. Just as alphabetization began with outsiders’ interest in making religious and economic inroads into China, it remained an internationalist project bound up with larger geopolitical trends. This transnational context bears reminding, as over the course of the twentieth century, Chinese language reform came to be narrated, narrower and narrower, as a state project of literacy, as though it were an internalist history.

The fact was that a globalist vision of language was converging from different corners of Asia and nearby regions. Despite how it has been argued, alphabetization did not confirm the triumph or superiority of western civilization

over the rest of the world. Those who engaged in that rhetoric may have utilized the discourse to get people to consider the proposal. Yet it is clear that Latinization drew from primarily pragmatic motives. It confirmed the utility of a linguistic medium, one that Europe wisely developed but did not own. This point was at times suggested by the Chinese language reformers themselves, and Zhao’s instrumentalist view represented this perspective. At the time, however, the material medium of language was yet to be disentangled from the sensitive questions of ownership and origin, whether it was western or indigenous, and the superiority or inferiority of the alphabetic versus Chinese writing systems. Zhao was one of the few who approached the issue separately as a linguistic science, as did Lin Yutang, who took language reform into the realm of typewriting technology and invented a pathbreaking typewriter in the 1940s that intercepted a crucial stage of global information technology (Tsu 2010).²⁰ Apart from the few linguists who could maintain an objective, technical interest, the alphabetization of Chinese was highly embroiled in culturally and emotionally weighted debates.

It is worth bearing in mind that other comparable contexts of alphabetization witnessed parallel debates and reactions. On the one hand, there were those in Central Asia, during Soviet Union’s wide sweeping Latinization campaigns, who believed that the script they had, generally Arabic, was simply more backward and ill-suited to the needs of the Turkic dialects, which required certain vowels that Arabic cannot convey. In this sense, the alphabet was seen as the script of modernity, progress, and western science. As the beginning of a poem by a Soviet Tajik poet conveys: “When the Latin letters adorned the new alphabet/Soon the demand became slow for the Arab alphabet./In the scientific era the new alphabet is like a plane/The Arabic alphabet is like a weak donkey in pain. . . .”²¹ On the other hand, there were also proponents who saw in the alphabet a concrete, universal instrumentality that is greater than any of its originating contexts. They could care less about where it came from, and were much more concerned about where it could take them. In an argument for why the alphabet is perfectly compatible with the Muslim context of Azerbaijan in 1922, the first Soviet Central Asia Republic to be introduced to the alphabet in 1926, an advocate states that “The Latin alphabet is not only international; it is pananthropic” (Winner 1952).²² By the same distinction, importantly, for Chinese language reformers like Zhao, there was no conflict or contradiction in using the alphabet for China’s own purposes. Admittedly, opponents to the project often played on, and perhaps bought

into, the hierarchical order. The obsession with comparing China to the West according to a western bar, in other words, limited the interpretation of what was in fact a broader transnational history of alphabetization—even today.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the scope of Latinization was beyond what one might find feasible now. For the language reformers, the fate of the world was inextricably bound with the failure and success of the alphabet. Samed Agamali-Ogly, an Azerbaijani revolutionary, recounts his 1923 visit to the dying Lenin, who reputedly left him with these immortal words: “Latinization is the great revolution in the east” (Martin 2001, 187).²³ By “the east,” Lenin meant the Soviet East, where the Russian leader had been dismayed by the linguistic and religious gulf. Azerbaijan later became the first Soviet republic in the east to adopt the Latin script as its official medium. That shining example, however, was in no way representative of the degree of division and dissent that plagued the campaign from beginning to end (Smith 1998, 133).²⁴ Throughout the last Czarist regime, the Russians did not overlook the importance of recognizing the diverse cultures and peoples of the east. Missionaries had devised Russian alphabets for the small peoples of the north, but always with an eye on local forms. After the Bolshevik revolution, the diversity issue served a new agenda, one that distanced itself as much as possible from the old regime. As scholars of Russian studies have amply shown, the newly-formed Soviet Union was confronted by the scores of languages and sub-languages that had been little studied or systematized.²⁵ In official documents of the state, for instance, confusion about what ethnicities resided in which republic abounded. Azerbaijanis were called Tartars, Uzbeks as Sarts, Tajiks as Uzbeks, and so on. The Bolsheviks had their work cut out before them, and cast their eyes over the Soviet East as a culturally untamed land, “extremely savage and backward” (Smith 1998, 43).²⁶

When Qu made his first trip to Moscow as a journalist in 1920–1921, he saw a Russia recovering from the ravages of a revolution. At the time, Qu had not yet been converted to Marxism (Qu 1935).²⁷ In the new Soviet Union, he came to believe in the way of socialism as the true bearer of democracy. He remarked on the common sight of equality among the cadres and was swept up in the revolutionary euphoria of the workers and peasants who were dancing in the Red Square in celebration of May Day (Qu 1985b, 145). The watershed moment came when he met and spoke with Lenin at the Third Congress of the Communist International in June 1921 (Lu 1995: 151).²⁸ The encounter changed the course of his thinking. As he later recalled to a friend, it was not only the political commitments of the Bolsheviks that inspired him. What deeply moved him

was their dedication to stamping out illiteracy when they were greatly stricken by material scarcity (Peng 1982, 108). He began during this period to study the question of Latinization, and joined the Communist Party the following year.

Returning to Moscow in 1928 on the occasion of the Sixth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Qu began to work out a concrete Latinization scheme at the end of the year (Xiao 1959; Shprintsin 1974).²⁹ Earlier in February 1928, a group at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East began to study whether Chinese could be latinized. By then, attempts to help the Chinese laborers in the Soviet Union to acquire literacy in the Chinese language had failed. As A. G. Shprintsin later recalls, “the teaching of hieroglyphs did not carry the crusade against illiteracy too far,” as the Soviet government ensured its failure (Shprintsin 1974, 330). At the Institute for Scientific Research on China of the Communist Academy in Moscow, Qu worked with V. S. Kolokolov and Shprintsin, along with Wu Yuzhang, Xiao San, and other members of the CCP. Kolokolov helped Qu devise the Chinese Latin alphabet and transcription system. Qu made an internal report on a draft of the Chinese Latinization scheme in early 1929 to a small audience of specialists and Chinese students. The draft, *Zhongguo ladingshi zimu cao'an*, appeared under Qu’s adopted Russian name. Up until May of that year, the study was primarily conducted among the Chinese students, which numbered in the hundreds. A larger conference was then held towards the end of May. Mainly Sinologists were invited to participate in the broader discussion about the draft proposal. The project acquired additional reinforcement when, in April 1930, contact was made with the Commissariat of Education, the Council of Nationalities of the U.S.S.R. Central Executive Committee, and the Down-with-Illiteracy Society. The new alliance led to further collaboration with A. A. Dragunov of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences in Leningrad. Dragunov had also been conducting research on Chinese Latinization sometime before and made a presentation in Moscow in May 1930, where many of the Latinization campaigners for the New Turkic Alphabet in the Soviet East were in attendance. In principle, they supported Qu and Kolokolov’s scheme, and it was decided that Qu, Kolokolov, and Dragunov would work together on the final draft of the proposal. *Zhongguo ladinghua zimu* was published in 1930. The title on the cover appeared in three scripts: Latinized Chinese, Chinese characters, and Russian.

While Romanization reached a new landmark with the introduction of Sin Wenz into China in the following year, that revolution neither began nor

ended with Latinization. Before the Latinization campaign for Dunganese started, a young Dunganese writer, Iasyr Shivaza, together with his classmates Yu. Yanshansin and Kh. Makeev at the Tartar Institute in Tashkent, worked on creating the first Dungan alphabet (Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer 1991: 27–30, 240–245). Initially based on the Arabic script that they learned from reading the Koran in Muslim classroom instruction, they drafted a Latin scheme in 1927 (Riedlinger 1989, 75–79). When the different Turkic nationalities in Soviet Central Asia began to adopt the New Turkic Alphabet, the Dungans followed their example. But it soon became clear that it would not suit the linguistic requirements of spoken Dunganese. Though the Latinized alphabet was adopted by the Dungans in 1928–1929, by spring 1930 the process was halted until further official review. Meanwhile, the research for Latinxua Sin Wenz gathered momentum in Moscow. When Qu's first draft was submitted, the two movements inched ever closer together. Dragunov became the nodal point, along with sinologist B. A. Vasiliev, who published on Dungans and their literature in the early 1930s. After working with Qu on Latinxua Sin Wenz, Dragunov began to publish on Dunganese as well and later presided as the chairman of the Committee of Experts for the Creation of a New Dungan Alphabet in 1952, when Dunganese made its belated transition to the Cyrillic script. Shivaza continued to be involved in the subsequent proposals for Dunganese and served on this committee. The research on Dunganese dovetailed with the implementation of Latin Sin Wenz. The Latinization of Dunganese and China's New Script did not only share an origin in the Soviet language campaigns. Their paths crisscrossed, though never explicitly acknowledged as a concurrent history. Despite the impact of Soviet sinology on the modern research into the Chinese script reform, the extent of this collaborative history has been little known. Added to that is the unique role that Dunganese played in the history of modern China's governance of sounds and script. In the same way that Shivaza's role in devising the first Dunganese alphabet has only quietly intersected China's linguistic history, his literary encounter with modern Chinese literature also made a memorable crossing.

Meeting Places

In 1956, Iasyr Shivaza joined a group of Kyrgyz writers in welcoming a delegation of 16 writers from China. It was the first Sino-Soviet friendship group in Frunze (Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer 1991). The only person he was able to

converse with was writer Ge Baoquan. The language they had in common was not Chinese but Russian, as Ge spoke Shanghainese, which was far from the range of familiar northern dialects. After the conference, Shivaza was left with the reminder that “the Chinese, though friends, are aliens and quite different from Dungans.” This feeling of familiarity and unfamiliarity persisted in his writing in different forms.

The event in Frunze led to a reciprocal invitation. The following year, in 1957, Shivaza visited China for the first—and only—time. The itinerary itself allegorized the journey from a place between worlds, an interplace, to the heart of Beijing. His visit began with attending a meeting of writers of the Xinjiang-Uigher Autonomous Region, where he, then the national poet of Kirghiz S.S.R., was one of the seven representatives from the Soviet Union. His cohort included writers from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. During the 15-day meeting, Shivaza read a poem before the audience, entitled “For the Poet Qu Yuan” (Gei Qu Yuan shiren), an ode to the third century B.C.E. poet and political exile whose loyalty to his ruler is enshrined in *The Songs of Chu* (Shivaza 2011). Though it was delivered in Dunganese, no translation was necessary. Shivaza's Chinese listeners understood the unmistakable northwestern inflections in his speech (Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer 1977–78).

Shivaza's recitation was poignant, and the poet persona was familiar enough to draw his Chinese audience close to him. But it carried layers of address that they would not have intuited entirely. In the poem, Qu Yuan is addressed as the second person. As the speaker makes his speech in the present, he recognizes all the while the difficulty of the attempted contact across time and space:

My grandfather and great-grandfather were born on the Miluo River,
They lived there, they died there, they never forgot you.
They sang your song, they remembered you,
Because you never finished your song but jumped into the big river.
They say you liked to eat *zongzi*, they never forgot that,
Each spring they wrapped the *zongzi* to remember you.
They threw the *zongzi* into the big sea, into the ocean,
Because you were hungry when you threw yourself into the big river.
I was born far away, have never seen the Miluo River,
On the Volga I did not forget you.
I, too, sang your song, to remember you,
I, too, threw *zongzi* into the Volga River.³⁰

The eulogistic mode of the poem shows that it is intended to be sung, just as the speaker's paternal predecessors had done before him. The repetition, to be sure, harks back to the speaker's own line of descent over three generations. But it is by no means continuous. While the allusion to Qu Yuan as a trope of homelessness and political exile is commonplace in Chinese literature, it is precisely the place of its invocation, in this case, that is not common. The speaker's grandfather—and his father before him—sang this ode to Qu Yuan from the place of Qu's suicide at the Miluo River. They took it upon themselves to carry on Qu Yuan's song at the place where it was left incomplete. They performed this successive lineage on site for the duration of their lives, until they themselves ceased to exist.

The speaker's present invocation, however, breaks this attachment to place sameness and the temporal lineage it sanctions. "On the Volga, I did not forget you" (line 10), the speaker said, echoing the act of non-forgetting that his predecessors had performed before him at the Miluo River (line 2). It is true that Qu Yuan's mythical exile is invoked, but only in juxtaposition with the speaker's own sense of being elsewhere, a place "far away." The perception of the speaker's place of birth, strikingly, is not articulated as the place on hand—i.e., where he is right here and now—but assumes instead the perspective of Qu Yuan. The speaker chooses not to privilege his own place-based point of view, according to which Miluo, not the Volga, would be more logically the place that is "far away." Instead of treating distance as an interval governed by two fixed points, then, he asserts the elasticity of distanciation, and its elusive quality—and power—of making a place feel closer or farther away relative to one's desired vantage point. Yet one would be too hasty to conclude that the speaker does not see his own place of speaking as desirable because he is emotionally oriented toward Miluo as the place of his origin, and all the more so because he never experienced it firsthand. A crucial interception disrupts this nostalgic reading: the analogy that the Volga is to the speaker as the Miluo was to Qu Yuan and the speaker's forebears. The analogy preempts an exclusive reading of lineage that aligns his allegiance with that of his forebears.

The evaluative content of Qu Yuan's place, the origin from which the speaker's own patrilineal lineage flows, has in fact fundamentally altered through the analogy. Miluo, a place of birth, life, and death, ceases to retain its value as an absolute origin, as though it were an inert setting that is merely there as a fixture, where time comes to pass, people live and die. The Miluo where his predecessors performed their mourning rituals is not the Miluo he now

invokes and animates. Nor does it have to be. And this is the important move: space is cast into relief not so much against the passage of time as against the possibility of other spaces. Instead of reaffirming the primacy of Miluo as the origin and place that his grandfather and great grandfather honored, it is now commemorated once more only insofar as it can be honored in relation to the speaker's present place of speaking. As a place, Miluo can ultimately claim no more value in being associated with the historical persona of Qu, in other words, than the Volga can in the speaker's utterance. This important analogy puts two things into play: First, it opens up the temporal succession of a single line of lineage to the simultaneous juxtaposition of places. Miluo still exists, but it is experienced only relationally with reference to another place that cannot and must not coincide with it. Second, this spatialization has an impact, in turn, on the modality of the temporal basis of memory. Whereas the speaker's predecessors took Qu Yuan as the object of their mourning and commemorative rituals, in whose name they performed the act of remembrance and continuity, the speaker does not have to—and is not at liberty to decide to—bind his loyalty to the same Qu Yuan or Miluo River. He had never been to Miluo, whereas his grandfather, and his grandfather's father, underwent birth, life, and death there. The circle of nativity will thus never close for him the way it did for them. He can only insert himself as a link into a chain of recall and commemoration, an interception that he uses to forge an ongoing process so that the obligation of the mourning was still being fulfilled as it passes from Qu to his predecessors, and his predecessors to him in an active incompleteness. Importantly, what the speaker loses with the fixity of origin, he also gains in simultaneous, juxtaposed spatialization. The spatial relief here is all the more significant, given that Miluo is here understood as a metonymic reference to China, just as the Volga would be to Russia.

Thus far, the juxtaposition of different places would seem to trump the importance of singular origins. Still, if the main contribution of juxtaposed places were simply to prove the impossible exclusivity of origins, it would be a rather small point for quite a lot of analytical labor. It would also still bind us to the same logic of privileging one axis (spatial) against another (temporal), just according to the opposite valuation. In fact, something else expresses time more compellingly, and immediately, than the idea of successive lineage. Just as place is a historical and lived instantiation of space, so too must our concept of time and succession be tested against an embodied unit of measure. For this, one needs only to step outside of the poem's diegetic frame. One

immediately recognizes, then, that place was being carved out, and specifically claimed by the language of the voice that recited the poem. At the time Shivaza recited this poem before his Chinese audience, his voice did not blend in inconspicuously with its setting or occasion. The inflections of his unmistakably northwestern dialect created dissonance and likeness, familiarity and dissimulation, in the ears of its Chinese listeners. In this language, he summoned a concatenation of places that his listeners could only partially relate from the vantage of one. And that place is only identifiable to the extent that the speaking voice uses a language that has traveled and lived elsewhere. In this way, the language-becoming of place marks the process through which place comes to inhabit, grow into, forget, erase, lose, and reconnect with a particular language; while the place-becoming of language marks the process through which language can shape, morph, isolate, bury, connect, and rebuild a place. Such are the twin key dynamics in the politics and history of Chinese diaspora, which bears the deep mark of the incongruity between speech and writing, sound and script.

How the speaker in "For the Poet Qu Yuan" is structured at a specific temporal and spatial intersection facilitates an important understanding of Shivaza's encounter with China. By the time he reached Beijing, it was hardly the endpoint of a pilgrimage of nostalgia. He already had a distinguished career and strong intellectual roots in the Slavic world. In 1934, he was one of the first Dungan writers to be accepted into the Union of Soviet Writers. From 1939 to 1941 he was the chairman of the Union of the Kirghiz Writers. The first Russian translation of his poetry appeared in Moscow in 1937, followed by translations into Kirghiz, Kazakh, and other languages in just a few years. Shivaza was not only the leading voice of Dungan poetry and literature, but an active conduit in introducing Dungan literature to the Russian readers at large. A strong advocate of Dunganese literature and arts, during his eight years of tenure (1930–38) as an editor of Dungan works in the Kirghiz State Publishing House, Shivaza mentored young Dunganese writers and promoted Dungan-related cultural affairs.

In Beijing, Shivaza met mainland Chinese writers such as Lao She, Mao Dun, Guo Moruo, Xiao San, officials such as Zhou Enlai, and important scholars of Chinese Muslims like Bai Shouyi, Ma Jian, Ding Yimin, Liu Geping, and Da Pusheng. He had met Lao She and others already the year before at the Urumqi conference. A photograph of Shivaza with Lao She, and Yang Wenqian in Urumqi shows the excitement of a young minority writer,

standing next to the renowned Chinese writer of the May Fourth generation, who is himself not ethnically Han but Manchu (Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer 1991: 61). For Lao She, though, who was at the time deeply involved in promoting local culture and speech in the writing of literature, especially for China's ethnic or "brother nationalities" (*xiongdì minzu*), the encounter did not stand out (Lao She 1991a, 385–392). His trip to Xinjiang was one of a number of cultural delegations that were orchestrated in promotion of the socialist brotherhood between China and the Third World from the early Communist period up through the Cultural Revolution. The ceremonial aspect left him exhausted and he could barely keep up with the number of writers he greeted (Lao She 1991b).

While Lao She and Shivaza's encounter was a missed opportunity, Shivaza did have an emotional reunion with Qu Qiubai's close collaborator in the Latinxua Sin Wenz project, Xiao San. Shivaza had met Xiao San almost twenty years earlier in the summer of 1938, when Xiao San was welcomed by the Union of the Kirghiz Writers in Frunze (Xiao 1952). Xiao San celebrated Shivaza as a great Dunganese poet and dedicated a poem to him in the spirit of socialist brotherhood: "You and I had known each other for thousands of years./ Together we once sang the same song./ But you were forced to leave your home country./ It's your good fortune that you found a wholly new ancestral land./ But you and we are still singing that same song./ I believe that the two households will merge as one./ And many families will unite into a large family./ Perhaps here, perhaps there, you and I will see each other again./ We will sit down around the same table./ And together let our voices soar in singing that song!"

By the time of his encounter with the Chinese writers, Shivaza was already quite familiar with the works of Lu Xun, Xiao San, Ba Jin, Zhao Shuli. He himself had also translated some of Ba Jin's short stories into Dunganese from Russian. He read others, like Pearl Buck, who wrote about China from an outside perspective. But the China he knew from all these vantage points was through the lens of the Russian language. Ultimately, as much as he was influenced by the Chinese revolutionary writers, he was even more intimately impacted by the works of Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Uyghur writers and poets, with whom he shared and breathed in the same milieu (Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer 1991).

It is an ironic reflection on modern Chinese literature why Dunganese was not recognized as one of its dialogic counterparts. While Leftist Chinese

writers were heavily invested in developing the cultural arts and languages of the masses, no one seemed to recognize its extraordinary preservation of regional and ethnic speech against the odds of history. Dunganese' expressivity of the mother tongue in script, one might say, embodied the very form they sought. Lao She, in many ways, missed what was right in front of him. The historical possibility of Dunganese was unthinkable in the Chinese context. The kind of dialectal or local color that Lao She promoted took standard Chinese as the normative substrate on which ethnic identities can be inscribed. Ethnicities had their places in the Chinese nation, and were impossible—and indeed irrelevant—outside of it. Dunganese was the exception that proved the rule. It was a language that was out of place, but borne of a place that was only possible through the materialization of a spoken Chinese language. Both place-defying and place-dependent, Dunganese is thought provoking not only as the early example of writing Chinese in different scripts. It also poses a foundational challenge for rethinking the linguistic foundation of modern Chinese literature.

Rather than easily fitting into the framework of Chinese Nationalist, Chinese Muslim, Sinophone, or even Area Studies, Shivaza is one of the many examples of the decoupled experiences of language and place. How to analyze both language and place as specific modalities of temporal, spatial, and material intersection is the challenge that Dungan literature brings to bear. In a way that is crucial to analyses of space and place, it shows how language materializes space into a lived place, and vice versa. The point, however, is not that language has to be wrested from a naturalized place of nativity. That is only one part of the conceptual turn of the language-becoming of place, and the place-becoming of language. Instead, to understand that nativity is not given once and for all, in place or in language, means to rethink both units as they continue to emerge from a coterminous history. The mutually constitutive process here is not just how language makes places, and places make language. The entwined history between Latinxua Sin Wenz and Dunganese reminds one of the stakes that compel us to reconstitute our present sense of connected intimacies and estrangement.

Notes

1. The amorphous concept of "Chineseness" continues to constrain ongoing discussions, even as they seek to break away from its habits of criticism. A recent

collection of essays on Sinophone studies both embodies and raises one's awareness of the problem (Shu-mei Shih et al., eds. *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.).

2. John DeFrancis, *In the Footsteps of Genghis Khan*, 228; original emphasis. For an account of the nineteenth-century Muslim revolt, see Bai Shouyi, *Huimin qiyi* (Shanghai: Shenzhou chubanshe, 1952), chs. 3 and 4; Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

3. While Dunganese studies is well established in Russian scholarship, it is only relatively recently, when Sino-Soviet relations were restored in the mid-1980s, that scholars in mainland China began research in this area. At the time of the writing of this essay, the full picture is still incomplete in the Chinese-language scholarship and restricted to largely ethnographic and linguistic studies. For an 1897 account, see Svetlana Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, V. Tsibuzgin, A. Shmakov, "Karakunuz: An Early Settlement of the Chinese Muslims in Russia," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 5.2 (1992): 243–278. For others, see Elizabeth Allès, "The Chinese-speaking Muslims (Dungans) of Central Asia: A Case of Multiple Identities in a Changing Context," *Asian Ethnicity* 6 (2) (June 2005): 121–134.

4. 134.

5. The figure of 15,000 (compared to 14,600 according to 1926 census) comes from a 1937 Russian document on orthography for Dunganese. It is translated into German and included in Heinz Riedlinger, *Likbez: Alphabetisierung bei den sowjetischen Dunganen seit 1927 und ihr Zusammenhang mit den Latinisierungsbestrebungen in China*, 167. See Allès 2005.

6. As late as the 1980s, the majority of Dungans were unable to communicate in their own language. Kyrgyzstan began reversing the situation by encouraging academic research and teaching of the language. A Department of Dungan studies was established at the Kyrgyz State University in 1988. See Eugene Huskey 1995, "The Politics of Language in Kyrgyzstan," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 23 (3) (1995): 549–572.

7. This becomes a significant fact in the later latinization project for the 100,000 or so Chinese laborers in Vladivostok.

8. After returning from Russia in the early 1930s, however, he did continue to devote himself to working out the technical details of a viable latinization scheme for the Chinese language, despite his ill health. With the help of his friend Peng Ling, Qu probed the question of dialectology. See Peng Ling's reminiscence, "Nanwang de xingqi san: Huiyi Qiubao Zhihua fufu" (The Unforgettable Wednesdays: Remembering Qu Qiubai and His Wife Zhihua), *Xin wenxue shiliao* 4 (1982): 107–110.

9. Qu, "Xin Zhongguo wen cao'an" (A Draft Proposal for the Chinese New Script), *Qu Qiubai wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1953), vol. 3: 705–706.

10. *Ibid.*, 706.

11. Qu, "Xuefa wansui!" (Long Live the Academic Warlords!), *Qu Qiubai wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1953), vol. 3: 596–597.

12. Here, Qu echoes the earlier assertion by Qian Xuantong in a March 1918 letter to Chen Duxiu, in which Qian emphatically wrote, "If you want to abolish Confucianism, you must first get rid of the Chinese script. If you want to eradicate the childish, barbaric, and obstinate habits of mind, you can't afford not to abolish the Chinese script first." This sentiment came to be known as the first open charge for Han script revolution, and resuscitated the discussion of Romanization despite the ascendancy of the National Phonetic Alphabet at the time. See Qian Xuantong, "Tongxin: Zhongguo jinhou zhi wenzi wenti" (Correspondence: China's Script Problem in the Present and Future), *Xin Qingnian* 4 (4) (1918): 70–77.

13. Qu, "Xuefu wansui" 595–596.

14. For Qu's full critique of Gwoyue Romatzyh, see Qu, "Luomazi de Zhongguo wen haishi roumazi de Zhongguo wen?" (Roman Script in Chinese or Nauseating Script in Chinese?), *Qu Qiubai wenji*, vols. 3/4 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1953): 662–672.

15. Zhao, "Gwoyue Romatzyh or the National Romanization." In *Linguistic Essays by Yuenren Chao*, ed. Wu Zongji and Zhao Xinna (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2006), 61.

16. See Zhao, "Hewei zhengyin?" [What is Standard Pronunciation], in *Yuyan wenti* [Problems of Language], ed. Zhao Yuanren (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1980), 103–121.

17. "What Is Correct Chinese?" In *Linguistic Essays by Yuenren Chao*, ed. Zongji Wu and Xina Zhao (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2006), 712.

18. Harriet C. Mills, "Language Reform in China: Some Recent Developments," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 (4) (August 1956): 521.

19. Ni Haishu, *Zhongguo pinyin wenzi yundong shi jian bian* (A Short History of the Phonetic Script Movement in China), (Shanghai: Xiandai shubao, 1948), 150–172.

20. See my *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, ch. 3.

21. M. Mobin Shorish, "Planning by Decree: The Soviet Language Policy in Central Asia," *Language Problems & Language Planning* 8 (1) (Spring 1984): 39.

22. Thomas G. Winner, "Problems of Alphabetic Reform among the Turkic Peoples of Soviet Central Asia," *Slavonic and East European Review* 31 (76) (December 1952), 136. Just as the Latin alphabet was purely instrumental, once it served its purpose, its erstwhile supporters were just as ready to abandon it, as they did when Latinization was replaced by the Cyrillic scheme in 1939. *Ibid.*, 146.

23. Quoted in Terry Dean Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 187.

24. Because it acquired its own Latin script early on, ironically, Azerbaijani was among the oppositions to the standards of the New Turkic Alphabet, adopted in 1928. See Smith 1998, 133.

25. The following discussion draws on Michael G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR*, especially 28–79.

26. *Ibid.*, 43.

27. Qu, "Duoyu de hua."

28. Lu Yuan, trans. "Qu Qiubai yu tongdai ren" (Qu Qiubai and His Contemporaries), in *Qu Qiubai yanjiu* 7 (Qu Qiubai jinianguan ed.) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1995), 151.

29. The account of just how New Script was devised is subject to discrepancies between different accounts. I bridge here the differences between the two key members of the project, Xiao San and A. G. Shprintsin (Xiao San 1959; Shprintsin 1974).

30. This translation is minimally modified from that provided by Dyer.

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