ABSTRACT

The reformation of the Chinese language was first started more than 90 years ago. However, it was last thirty years that some remarkable results were achieved. After the formation of the present Chinese Government in 1949, much efforts were spent in the studying and planning for the promotion of simplified characters, thus leading to the unprecedented achieved in the reformation of the Chinese characters.

The objective for the reformation of the Chinese characters is to solve the learning problems of the Chinese language. With simplification, the number of strokes was reduced. However, there remains the problem of the great number of characters (单字). This is a major problem in learning and modernization. Upon completion of the mammoth task of simplifying the characters, the next step then in the reformation is to reduce the number of characters. In this academic exercise, I shall first of all give a brief introduction and analysis of a few recent proposals for the simplification process, thereby paving the way for the next stage in the reformation — reduction in the number of Chinese characters.

In my studies, it is learnt that there are approximately fifty thousand characters in the dictionaries, new and old. In recent years scholars have investigated and found that of the twenty-one million characters (总字数) used in modern-day newspapers, magazines and reports, only six thousand individual characters (单字) have been used. It goes to show that the number of frequently-used Chinese characters could be reduced.

Furthermore, it will be shown in this paper that there are differences in the relationship between a single characters (单字) and a word (词). The modern Chinese language is not inclined to be monosyllabic. It is gradually moving towards multisyllabic. At the same time, I shall endeavour to prove that in modern Chinese, only some 3,900 characters (常用单字) are frequently used in coupling with one another, some 90,000 words (词) could be generated, thus increasing the vocabulary by some 22 times. This goes to show that the reduction in number of Chinese characters is a distinct possibility. Finally, this paper shall integrate all evidence in the various chapters aforesaid putting forward the various methods and theories in the reduction of the number of Chinese characters. However, no attempt shall be made to determine the actual number of Chinese characters to be retained as this is not the subject matter of this exercise.