ABSTRACT

From the period of the Oracle - Bone Writing (甲骨文 Jiaowen) to the present, the Chinese Characters have a history of about three thousand-old years. The Chinese way of writing has always served as a means of communication, and of the preservation of Chinese culture and Chinese thought. It is still in general use today.

Owing to the fact that Chinese Characters are, by nature, difficult to write, learn and read, it seems logical that Chinese writing requires reformation. In fact, Chinese Characters reform started very early, but it was only during the early Republican Period (1912 - 1948) that it became common. For example in 1917, Hu Shi (胡适) and Chen Duxiu (陈独秀) initiated the literary revolution in Xin Quingnian (《新青年》). In 1923, a leading magazine Guoyu Yuekan (《国语月刊》), or National Language Monthly, was published. Writers participating in the discussion in these magazines included Qian Xuantong (钱玄同), Zhao Yuanren (赵元任), Li Jinxi (黎锦熙) and others.

The present study aims to examine the theories about Chinese Characters reform during the early Republican period and to assess their consequent influence on present-day on going reform process and language policy.

This academic exercise is divided into six chapters. The first chapter traces the background of the theories of Chinese Characters reform. Chapter two discusses the reasons for the necessity to reform the Chinese way of writing, quoting foreign scholars' views to support such a necessity. Chapter three is a brief historical account of the characters reform movement in general.

The next two chapters focus on the theories of Chinese Characters reform propounded during the period under review, including Simplification of Chinese Characters, the use of Phonetic Symbols (Zhuyin Fuhao注音符号), Romanisation of Chinese Characters and Esperanto.

The last chapter concludes the study with significant facts and principles of the Chinese Characters reform theories and critically assesses their influence on present-day Chinese writing system and language policy as a whole.