

The 'French Connection' – Chinese Linguists in Paris

Mariana Münning

Universität Heidelberg, Deutschland

Abstract Five linguists (Liu Bannong, Chao Yuen Ren, Wang Li, Chen Dingmin and Gao Mingkai) studied at Paris University during the 1920s and 1930s and shaped Chinese linguistics decisively. This paper frames them as “go-betweens” (Raj 2017) who were able to travel between the two spaces of circulation, Paris and Chinese academia. Specifically, this paper examines how their roles changed from student to expert, as reflected in their respective relationships with the French professors, how their studies in Paris contributed to their shaping of Chinese linguistics, especially phonetics and grammar, and why this ‘French Connection’ may have been overlooked up to now.

Keywords China. France. Linguistics. Phonetics. Grammar.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Phonetics. – 2.1 Liu Fu (Liu Bannong). – 2.2 Zhao Yuanren. – 2.3 Wang Li. – 3 Grammar. – 3.1 Chen Dingmin. – 3.2 Gao Mingkai. – 4 Back in China. – 5 Conclusion.



Peer review

Submitted 2024-07-30
Accepted 2025-01-22
Published 2025-05-30

Open access

© 2025 Münning | © 4.0



Citation Münning, M. (2025). “The ‘French Connection’ – Chinese Linguists in Paris”. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, supplement, May 2025, 131-160.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/02/004

1 Introduction

"Spaces of circulation" (Raj 2017) are not, and never were, equally permeable in both directions. In the case of Western/Paris academia on the one side and Chinese/Beijing academia on the other, the twentieth century started off with a clear imbalance. While Western academia was bleeding out towards the 'East', with Chinese scholars receiving, studying, and learning Western science on a large scale, their voices were only sporadically heard – or listened to – in Europe. "Go-betweens" were able to pierce through the membranes of the spaces of circulation, a task not only intellectually but also physically challenging, as the journey had to be undertaken by ship or train. This paper argues that Chinese students at the University of Paris from 1920 to 1940 evolved from mere pupils absorbing knowledge in France and transporting it to China to eye-level dialogue partners, or "interlocutors" (Krämer 2023) for the French professors. In this way, the Chinese linguists reclaimed explanatory power over their own language.

The title of this paper alludes to the 1971 film with Gene Hackman (1930-2025), in which he impersonates a policeman and is trying to find out how drugs are smuggled from France into the USA without anybody noticing. As silly as this allusion may be, it illustrates that the crucial role of Paris-trained linguists in China, or of French influence in Chinese linguistics, has long been overlooked. One reason for this may have been the terrible repressions some of the linguists had to endure during the Anti-rightist-campaign and the Cultural Revolution, during which Western teaching was labelled as "bourgeois", the intellectuals had to renounce them, and subsequently self-censored themselves and their French experience.

The protagonists, the "go-betweens", are five linguists who studied at the University of Paris in the period between 1920 and 1940 and who have shaped the discipline decisively:

1. Liu Fu 劉復 (Liu Bannong 劉半農, 1891-1934), in Paris 1921-25
2. Zhao Yuanren 趙元任 (Yuen Ren Chao, 1892-1982), in Paris in 1924 and 1925
3. Wang Li 王力 (Wang Liaoyi 王了一, 1900-86), in Paris 1927-32
4. Chen Dingmin 陳定民 (1910-85), in Paris 1934-39
5. Gao Mingkai 高名凱 (1911-65), in Paris 1936-41

Zhao Yuanren, in contrast to the other linguists, did not write a doctoral thesis but went to Paris for a shorter period to converse with linguists and sinologists and audit some of their classes. Due to his immersion in the discourse on phonetics, his close contact to Liu Fu while in Paris, and his role for Wang Li to decide to study there, too, he is included in this study. The other four, Liu, Wang, Chen, and Gao, each completed their doctorate at the University of Paris in topics

in Chinese linguistics, i.e. linguistics of the Chinese language in the narrower sense. They were chosen based on Yuan Tung-li's bibliography of doctoral dissertations (Yuan 1964).¹ Adjacent disciplines, such as palaeography or literature studies, are not included. This paper examines how the setting of Chinese academics in Paris enabled exchange of ideas and contribution to the study of the Chinese linguistics to a large extent. This will not only reveal that they were increasingly able to shrug off their roles as students and become dialogue partners, or interlocutors. It will also reveal that this development went hand in hand with a shift of research focus from phonetics to grammar.

This shift from one linguistic subdiscipline to the other has come to be a focus of this paper as virtually all secondary literature about Wang Li's time in Paris claims that he originally wanted to write a thesis on grammar but was dissuaded to do so by Paul Pelliot (1878-1945).² Instead, Wang Li graduated with a thesis in experimental phonetics on his home dialect. All five protagonists had set out to France not as inexperienced students but as scholars with a certain amount of experience and expertise. While Wang and Liu had already written theses and treatises on grammar, both scholars would later graduate with works in phonetics. It should be noted that Liu specifically worked on the tones of several dialects. Only the younger generation was able to move more towards grammar. Chen tackled particles from a phonetic angle but pursued the question if they have a grammatic or emphatic function. Gao, then, stayed with the question of particles, but clearly focused on their grammatical value. With this gradual disciplinary shift came a shift from description to analysis.

The five linguists were neither the first nor the only Chinese in Paris. It was a popular destination for Chinese students, especially Anarchists, and the Paris commune of 1871 became a well-cited example of an early attempt of a communist government in later PRC history textbooks. Many students had been organised in the Work-Study-Movement (or 'diligent work and frugal study movement', *Qingong*

¹ I am grateful to Olivia Wenzel for directing me to this bibliography. Sun et al. have presented a research paper that also discusses the roles of Cen Qixiang 岑麒祥 (1903-1989) and Wang Lien-Tseng 王聯曾 (?-?) who obtained a "licentiate" in phonetics at the University of Paris. They also mention the doctoral candidate Tao Yumin 陶燠民 (?-1934) who died before he could defend his dissertation (Sun et al. 2024, 58).

² Groeling-Che 1984, 17. Von Groeling-Che based her book on personal interviews with Wang Li. The Chinese biography by Zhang and Wang implies that it was Marcel Granet 格拉奈 (1884-1940) who insisted Wang writes on phonetics (Zhang, Wang 1992, 42). Wu's article in the magazine *Renwu* 人物, however, blames Henri Maspero (Wu 1981).

jianxue yundong 勤工儉學運動, 1912-27).³ In Lyon and Beijing, Sino-French organisations such as the Sino-French University were established. Interestingly, already Ma Jianzhong 馬建忠 (1845-1900), famous for creating the first grammar of Chinese as a Chinese native, the *Mashi wentong* 馬氏文通 from 1898, had sojourned in Paris from 1876 to 1880. However, even though he was an inspiration to virtually all five linguists of this paper, he did not study linguistics but law, namely at École Libre des Science Politiques (known today as Sciences Po)⁴ (Mair 1997, 5, 7-8). For Wang Li, for example, Ma was an important inspiration. Since Ma relied extensively on Western grammar concepts to explain Chinese grammar, Wang warned time and again against a wholesale adoption of Western theories (cf. Münning 2017, s.v. “Wáng”).

This paper aims at describing and questioning the network(s) of linguists and the knowledge transfer between them. Research questions include: what was the relationship shared by the French and Chinese actors? Was this relationship one between teacher (French) and student (Chinese)? Did the Chinese actors merely serve as informants for the French professors? Was the role of the Chinese to transmit knowledge (maybe only to partial extent) between ‘two spaces of circulation’ in both directions? Or was the explanatory power of Chinese linguistics underestimated by the French teachers and the knowledge transfer was unidirectional? Or can we find a development from a mere student-teacher to an eye-level interlocutor relation? What sources can we use to find out? And finally: What role does the “French Connection” play for nowadays’ Chinese linguistics and “languagescape”?

This paper proceeds as follows: First, Liu, Zhao and Wang as the three protagonists who studied phonetics in Paris and their contributions to the discipline are discussed. After that, the same is done for the grammar specialists. This paper attempts to highlight their contributions to the field, their impact and their role in the discourse. The section “Back in China” describes the events occurring after their sojourn in France, with a focus on their treatment as targets of the anti-rightist campaign. It gives an outlook on their impact on Western sinology. A conclusion will answer the research questions raised above.

³ Liu Fu criticised the *jianxue yundong* in his “Ou you huiyilu” 歐遊回憶錄 (1926): it is impossible to work enough to fully finance yourself.

⁴ Ma Jianzhong’s older brother Ma Xiangbo 馬相伯 (1840-1939) apparently helped in the compilation to an unknown extent. Ma Jianzhong was well versed in French, Latin, Greek and German.

2 Phonetics

Four of the five protagonists of this paper studied phonetics in Paris. In Europe, research of tonal languages was just beginning. Tones per se were known in China for centuries but their physical qualities were unclear. Three major conceptual and technological innovation bids came from the West: First, the idea that the tones were pitch tones, i.e. like a musical melody, which can be notated with musical notation. Second, technological devices that recorded sound waves either as graphical representations or in audio form for playback. Third, Bernhard Karlgren's (1889-1978) idea to combine the traditional Chinese phonological scholarship with these modern methods.⁵ To yield the desired, meaningful and reliable results, however, Chinese native speakers were needed as go-betweens to adapt these innovations and apply them in the field. Liu Fu, Zhao Yuanren and Wang Li were these go-betweens. Their results, such as Zhao's representation of tones with numbers that indicate pitch levels, came to be accepted in Chinese linguistics and language learning worldwide. The main section of this paper presents their role as go-betweens between Europe and China, between Paris and Peking (if the reader allows this cheap alliteration), carrying back and forth knowledge from the respective spaces of circulation.

2.1 Liu Fu (Liu Bannong)

Liu Fu, or Liu Bannong 劉半農 (1891-1934), born in Jiangyin 江陰, Jiangsu Province, was not only a linguist but also a poet, essayist, translator, teacher, language planner as well as photographer⁶ and inventor. Like the other protagonists of this paper, he was not just concerned with describing and researching the Chinese language, but also with reforming it. He was a vernacular language (*baihua* 白話) enthusiast, whose article in the May Fourth journal *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 (New Youth) was so impressive that it prompted Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940) to invite him to come to teach at Peking University.⁷ Among the many scholarly endeavours he undertook was the collection of folksongs from 1918 onwards, a movement which was born out of the wish to understand and preserve oral (and vernacular or

⁵ This enumeration is not chronological.

⁶ Liu himself describes that the second phase of his photography studies and experience began in 1923 in Paris, when he was insomniac and bought himself a small camera to "play around" (*wan wan* 玩玩) and read whatever he could get a hold on the topic. Liu 1927, 1.

⁷ Boorman 1968, 2: 394. Cai Yuanpei's calligraphy adorns Liu's doctoral thesis.

“vulgar”, *su* 俗) modes of expression as source for a modernised language and which opened up paths to dialectology and the question of how to best record oral speech.⁸ Liu is often credited for creating the female personal pronoun character *ta* 她, but it had already appeared in Kang Baiqing’s 康白情 writings. However, Liu definitely popularised it, not least with his poem “*Jiao wo ruhe bu xiang ta*” 教我如何不想她 (Tell me how I can forget her) written in London in 1920, which was later set to music by Zhao Yuanren and became a hit.⁹ “Her” or “she” in the case of Liu’s poem/song refers to China. Liu remarked in 1926, after his return to China in 1925, how much he missed his home country, even though he saw many social problems there (Liu 1926). That studies abroad were seen as a deliberate effort to develop and strengthen a perceived backwards China is a recurring theme among the Chinese intelligentsia of the time.

Liu was sent to study in London by the Ministry of Education in 1920 (Wei 2001a, 498). To have enough time to prepare his journey, he had stopped his Peking University grammar class on December first, 1919 (Xu 1989, 67). That year, he had already published his *Zhongguo wenfa tonglun* 中國文法通論 (General discussion of Chinese grammar).¹⁰ The funds allocated to Liu just covered for himself and his studies at University College London (UCL; Wei 2001a, 498). He joined the phonetics laboratory which had been established in 1912 (Xu 1989, 10) and was led by Daniel Jones (1881-1967, who had been able to obtain his position thanks to his studies with and support by the French phonetician Paul Passy, 1859-1940; Chang, 183). As Liu had taken his wife and daughter along, his budget was very tight.¹¹ In the summer of 1920, his wife bore twins (a boy and a girl) in London, aggravating the financial situation and motivating him to relocate to Paris with his wife and then three children, where the cost of living was lower, and continue his doctoral studies at the University of Paris in June 1921¹² after an entrance exam or test (Wei 2001a, 498). Liu also felt that he and his family stood out less as foreigners there (Liu 1926). Research often stresses the economic motivation to relocate, but the academic reason should not be underestimated. Zhao Yuanren recalled that Liu considered the UCL methods for analysing tone languages to be crude (Chang 2021, 194). Paris, in contrast, was home to Paul Passy, who held the first chair of General

⁸ Cf. Tam 2020, 114 ff.; Hung 1985, 1 ff. One of Liu’s brothers, Liu Tianhua, was a musicologist.

⁹ Huang, 2023. I am thankful to Jérémy Biehler for directing me to this resource.

¹⁰ For the publication date of the first edition, see Xu 1989, 68. Peverelli (2015) translates the title as “Comprehensive Discussion of Chinese Grammar”.

¹¹ Liu 2000, 11. Liu Xiaohui (Liu Yuhou 1916-?) was Liu Bannong’s oldest daughter.

¹² Bao 1988, 76-7 and Xu 1989, 78.

and Experimental Phonetics, created especially for him at École des hautes études d'histoire et de philologie, from 1894 until 1926. He was also the founder of the International Phonetic Association and one of the inventors of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).¹³ At Collège de France, abbé Pierre-Jean Rousselot (1846-1924) had founded the first experimental phonetics laboratory in 1897 (Brock et al. 2021, 301).

In retrospective, Liu Fu felt he had too much “ambition” (*yexin* 野心) when he planned to study abroad and had to tone down his expectations step by step. His initial plan to study both literature and linguistics turned out too large (二者不可得兼 – you cannot have both/ you cannot have the cake and eat it), so he decided to concentrate on linguistics. However, even this turned out to be too broad, so he decided to concentrate on general phonetics (*putong yuyinxue* 普通語音學). Self-ironically he confessed that even that was still too much for his talents (*tiancai* 天才). Therefore, he settled with experimental phonetics (*shiyan yuyinxue* 實驗語音學). His advice, therefore, was to concentrate on less but to do it more thoroughly, especially given that time abroad is limited for a foreign student. The focus of his studies was to learn new methodologies to substitute for the old (“dead”, *si* 死) ones, which he could then apply once returned to China, only this would constitute the “correct” (*zhengdang* 正當) way of studying abroad.¹⁴

Liu's activities in Paris, as have been recorded in his *nianpu* 年譜 (annalistic biography), as his diary was allegedly burnt during the Cultural Revolution (Koller 1993), testify to the wide scope of his interests and talents. He frequented lectures of Collège de France (Wei 2001a).¹⁵ Numerous essays, poems, and translations of his appeared in Chinese magazines. He studied and copied the Dunhuang manuscripts in the French National Library. Informing the Chinese readers about Chinese sources in France and taking part in the literary and linguistic debates of the time (on language reform, for instance), his motivation was to transport knowledge from France to China, his home country's development and progress always in mind. In 1921, he wrote to Cai Yuanpei with a plan to establish a Chinese experimental phonetics laboratory (Xu 1989, 80, *passim*). In the letter, which was published in the *Peking University journal*, vol. 893, he lays out a concrete working plan for the lab that should be part

¹³ Cf. Fallon 2006, 239. See also Ashby 2015, 118 and Ashby 2011. The film discussed by Ashby shows (probably) Stephen Jones using the apparatuses, speaking into a mouthpiece, recording sound waves on a kymograph, etc. See also Chang 2021.

¹⁴ Liu 1925a, 81. In this speech at an academic reunion, his widely lauded witty style is evident, spiced with self-irony.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, there are only attendance booklets in the archive of Collège de France from later years.

of Peking University, including what apparatuses to purchase (such as the kymograph and instruments developed by European scholars, like Rousselot), who should staff it and that it should not only investigate, but also store and interpret Chinese language data,¹⁶ and, if the circumstances allow, also other languages.¹⁷ This laboratory was indeed established upon his return (Cai 1934, 2) and accommodated and trained young researchers, such as Wei Jiangong 魏建功 (1901-1980), from whom we know that at least some of the instruments requested by Liu were indeed used there (Wei 2001a; Münning, 2022).

In 1922, Liu Fu wrote to Cai Yuanpei again to report about his progress and to invite interested readers to correspond with him. He described the European academia as compartmentalised (“sectarian”, *menhuzhijian* 門戶之見), i.e. that the scholars stick to colleagues in their respective discipline and are reluctant to accept someone who would endeavour into too many different fields. Therefore, Liu decided to concentrate on experimental phonetics, which was best to study in Paris (while applied phonetics was best in England); and as Humboldt University in Berlin was a good address for experimental phonetics, too, he spent a few months there. From the letter, we know “Monsieur Fu Liu” lived in 5, rue des Feuillantines, Paris (Liu April 20, 1922). He would move at least one time within Paris, Zhao Yuanren located him in Rue de l’Estrapade in 1924 (Zhao 1934).¹⁸

Even though his studies in Paris focused on experimental phonetics, the work Liu had already done on grammar stayed with him, as did his involvement in the language reform discourse.¹⁹ In 1923, he wrote a postface to his *Zhongguo wenfa tonglun* for its third edition in which he adds to some aspects of it and makes some corrections, much of it indebted to his new ideas gathered in France. The work itself is based on Henry Sweet’s *New English Grammar* (1891-98) and argues that most grammatical features of Chinese are expressed in its syntax (Peverelli 2015, 73-4). Its influence on Li Jinxi 黎錦熙 (1890-1978), a trailblazer of modern grammar studies, is important (31). It also opens a connection to the last protagonists of this paper, Chen Dingming and Gao Mingkai, as it touches the question of particles (or to only Gao as it discusses the preposition (or verb) *zai* 在).

¹⁶ It is possible that “Zhongguo yuyan fanyuan 中國語言範圍” also includes non-sinitic languages spoken in China.

¹⁷ Liu Fu: “Tiyi” 1921.

¹⁸ To confirm the addresses and possibly find others in case he moved, I have tried to locate Liu’s student file at Archives Nationales, but it is not available for consultation because of its brittle state. I hope to receive a scan at some point in the future. I extend my gratitude to the archivers for their help.

¹⁹ Liu was a member of the Guoyu tongyi choubeihui 國語統一籌備會 (Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language), for example.

It also opens a connection to Wang Li (other than experimental phonetics) as it touches the question of Europeanisation *Ouhua* 歐化 (Liu 1923, 121). Last but not least, as Liu would revise his grammar after his return to China and publish it as *Zhongguo wenfa jianghua* 中國文法講話 (Lectures on Chinese grammar) in 1932, so grammar is also starting and ending point for him.

The two main questions Liu tackles in his *Zhongguo wenfa tonglun* postface are first (1) the difference between spoken and written language and the new writing style as in between the two and (2) what role the study of foreign grammar can play for the study of Chinese. (1) Liu's deliberations about the difference between the spoken and the written are indebted to the wish for reform of the time: the implementation of a standard language, i.e. pronunciation (his complementary thesis hits the same note) and the unification of the spoken and the written language (*yan wen heyi* 言文合一, Liu 1923, 119, *passim*). Nevertheless, Liu states that linguists should not try to be politicians (*zhengke* 政客, a derogatory term). Under the impression of phonetics, he describes vividly how many aspects of the spoken language are not represented in writing and according to him can never be (Liu 1923, 119). This is particularly true in the case of prosody, where a sentence can be completely altered semantically depending on which syllable is stressed (114). As he advocates to study spoken and written grammar distinctly, Liu clarifies that his grammar deals with the written language modelled on the spoken, *yutiwen* 語體文 destined to replace the classical written language *wenyanwen* 文言文. He locates its grammatical features between conservative (Chinese) and Europeanised grammar (Liu 1923, 120-1). Later, also Wang Li would "blame" grammatical features of the modern language on European influences,²⁰ but this view was corrected or attenuated by Alain Peyraube (Peyraube 2000), Ruth Cordes (Cordes 2014) and others.

(2) As literally anyone writing about grammar, Liu refers to Ma Jianzhong as pioneer for the study of written grammar. However, Liu states that Ma only put a veneer of western clothing on classical Chinese scholarship (Liu 1923, 116). So, what use can the study of foreign grammar have? The comparison with and translation into other languages can help pinpoint, explain and name features and functions of modern Chinese grammar, such as parts of speech, that have hitherto not been studied. He comes to the conclusion, for example, that *zhong* 中 is a noun (in the middle) by comparing it with English, French and Sanskrit, deciding that the Sanskrit rendering of *Zhongguo zhi zhong* 中國之中 is the most suitable, discarding the

²⁰ Wang [1943] 1985, 460 ff. This grammar is based on his Xinan Lianhe Daxue 西南聯合大學 (United South-Western University) lectures, it was first published in 1943.

prepositions “in” and “à” of English and French (129-39). At the example of the term *zai* 在, he shows that even though it expresses a position (*diwei* 地位), it cannot be simply equated to “at” or “à” (130-4). While the study of Western languages can be helpful, the influence of them should not be too strong so that either particular Chinese grammar phenomena are obscured by it, or the language develops into Pidgin English (121-2).

Liu Fu graduated with two doctoral dissertations. *Étude expérimentale sur les tons du chinois* (Experimental study of the tones of Chinese) was his primary thesis, which earned him a reward (*récompense*) of 500 Francs of the Commission du prix Volney in 1925. Erroneously, secondary literature usually claims he received the actual prix Volney, which is not the case (“Informations diverses” 1925). His complimentary thesis (a requirement that applied to some doctoral candidates and that was dropped in 1969, (cf. Durry 1969) was *Les Mouvements de la langue nationale en Chine* and it testifies to the entanglement of linguistics and language planning in twentieth century China. Just as or even more than the “correct” pronunciation of English was to be taught in British schools and gave impetus to phonetics as a discipline (Chang 184), Chinese scholars and educators fought for a nationwide promotion of a standard language. In contrast to most scholars of the time, who advocated for choosing the Beijing dialect as the standard, Liu advocated for the eclectic pronunciation standard that he conceptualised as a developed imperial Mandarin (*guanhua* 官話). He criticised one of the earliest proponents of the language of Beijing, Zhang Shiyi 張士一 (1886-1969), for copying Daniel Jones’ approach that the standard pronunciation should be modeled on a Southern English person educated at a public boarding school (Jones 1922, 4; Liu 1925d, 52). Zhang Shiyi’s phrase *you jiaoyu de Beijing bendi ren suo shuo de hua* 有教育的北京本地人所說的話 (language of an educated native of Beijing; 1920, 35), however, was to become part of the official definition of the Chinese standard language as *shouguo zhongdeng jiaoyu de Beijing bendi ren de hua* 受過中等教育的北京本地人的話 (the language spoken by a native of Beijing who has received middle school education) (Wei 2001b) and similar wordings for years to come. The thesis is directed at a Western audience, clarifying Chinese terminology and presenting Chinese actors. However, Liu always stays in dialogue with the Chinese audience, for example by publishing his dissertation abstracts (Liu 1922c; 1925c) or contributing to the discussion on the national language (Liu 1922b).

And he did more than just staying in dialogue: Everything learned abroad was to be used to modernise and strengthen China and the newly born nation. Therefore, Liu published the findings of his primary thesis *Étude expérimentale* in Chinese in China as *Sisheng shiyanlu* 四聲實驗錄 (Experimental Study of the Four Tones) in 1924, before the French version was published in Paris. In his role as go-between, he

targeted the Chinese and the French readers differently and chose the content accordingly. In the following paragraphs, I attempt a summary and comparison of the two works.

Consulting the thesis *Étude expérimentale* makes the reader understand why the commission of the prix Volney may have thought Liu Fu merited a reward, and it also fuels the argument that Chinese linguists like him were much more than mere students but also informants, innovators and discourse participants. Liu acts as informant by presenting the history of tone research in China and by providing the phonetic source material. He acts as innovator by developing new methodologies. Lastly, he participates actively in the discourse by addressing existing scholarly opinions and providing solid research evidence for the nature of the tones in the Chinese language: They are expressed by pitch, i.e. different frequencies, just like music (not absolute, but relative to each other).

In the introductory paragraphs of *Étude expérimentale* – the entire book is structured in numbered paragraphs, like his other scholarly works, too – Liu summarises the historical discourse about tones. He presents the Chinese debate to the Western reader, beginning with the earliest, probably unconscious, manifestation of tones in pre-imperial times, criticising several Chinese approaches to historical sources (such as Qian Xuanton's 錢玄同, 1887-1939, and others). Only European scholars and their "musical ear" (*oreille musicale*) were finally able to grasp the true nature of the Chinese tones from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards: their "pitch" (*hauteur musicale*). He mentions M. de Michels ("Du système des intonations chinoises et de ses rapports avec celui des intonations annamites", *Journal Asiatique*, 1869) and M. Courant (*Langue chinoise parlée*, Paris, 1914) who were able to apply a "scientific method" (*méthode scientifique*). But the greatest innovation was introduced by Bernhard Karlgren in his *Études sur la phonologie chinoise*, 1915, aided by methods from the new science of experimental phonetics (Liu 1925d, 9). Liu Fu criticises Karlgren for basing his findings on single speakers as informants, such as a certain Ts'i Lien-teng (Qi Liandeng) living in Paris and being the source for the four tones of the Beijing dialect. Still, Liu is obviously following on Karlgren's footsteps. Karlgren admitted that it would need a much more thorough study and more data, preferably obtained by the modern methods of experimental phonetics and its devices invented by Rousselot and others. Karlgren basically suggests the methodology that Liu would then employ for his thesis and admit being inspired by him (10-11). However, as man's life is short, Karlgren decided to make use of his ears (Karlgren 1915, 224-5) and only discusses the use of recording devices such as the phonograph by Lioret and the artificial palate in theory. He also makes extensive use of existing literature, such as Courant's *La langue chinoise parlée* (1914) and its rendering of the

tones in musical notation (Karlgren 1915, 258).

For the Chinese audience, Liu proceeds differently. He begins with his research question “What are the tones” and clarifies that he is of course aware that in many regional languages, there are more than four tones. In the Chinese version, 12 dialects are presented,²¹ in the French thesis, he concentrates on Pekingese (Beijingese), Cantonese and his home dialect of Jiangyin and only occasionally mentions examples from the others. The Chinese readers get a crash course of the definition of sound and its physical properties, as well as about pitch and music with an introduction to musical theory, the physics behind it, and notation. The Chinese version is written in a more essayistic style, spiced with anecdotes.

The Chinese version of the thesis then proceeds with an introduction into acoustic physics (Shengyin zhi duanding 聲音之斷定, definition of sound) and omits the historical overview over past research. For the Chinese readers, he dives right into the methodology, presenting the different devices with images. In the French thesis, images are shown in the appendix. Liu used the following devices:

- To record sound: electric device with a rotating cylinder (Liu 1925b, 11), this is the kymograph (*langwenji* 浪紋計) in the Chinese thesis
- To measure time: electric tuning fork (électro-diapason, *dianlang yincha* 電浪音叉; Liu 1951, 25)
- Vibrations of nasal sounds: manometric mask (masque manométrique) that Jean Poirot (1873-1924)²² had specially made for Liu
- To record the vibrations of the voice: small drums
- To measure the traces made on the cylinder and drums: a construction with a magnifying glass and a ruler invented by Liu (Liu 1925b, 12)

The last two items merit a special discussion: the mask that Poirot had made for Liu was attached via a tube system to a magnalium needle that would draw the waveform of the vibrations of the voice on a revolving drum. This setup was a special invention of Liu. The other invention was a construction with a ruler and a magnifying glass that indicates directly the logarithm of the pitch (*zhijie liang duishu de yin'gao tuiduanchi* 直接量对数的音高推断尺). Cheekily, it came to be called “Liugraph” among the colleagues, analogously to “Liore[t]

²¹ Dialects with four tones: Beijing and Chengdu (with the entering tone ru-sheng 入聲 in parentheses), Nanjing, Jiangyin (Jiangsu), Jiangshan (Zhejiang), Jingde (Anhui), Tengyue (Yunnan), Wuchang, Changsha; dialects with eight tones: Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Chaozhou. Liu also mentions the names of the speakers. Note that nowadays' classification into big dialect groups was not yet complete.

²² Poirot had taken over the phonetics institute and the Archives de la Parole from Ferdinand Brunot (1860-1938) in 1920.

graph”, Lioret’s phonograph (Zhao 1934). Liu’s work under the direction of Poirot came to be received as pioneering in the history of the Phonetics Institute: “J. Poirot came in 1920 with his labiograph, and he directed the doctoral research of Liu Fu, using a recording cylinder (built by Boulitte),²³ equipped with an electric tuning fork and a manometric mask. The result was a pioneering thesis on the phonetics of Chinese tones” (Fougeron et. al. 2023, 4). Liu was able to prove that “tones corresponded to specific patterns of the fundamental frequency’s variation over time” (Yeang 2019, 104). Even before the publication of his thesis, in December 1922, Liu was accepted into the Société Linguistique Française after Poirot’s recommendation.

2.2 Zhao Yuanren

Zhao Yuanren, together with Wang Li, who will feature in the next section, was one of the most important Chinese linguists of China. He went to Paris for shorter stays in 1924 and 1925 while staying in England during his extensive research travels in Europe. He was a close friend of Liu Fu and connects Liu and Wang. Zhao was a veritable polyglot and polymath, voice of the national language²⁴ and stands out among the protagonists of this paper as he did not complete a doctoral dissertation in Paris (and never intended to). He toured Europe for research as a more “accomplished” scholar and audited the classes of Antoine Meillet (1866-1936), Vendryès, Maspero and Pelliot (Chao 1976). He was a frequent lunch and dinner guest at Liu Fu’s house, for instance, on January 8, 1925 (Zhou 2022).

Zhao Yuanren gives us an impression of how he and maybe also other Chinese students may have perceived the language competencies of their teachers. Meillet quoted all languages with a “perfect French accent”. Vendryès and Maspero each spoke French with their respective local accents (Vendryès from the Northeast, Maspero from Paris). However, Zhao concludes: “But the lectures of these scholars were clear and systematic, and whenever necessary they could make good use of native informants or recordings” (Chao 1976, 18). After he went to a lecture of Pelliot on Central Asia on January 15, 1924, he noted about Pelliot’s Chinese pronunciation that “his intonation was terrible for a philologist” (Zhou 2022, 233). Most of the diary in that time is written in English. He frequented Hubert Pernot’s (1870-1846) class in general phonetics. Zhao noted that even though the lectures are

²³ Georges Boulitte was the instrument manufacturer of the institute of phonetics in Paris. Cf. Amelot et al. 2024.

²⁴ Zhao’s *A Phonograph Course in the Chinese National Language* came accompanied with records of his voice realising the old, eclectic national pronunciation standard.

good, Pernot “can’t pronounce a f^h (or f^h?) or a p^h” (January 16, 1925).

On March 17, 1925, Zhao attended Liu Fu’s thesis defense at Salle Louis Liard. The professors there were Vendryès, Granet, Meillet, Pelliot, Maspero and Pernot. Poirot, to whom Liu would dedicate his thesis, had already passed away. What Zhao learned in London and Paris – not only from the professors, but also from his friend Liu – was to shape his dialect research and in consequence Chinese linguistics decisively.

2.3 Wang Li

Wang Li, born in Bobai 博白, Guangxi, was one of the most influential linguists of twentieth century China. He authored scientific standard and reference works that should not be missing on any sinological bookshelf. He also participated in language planning in the PRC, such as in the promotion of the standard language, the development of the Hanyu Pinyin 漢語拼音 transcription system and in the simplification of the Chinese characters.

Like the other protagonists, Wang received his scientific training both in China and in France. He studied at Qinghua University (1926-1927) with teachers such as Zhao Yuanren and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) and he graduated with a thesis on the classical Chinese grammar *Zhongguo guwenfa* 中國古文法 (Grammar of classical Chinese). Grammar was to remain one of Wang’s most prominent research topics. After his graduation, he sought Zhao Yuanren’s advice about what to do next. Zhao recommended him to go to Paris to study linguistics (Xia 1988, 18).

Wang Li followed Zhao’s advice and studied at the University of Paris 1927-1932. He studied with the theoretical linguist Vendryès, and the sinologists Pelliot and Granet. To earn money, he translated French literature (including Molière and Baudelaire, but also French translations of Greek and Roman literature) into Chinese. He sent his translations to Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶 (1894-1988) at the Commercial Press (Shangwu Yinshuguan 商務印書館) to be published, a connection made possible by Li Shicen 李石岑 (1892-1934),²⁵ who was impressed how fast Wang, with no prior knowledge, had learned French (Xia 1988, 19). Wang also made a translation of the introduction of Vendryès’ *Le Langage* (Wang 1934).

Wang Li graduated from Paris University with a PhD thesis on his native Bobai 博白 dialect: *Une prononciation chinoise de Po-Pei*

²⁵ Zhang, Wang 1992, 40. Ye Shengtao was later to play another important role as catalyst for the advancement of linguistics when he enabled Wei Jiangong to publish the first edition of the pocket dictionary *Xinhua zidian* 新華字典 in 1953.

(province de Kouang-si): étudiée à l'aide de la phonétique expérimentale. Wang Li had originally intended to write about Chinese grammar. Pelliot (who had introduced him to Granet, chair of the Institut des hautes études chinoises), however, advised Wang to focus on the Bobai dialect from Guangxi and focus on empirical methods.²⁶ To put it bluntly, Wang was demoted from an expert to a specimen whose sole quality was that he was a native speaker. His thesis is heavy in the use of technology. Unlike Liu who measured the quality of the sound emitted by the speaker, Wang also investigates what the speaker needs to do to produce this sound, i.e. especially the places of articulation.

For the printing of his dissertation, Wang Li received a grant by the Institut des hautes études chinoises de l'université de Paris. It is noted on the cover page, and the archive of Collège de France²⁷ has preserved Wang's receipt. According to this receipt, the 3000 Francs were to be paid back. His acknowledgements give us an idea who advised him scientifically. He first mentions Pelliot, who also made the printing grant possible. Furthermore, Pierre Fouché,²⁸ rapporteur de la these (examiner), Marcel Granet (administrateur de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises), and M. l'Abbé Millet, "qui a bien voulu mettre à sa disposition son experience et son laboratoire".²⁹

In the Préface to his dissertation, Wang Li mentions his predecessors Yuen Ren Chao and Liu Fu. He writes:

Mon maître Yuen-ren Chao, servi par une science approfondie de la linguistique et une finesse d'oreille remarquable, a publié une étude très appréciée sur « le dialecte du Wou moderne ». Cette œuvre originale, en ce sens qu'aucun Chinois n'avait pu avant lui fournir une étude aussi documentée, nous fait pressentir qu'elle en eût été la perfection si l'auteur avait pu recourir à la phonétique expérimentale, c'est ce qu'a fait M. Fu Liu pour son travail sur « les tons du chinois ». (Wang 1932, XI)

²⁶ Groeling-Che 1984, 17. As mentioned above, other authors claim that it was not Pelliot but another French professor who dissuaded Wang Li from grammar and made him work on phonetics.

²⁷ I am very thankful for the help of Delphine Spicq and Claire Guttinger.

²⁸ "Le LPP et son histoire". On the history of the Phonetic Institute and the Archive de la parole, see Fougeron et al. 2023.

²⁹ Wang Prononciation XII. I suspect said abbé Millet is Adrien Millet, who authored *Étude expérimentale de la formation des voyelles* (cf. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k38604j.r=Abb%C3%A9%20Millet?rk=21459;2>) and *Précis d'expérimentation phonétique. L'oreille et les sons du langage*. He was the assistant of l'abbé Rousselot. Cf. Bordato 1939, 382.

Here, Wang Li refers to Chao’s book “Studies in the modern Wu-dialects” *Xiandai Wuyu de yanjiu* 現代吳語的研究³⁰ from 1928. It had by no means been carried out without all technological apparatus. As described above, Zhao was familiar with Liu’s work and knew the phonetic apparatuses. However, as Chen Pang Yeang has analysed, Chao’s approach relied much more on the ears of the investigator. The machines he employed could only be operated by “human data collectors with ‘musical ears’”. The accurate sensory perception not only enabled Chao and his team to discern the pitch, but also an accurate phonetic transcription of the sounds. To this end, he would play the phonograph backwards, for example (Yeang 2019, 97).

Wang Li continues that additionally to employing Liu Fu’s methodology, he used the artificial palate (palais artificiel, palatography) and photography. In the thesis, Wang pronounces every phoneme in the Bobai dialect, takes a picture of himself doing so, and prints a schematic rendering of the artificial palate. The artificial palate shows where the tongue meets the roof of the mouth, i.e. it shows the places of articulation. Wang Li later stated that the aspect of natural sciences, such as, for example, the anatomical study of the vocal tract, was key to his success as a linguist and that it would play an integral part in advancing the linguistic sciences in China (Wang 1980, 77).

3 Grammar

Both Liu Fu and Wang Li would have merited to appear prominently in this section, but as their main activities in Paris fall in the field of phonetics, they were treated above. As it is especially known from Wang Li that he would have preferred to write a thesis on grammar, we turn to look at the next generation of PhD students who were actually able to study grammar in Paris: Chen Dingmin and Gao Mingkai. I argue that their study of grammar as a more ‘analytical’ subject represents a shift in the role of the Chinese students in France and shows that they were increasingly accepted as specialists and partners in dialogue. This is also reflected by the fact that both Chen’s and Gao’s theses are prefaced by their French professors, namely by Maspero and by Demiéville, respectively.

3.1 Chen Dingmin

Chen Dingmin, born in Ningbo 寧波, Zhejiang province, but living in Beijing since he was four years old, can be considered the “missing

³⁰ The 1956 reprint is available in the Chinamaxx database.

link" between phonetics and grammar. In Paris, he wrote the dissertation *Étude phonétique des particules de la langue Chinoise* (1938) in which he pursues the question if the particles are emphatic or grammatic in nature. He also occupies a singular role among the protagonists because of three reasons: First, his main field of study came to be the French language; second, his work as a linguist was much less influential; and third, because he can be considered a communist. Before departing to France in 1934, he studied at the Chinese department of Institut Voltaire of the Sino-French University (*Zhong fa daxue Fu'ertai xueyuan guowen xi* 中法大學伏爾泰學院國文系) in Beijing (Xu Youchun 1991).

In Paris, Chen did his research for two years at the Institut de Phonétique under the supervision of its director, Pierre Fouché. In the preface of his thesis, he also thanks the assistant in the Institut, Miss M. Durand. He acknowledges the support and guidance of three other professors: Henri Maspero, Joseph Vendryès (whose course on general linguistics Chen frequented), and Paul Pelliot. In terms of finances, his thesis was printed with funds from Institut franco-chinois de Lyon,³¹ for which Georges Dubarbier had given his recommendation (Tchen 1938, 5-6).

Why do I consider Chen's dissertation as the 'missing link' between phonetics and grammar? While his measurements of the language of Peking and of Ningbo are done with a purely experimental phonetics methodology, i.e. he measures the changing pitch in a phrase, he does much more. He discusses the grammatical structure of Chinese as a whole and the role of final particles in particular. Maspero authored a preface that could be perceived as contradictory to Chen's argument. I argue that Chen did indeed learn and apply a lot from his French professors, but he also considered his predecessor Liu Fu's work a lot and recurs to Wang Li's thesis. Most importantly, however, he also emancipates himself from his French teachers by coming to different conclusions than them.

Maspero claims that particles are used almost never for their grammatical, but nearly always for their affective function ("à peu près rien de grammatical, il est presque purement affectif", Maspero 1938, IV-V). The interrogative final particle *ma* 嗎³² is the most salient example to show that Chen is of a different opinion: With *ma* at the end of the phrase, it becomes a question. Chen compares the use of interrogative particles with the change in syntax in English

³¹ For more on the Institut franco-chinois, see Villard 2014.

³² Today's *ma* was pronounced *mə* at Chen's time, as he points out discussing the shifts of pronunciation occurring among final particles away from the vowel of phonetic compound of the character towards the schwa (Tchen 1938, 142). For *ma*, however, this tendency would be reversed.

and French. He reaches the conclusion that an interrogative phrase can be marked by a particle, but also, like European languages, by a raising of the voice (and no particle). The particles, however, play an important role, as the pitch tones of Chinese limit the possibility to modulate the pitch of a sentence. Relying on Vendryès and Meillet, he compares the Chinese and Latin particles (Tchen 1938, 47).

Chen addresses existing prejudices on the Chinese language and script, such as monosyllabism³³ and ideography. For the question of monosyllabism, something Maspero believed, too, he points out that there is a huge difference between the classical written (mostly monosyllabic) and the modern spoken (largely polysyllabic) language. In the latter, a word “mot” comprises more than one monosyllabic Chinese character. Chen identifies the script as source for this misunderstanding (Tchen 1938, 9-10, 23). He debunks the “ideographic myth”³⁴ with the example of phono-semantic compound characters (he calls them “idéogrammes phonétiques”, “l'idéogramme devenant phonogramme”, 141). He points out that the phonetics are key, i.e. that a character was created for a certain pronunciation, and that its meaning is also accessed by this pronunciation. Furthermore, Maspero believed the Chinese language does not have parts of speech (parties du discours) as they are not morphologically marked (Maspero 1934, 482).³⁵ Chen contradicts him by clearly speaking about substantives, verbs and adverbs (Tchen 1938, 29 ff.).

Chen Dingmin investigated Chinese final particles in the spoken languages of Beijing and Ningbo from a phonetic angle, but his overall discussion of the Chinese language and its grammar cannot be neglected. The next and final protagonist of this paper, Gao Mingkai, was to focus on the grammatical value of prepositional particles.

3.2 Gao Mingkai

Gao Mingkai 高名凱 (1911-1965) from Pingtan 平潭 in Fujian 福建 province, graduated in philosophy from Yenching University in Beijing in 1935 (Xu 1991, 738). He studied in Paris 1936-1941 and completed

³³ On the “cliché” of monosyllabism, cf. Behr 2018.

³⁴ Proponents of the concept that the Chinese characters are ideographic reduce them to mere visual representations of an “idea”. The conceptualisation as “myth” goes back to DeFrancis 1984. It is to be noted, however, that Chen does not debunk this myth completely, he still employs the term and sees the characters as only loosely representing sound and the phono-semantic compound characters as exception. See Tchen 1936, 16 fn 2.

³⁵ Kurhofer describes how Maspero perceived Chinese as monosyllabic, isolating and that it has no morphology and no word classes. Chen would contradict all these (Kurhofer 1998, 382).

his PhD thesis *Essai sur la valeur réelle des particules prépositionnelles en chinois* under the supervision of Henri Maspero in 1940.

Like Liu Fu and Wang Li, Gao Mingkai's finances in Paris were tight. Additionally, World War II influenced daily life (Gao 1941). Gong Xiangrui 龚祥瑞 recalls getting to know Gao in Paris in 1938. Gong himself studied in London but spent the summer vacation in Paris. They first lived in Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris, which is outside of the city center and therefore moved into Quartier Latin, closer to the university. To save money, they cooked themselves and bought cheap ingredients. Gao would not let any food go waste (Gong 1992, 43).

The idea to write about prepositions (*jieci* 介詞) came from Maspero. Their existence was debated (Gong 1992, 44). Gao, like Chen, first makes general observations on Chinese grammar before treating his examples. He describes the language as morphology-less, so that all grammatical operations need to be done in the syntax. He points out that Chinese has no word classes – at least none that are morphologically marked – and that only their position in the sentence can reveal their role. The starting point for Gao's dissertation was an article by his teacher Lu Zhiwei 陸志韋 (1894-1970, C.W. Luh) on the use of verbs in Chinese and European languages (Lu 1937), in which Lu states that some Chinese verbs blend in with prepositions. Gao concludes that prepositions are quasi-verbs. But the technicalities of grammar are only an access point to the much bigger question that Gao, who was originally a philosopher, pursued: How does language influence thought? For this question, he draws on writings by Lu Zhiwei,³⁶ Maspero, Granet and de Saussure. The latter's quote "Les mœurs d'une nation ont un contre-coup sur sa langue, et, d'autre part, c'est dans une large mesure la langue qui a fait la nation" adorns the cover of Gao's dissertation (Kao 1940).

The Avant-propos by Gao himself, the Préface by Paul Demiéville and the introduction furnish us richly with sources and influences on Gao Mingkai, among them Vendryès' *Le Langage* (1921). It is likely that Gao knew Wang's translation. Vendryès, himself no speaker of Chinese, uses the Chinese language as example in his *Le Langage*. He describes how in East Asian languages,

Quant à la hauteur musicale, nous en avons de remarquables exemples dans les langues de l'Extrême-Orient, où l'intonation seule suffit à distinguer le sens et la valeur de mots autrement

³⁶ Lu Zhiwei had studied psychology in the USA (Vanderbilt and Chicago). He was to become the first Chinese commentator of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in 1948 and rejected it (Münning 2017). The idea that language influences thought and vice versa is older than Whorfianism, though.

homophones. En chinois, tel monosyllable, s’il est prononcé sur six tons³⁷ différents ou différemment intonné, peut designer six objets différents. (Vendryès 1921, 35)

He continues how the languages of East Asia have few “elements grammaticaux” but that the tone still (encore) plays a more important role (Vendryès 1921, 72). He claims that even though the word (mot) in Chinese can be defined without problem, but without context, it is unintelligible (“mais dégagé de son contexte, il perd toute valeur expressive et n’a plus qu’un vague sens abstrait qu’on ne peut rapporter à aucun emploi”, Vendryès 1921, 82). It seems that he speaks of classical grammar but modern pronunciation. It is remarkable how well informed he was, he mentions the noun-verb tone change (*hǎo* vs. *hào* 好) that we nowadays assume as developed out of an affix (-s) in Old Chinese (Vendryès 1921, 106) – which had no pitch tones (Pulleyblank 2000, 30).

It goes without saying that the knowledge acquired by Gao Mingkai (and the other protagonists) in Paris played a key role for their research and terminology. Chen Dingmin and Gao Mingkai adopted the categories *semantème* and *morphème* from Vendryès for *mot plein* (*shici* 實詞) and *mot vide* (*xuci* 虛詞). Vendryès knowingly received some Chinese grammatical theory: “les mots vides et les mots pleins, pour employer la terminologie chinoise” (1921, 98). And indeed, the Chinese distinction between “full” and “empty words” had been introduced to Western linguistics by Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare (1666-1736) in 1727 in his *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* (Robins 1967, 105).³⁸ In the nineteenth century, Abel-Rémusat formulates it in French in his *Éléments de la grammaire chinoise*:

Les Chinois appellent 實字 *chǐ tseu* [mots pleins], les mots qui ont une signification propre, comme les noms et les verbes; et 虛字 *hiú tseu* [mots vides], ou 助辭 *tsoú thseu* [termes auxiliaires] les particules qui ne servent qu’à modifier le sens des premiers, ou à marquer les rapports qui les lient entre eux.³⁹

Gao’s philosophical conclusion is that the prepositions⁴⁰ as quasi-verbs indicate actions and not relations. “Pour un Chinois, le monde

³⁷ Vendryès does not indicate which variety he refers to. Cantonese as spoken in Hong Kong and Macau has six tones. Vendryès quotes Granet 1920 in his avant-propos (Vendryès 1921, XV), who, although mentioning tones in general in his article, does not mention a certain number.

³⁸ I am thankful to Chen Wei for directing me to this information.

³⁹ Abel-Rémusat 1857, 35. On page 77 it says: “particules ou mots vides”.

⁴⁰ The prepositions Gao treats are, for example, *zai* 在, *bei* 被, *yu* 與 and many others. To discuss their different roles would go beyond the scope of this paper.

est composé d'événements atomiques" (Gao 230) and he only wants to express a real action of the concrete world, and no abstract rationalised relation. His argument that there is a distinct Chinese way of thinking characterised by this atomism that shows itself in the language draws on Vendryès, Bertrand Russell's *Outline of Philosophy* and Bernard Bosanquet's *Logic or the Morphology of Knowledge*. "La différence entre le mode de la pensée chinoise et celui de la pensée européenne est remarquable" (Kao 1940, 230). It is furthermore characterised by "représentationnisme" (representationism), which aims to represent the actual world as closely as possible (232). Relations are perceived as actions: *gei* 給, for example is different from "pour" (for), as it comes from the action "donner" (to give; 233).

While the question of how to grasp accurately the unique features of the Chinese language has occupied Chinese linguists for decades (Wippermann 2003), this view would cause a lot of trouble for Gao Mingkai after his return to China.

4 Back in China

What happened to the five protagonists in the long run after their return to China? Liu held several positions at Peking University, the Université Franco-Chinoise, and Fu-Jen University. In addition to his aforementioned grammar *Zhongguo wenfa jianghua*, he authored several important scholarly works and essays, including studies based on materials gathered in European libraries (Boorman 1968, 2: 395). He also served as chairman of the Chinese committee for the Sino-Swedish Expedition, led by Sven Hedin (1865-1952; Walravens 2003, 245; see also Hedin 1943). Unfortunately, he passed away at a young age in 1934 from an illness he contracted during a field trip to collect folk songs in Suiyuan 綏遠 province (Boorman 1968, 2: 395), which is now part of Inner Mongolia.

Chao Yuen Ren's massive contributions cannot be underestimated. He applied and developed experimental phonetics in dialect research, shaping decisively how we classify the Chinese dialects today. For him, however, the title "back in China" is not quite fitting: he went to live in the USA from 1938 onwards, teaching at Hawaii, Yale, Harvard, Berkeley and others. Nevertheless, he "continued to serve China" and the study of the Chinese language. His achievements accepted worldwide include his textbooks *Cantonese* and *Mandarin Primer*: Especially the introduction of the *Mandarin Primer* is innovative because of its accurate description of the linguistics of modern

spoken Chinese.⁴¹ He was elected President of the Linguistic Society of America and chosen as a member of Academia Sinica. His "Questions of linguistics" *Yuyan wenti* 语言问题 became the first Chinese book on general linguistic theory in 1960 (Boorman 1968, 2: 151-2).⁴²

Most activities of Chen Dingmin after returning to China are in the study of the French language. He also served as French interpreter on several world events, such as the World Youth Festival in Hungary in 1949, the conference of the World Federation of Trade unions in Beijing, the Asian Women's Congress or the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference. He accompanied Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) to the World Peace Council and Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898-1976) to the Geneva Conference in 1954 and to the Bandung Conference in 1955. He joined the Communist party in 1956. In 1957 he transferred to Paris as Xinhua News correspondent, where he stayed for three years. Upon his return to China, he participated in the translation of Mao Zedong's and Liu Shaoqi's works (Xu Youchun 1991, 1035). However, Chen was not spared during the Cultural Revolution despite his contributions to the Communist cause.

Wang Li and Gao Mingkai were also to author many linguistic works which were to decisively shape the discipline in China, especially in Wang's case. Their fate in the PRC political campaigns,⁴³ however, merits a special look. Not only were science and research increasingly politicised after 1949. Both linguists became victims of the Anti-Rightist Campaign (*fan-you yundong* 反右運動), which was, like the Cultural Revolution, detrimental to academia as a whole. It targeted mostly intellectuals, many of which were labelled as rightists, criticised by their peers and forced to write extensive self-criticisms.⁴⁴ In these, Wang and Gao had to renounce their French teachers and their ideas (Gao, 1958, Wang 1958). Ironically, only few years ago Vendryès, de Saussure and Meillet had appeared on a list of key authors to be translated into Chinese to advance the linguistic sciences.⁴⁵ In 1958, however, they and their theories were labelled as bourgeois and picked apart. The same was the case for French sinologists like Maspero and Granet. Following their scholarly footsteps became

41 Zhao's *Mandarin Primer* "introduced the methodology of structuralism" and had a notable impact on Chinese linguists (Norman 1988, 177).

42 As late as in 1957, Wang Li blamed the backwardness of Chinese linguistics on the lack of general linguistics (Masini 1985, 11).

43 In the Cultural Revolution, Wang Li was forced to work in a factory, humiliated and beaten with a metal rod. Groeling-Che 1984, 23.

44 Many victims were imprisoned, some even executed.

45 Secret document in Wei Jiangong's manuscript collection, presumably dating from 1956 with a bibliography of linguists to be studied and translated ("Fazhan yuyanxue" 1956).

a “wrong attitude”.⁴⁶ Especially the idea that the quality of Chinese and Western thinking could be inherently different drew criticism. To defend himself, Gao tries to argue that he was a victim of Western imperialism and got the wrong scholarly influence that led him astray. What has been summarised above, the atomism (*yuanzizhuyi* 原子注意) and representationalism (*biaoxiangzhuyi* 表象主义) Gao proposed as specific Chinese way of grammatical thought in his French thesis on prepositional particles, had to be condemned now. He reconfigures his reading of Granet, for example, to mean that the different grammatical phenomena in Chinese and European languages simply mean that things need to be expressed differently (Gao 1958).⁴⁷

But not all rethinking of Western grammatical theory was induced by censorship and political pressure. Wippermann writes how Western sciences were increasingly perceived as some sort of “corset” (Wippermann 2003, 209). The Emancipation from the Western gaze on the Chinese language produced important foundational research results, such as the definite rebuttal of monosyllabism. Wang Li, Gao Mingkai and Lü Shuxiang 呂叔湘 (1904-1998) defined the word in the 1940s as smallest semantic unit (*add zui xiao yi yi danwei* 最小意義單位) that may very well transgress the limit of the single character. They were of course familiar with Bloomfield’s definition of word as “minimal free form”. Still, wordhood in Chinese remained and maybe remains an important topic. Bound and free words are discussed by Lü Shuxiang. The definition of word as free morpheme by Wei Jiangong and its realisation as lexical item results in the compilation of the concise yet encompassing *Xinhua Zidian* 新華字典 (1953). Lu Zhiwei pursued the question of word formation in his *Hanyu de Goucifa* 漢語的構詞法 (1964).⁴⁸ It remains to be noted that the question of word boundaries has important implications for Pinyin orthography, compare Li Jinxi’s “writing words together” (*cilei lianshu* 詞類連書, as early as 1923; Münning 2022, 171).

Nevertheless, the reception of Western linguistic science did not end in the late 1950s. Gao Mingkai authored a Chinese translation of de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale*, along with an extensive explanatory introduction, before his premature death from illness in 1965. These works contributed significantly to the development of linguistic terminology in Chinese and became the main source for Saussurian thought in China after their publication in 1980 and 1982

⁴⁶ Zhao Shikai 1958, 128. Zhao’s criticism appeared in a collected volume with numerous criticisms of him and even more of Wang Li.

⁴⁷ Much more could be said about how linguistic theories (or scientific theories as a whole) were or had to be reframed in those highly politicised times. For the permutations of Saussurean thought, see Masini 1985.

⁴⁸ Also earlier, in 1960, Lu clarified “The Status of the Word in Chinese Linguistics” (Lu 1960).

(Grych 2020, Masini 1985, 19).⁴⁹ According to Masini, interest in de Saussure arose because of Gao's and others' stays in France and had a profound influence on Chinese linguists. Their works can be seen as the result of Chinese linguistic tradition encountering ideas from abroad (Masini 1985, 24). Also in 1980, during the Reform and Opening period and the Four Modernisations, Wang Li advocated the study of foreign languages and Western ("traditional") linguistic theory in a speech (Wang 1980, 77).

However, we can by no means speak of a unidirectional transfer of knowledge from France or the West to China. Zhao Yuanren and Wang Li became key references for Chinese linguistics and Chinese studies. For example, Wang's *Gudai Hanyu* 古代漢語 ("Classical Chinese") became the standard textbook for generations of sinologists. Its impact was already clear at the Second Chinese Linguistics Conference in October 1967 on "Problems of Content and Form in the Teaching of Chinese". Discussions covered its use in the classroom, its role as the basis for a students' glossary, and reviews of the book published in the PRC periodical *Zhongguo Yuwen* 中國語文. Additionally, Chinese scholarship was recognised on a broader scale, and the question of which grammar books should be translated into English was deliberated (Mote 1967).

In a sense, the direction of knowledge exchange about the Chinese language shifted. The French sinologist Robert Ruhlmann (Yu Rubo 于如伯, 1920-1984), listed as observer at the conference, would later visit Wang Li in China (Wu 1981). Similarly, Alain Peyraube met Wang Li in China for the first time in 1973 – still during the Cultural Revolution – when academic activities were still suspended and Wang Li was forced to work in a factory. Peyraube himself studied under Zhu Dexi 朱德熙 (1920-1992), who had once helped Wang Li retrieve his glasses when he was mistreated earlier during the Cultural Revolution. This act led to Zhu's own arrest but earned him Wang Li's lifelong gratitude. Peyraube, like most sinologists and specialists in Chinese linguistics, regards Wang as the most important figure in the field, with the most comprehensive body of work.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The reception of de Saussure in China merits a longer discussion. I direct the interested reader to Masini, who interestingly describes that Cen Qixiang, mentioned already above, had published an unofficial, maybe even secret translation of de Saussure's *Cours* by "disguising" it in Stalinist linguistics (Masini 1985, 14-15). See also Zhang and Zhang 2014.

⁵⁰ I extend my gratitude to Alain Peyraube for telling me about his experience and to Cathérine Jami for making this meeting possible.

5 Conclusion

What role did the “French Connection” play for Chinese linguistics – or – how important was France in the formation of the Chinese languagescape? What ideas traveled from Paris as one and China as the other space of circulation via the five go-betweens or interlocutors? What quality did the exchange between Chinese and French linguists and sinologists have and how did it change over time? Were the Chinese linguists able to leave a mark in Paris?

This paper can only offer a tentative answer to these questions, as well as a tiny glimpse in the rich lives and achievements of the five linguists. Learning from Paris was characterised by both reception and rejection. Receiving Western scholarly achievements constituted the largest part. The methods of experimental phonetics acquired by Liu Fu, Zhao Yuanren and Wang Li were to shape dialect research in China. Liu and Zhao, however, also contributed to the field with new inventions and approaches. Liu, in particular, left a mark on the French academic world with his prize-winning thesis and experiments. Chen Dingmin and Gao Mingkai then entered a state of dialogue with their supervisors, visible from their prefaces to their dissertations. In the long run, some aspects were also rejected. Some silently, such as monosyllabism, by simply offering a new grammar that clearly showed how most words in the modern language are made up of several syllables/characters. Some openly and politically induced, such as in the self-criticisms of the anti-rightist-campaign, which can at least partly explain why the ‘French Connection’ has often been overlooked, downplayed or even concealed by the go-betweens themselves for self-protection. Maybe both can count as emancipation from Western explanatory power. Since all protagonists were active in twentieth century language planning, their influence cannot be downplayed.

Bibliography

- Abel-Rémusat, J.-P. (1857). *Éléments de la grammaire chinoise*. Paris: Maisonneuve.
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57208927>
- Amelot, A.; Demolin, D.; Elmerich, A. (2024). "Instruments Used in Experimental Phonetics at the Beginning of the 20th Century at the Institute of Phonetics in Paris". Bóna, J. (ed.), *HCSR 2024 - Proceedings of the 6th International Workshop on the History of Speech Communication Research* (Budapest, September 20-21, 2024). Dresden: TUDpress, 167-76. Studentexte zur Sprachkommunikation 109.
<https://doi.org/10.21437/HSCR.2024>
- Ashby, M. (2011). "Film from a Phonetics Laboratory of the 1920s". Paper presented at the *ICPhS XVII Special Session Hong Kong*, August 17-21, 2011.
- Ashby, M. (2015). "Experimental Phonetics at University College London Before World War I". Hoffmann, R.; Trouvain, J. (eds), *HCSR 2015 - Proceedings of the First International Workshop on the History of Speech Communication Research* (Dresden, September 4-5, 2015). Dresden: TUDpress, 118-27. Studentexte zur Sprachkommunikation 79.
- Bao Jing 鲍晶 et al. (1988). "Liu Bannong shengping nianbiao 刘半农生平年表" (Chronological Biography of Liu Bannong). *Liu Bannong yanjiu ziliao 刘半农研究资料* (Liu Bannong Research Materials). Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 66-102.
- Behr, W. (2018). "'Monosyllabism' and Some Other Perennial Clichés About the Nature, Origins and Contacts of the Chinese Language in Europe". Malinar, A.; Müller, S. (eds), *Asia and Europe – Interconnected: Agents, Concepts, and Things*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 155-209.
- Boorman, H.L. (ed.) (1968). *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, vols. 1-2, New York; London: Columbia University Press.
- Bordato, E.E. (1939). "L'abbé Rousselot et la phonétique expérimentale". *Humaniades*, 27, 365-406.
https://www.memoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/art_revistas/pr.2275/pr.2275.pdf.
- Brock, G. et al. (2021). "Les laboratoires de phonétique français dans la première moitié du XXe siècle: instrumentations, corpus et thématiques de recherche. Dodane, C.; Schweitzer, C. (eds), *Histoire de la description de la parole: de l'introspection à l'instrumentation*. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 301-18.
- Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1934). "Liu Bannong xiansheng bu si" 刘半农先生不死 (Mr. Liu Bannong Does Not Die). *Qingnianjie*, 6(3), 1-2.
- Chang, K. (2021). "Field, Ears, and Laboratory: Training Language Scholars, 1920-1940". Chang, K.; Rocke, A. (eds), *A Global History of Research Education Disciplines, Institutions, and Nations, 1840-1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 174-205. History of Universities XXXIV/1.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192844774.003.0010>
- Chao, Y.R. (1976). "My Linguistic Autobiography". Anwar, S.D. (ed.), *Aspects of Chinese Sociolinguistics. Essays by Yuen Ren Chao*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1-21.
- Cordes, R. (2014). *Language Change in 20th Century Written Chinese: The Claim for Europeanization* [PhD dissertation]. Hamburg: University of Hamburg.
- DeFrancis, J. (1984). *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Durry, M.-J. (1969). "La suppression de la 'thèse complémentaire'" alleluia sous condition". *Le Monde*, May 8.
https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1969/05/08/la-suppression-de-la-these-complementaire-alleluia-sous-condition_3059611_1819218.html
- Fallon, P. D. (2006). "Passy, Paul Édouard (1859-1940)". Brown, K. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, vol. 9. 2nd ed. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 239-40.

- “Fazhan yuyanxue he peiyang yuyanxue rencai de shi'er nian jihua cao'an chugao” 發展語言學和培養語言學人才的十二年計畫草案初稿 (Initial Draft of the 12-Year-Plan to Develop Linguistics and Train Linguistic Personnel; 1956?). Wei Jiangong family possession.
- Fougeron, C.; Amelot, A.; Rialand, A. (2023). “On the History of the Phonetic Institute of the Université de Paris from 1911 to 1950”. Paper presented at the 20th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences (ICPhS), August 2023, Prague, Czech Republic. hal-04335615.
- Gao Mingkai 高名凱 (1941). “Chu le Bali” 出了巴黎 ([I] left Paris). *Yanjing Shuixing*, 1(3), 2-5.
- Gao Mingkai (1958). “Pipan wo zai yuyanxue gongzuo zhong de zichan jieji xueshu sixiang” 批判我在語言學工作中的資產階級學術思想 (Criticising the Bourgeois scholarly thought in my linguistic work). *Zhongguo yuwen*, 76(10), 458-64.
- Gong Xiangrui 龚祥瑞 (1992). “Huiyi Gao Mingkai zai Bali” 回忆高名凱在巴黎 (Remembering Gao Mingkai in Paris). *Gao Mingkai xiansheng jinian wenji* 高名凱先生紀念文集 (Collected memories of Gao Mingkai). Beijing: yuwen chubanshe, 43-5.
- Granet, M. (1920). “Quelques particularités de la langue et de la pensée chinoises”. *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 98-128; 161-95.
- von Groeling-Che, H. (1984). *Leben und Werk des chinesischen Sprachforschers Wang Li*. München: Minerva Publikation.
- Grych, K. (2020). “Le cours de linguistique Générale en Chine: le cas de la terminologie saussurienne traduite par Gao Mingkai”. Matsumoto, A.; Piechnik, I. (eds), *La terminologie de Ferdinand de Saussure en traduction*. Cracovie: Avalon, 9-31.
- Hedin, S. A. (1943). *History of the Expedition in Asia, 1927-1935*. Vol. 1, 1927-1928. Stockholm [Göteborg]: [Elanders].
- Huang Xingtao 黄兴涛 (2023). *A Cultural History of the Chinese Character “Ta (她, She)”*: Invention and Adoption of a New Feminine Pronoun. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Hung, C.-T. (1985). *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature 1918-1937*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- “Informations diverses” (1925). *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 69(3), 153-4.
https://www.persee.fr/doc/crai_0065-0536_1925_num_69_3_86553.
- Jones, D. (1922). *An Outline of English Phonetics*. New York: G.E. Stechert & Co.
- Kao Ming-K'ai [Gao Mingkai] (1949). *Essai sur la valeur réelle des particules prépositionnelles en chinois*. Paris: Librairie L. Rodstein.
- Karlgren, B. (1915). *Études sur la phonologie chinoise*. Leyde: Brill; Stockholm: Norstedt & Söner.
- Koller, B. (1993). *Hinter den Kulissen der 4. Mai-Bewegung: Liu Bannong: Ein Pragmatiker literarischer Erneuerung* [MA dissertation]. Zürich: University of Zürich.
- Krämer, H.M. (2023). “Mahayana in Europe: Friedrich Max Müller and His Japanese Interlocutors”. Licha, S. K.; Krämer, H.M. (eds), *Learning from the West, Learning from the East: The Emergence of the Study of Buddhism in Japan and Europe before 1900*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 155-91.
- Kurhofer, H.F.W. (1998). *Chinesische Grammatikforschung und -schreibung von 1898 bis 1949: Bestandsaufnahme und Analyse* [PhD dissertation]. Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität.
- “Le LPP et son histoire”. Laboratoire de Phonétique et Phonologie.
<https://lpp.cnrs.fr/le-laboratoire/le-lpp-et-son-histoire/>
- Liu Bannong 刘半农 (1926). “Ouyou huiyilu” 欧游回忆录 (Memories of Staying in Europe). *Xinwenxue shiliao*, 1.1991, 4-22, 39.
- Liu Bannong 劉半農 (1927). *Bannong tan she* 半農談攝 (Bannong on Photography). Beijing: Beijing sheyingshe.

- Liu Fu (1921). "Tiyi chuangshe Zhongguo yinyunxue shiyanshe jihuashu" 提議創設中國音韻學實驗室計畫書 (Letter to Propose the Establishment of a Chinese Phonetics Laboratory). *Beijing daxue rikan*, 893, 3-4.
- Liu Fu 劉復 (1922a). "Liu Fu jiaoshou zhi xiaozhang han" 劉復教授致校長函 (Professor Liu Fu's Letter to the Principal). *Beijing daxue rikan*, April 20, 1005, 2.
- Liu Fu (1922b). "Guoyu wenti zhong yige da zhengdian" 國語問題中一個大爭點 (A Big Point of Contention in the National Language Question). *Beijing daxue rikan* 北京大學日刊 988.
- Liu Fu (1922c). "Guoyu yundong sisheng shiyanlu tiyao" 國語運動四聲實驗錄提要 (National Language Movement: 'Experimental Study of the Four Tones' Abstract). *Chenbao fukan*, April 27, 1-4.
- Liu Fu (1923). *Zhongguo wenfa tonglun* 中國文法通論 (General discussion of Chinese Grammar). Shanghai: Qunyi shushe.
- Liu Fu (1925a). "Wo de qiuixue jingguo ji jianglai gongzuo" 我的求學經過及將來工作 (Process of My Studys and My Future Work). *Beijing daxue yanjiusuo guoxuemen zhoukan*, November, 1(4).
- Liu, F. (1925b). *Étude expérimentale sur les tons du chinois*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Liu Fu (1925c). "Guoyu yundong lüeshi tiyao" 國語運動略史提要 ('Les Mouvements De La Langue Nationale En Chine' Abstract). *Chenbao fukan*, June 1, 1-2.
- Liu, F. (1925d). *Les mouvements de la langue nationale en Chine*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Liu Fu [1924] (1951). *Sisheng shiyanlu* 四聲實驗錄 (Experimental Study of the Four Tones). Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju.
- Liu Fu [1932] (1975). *Zhongguo wenfa jianghua* 中國文法講話 (Lectures on Chinese Grammar). Taipei: Guting shuwu.
- Liu Xiaohui 刘小蕙 (2000). *Fuqin Liu Bannong* 父亲刘半农. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe.
- Lu, C.W. [Lu Zhiwei] (1960). "The Status of the Word in Chinese Linguistics". Rachnevsky, P. (Hrsg.), *Beiträge zum Problem des Wortes im Chinesischen*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 34-47.
- Lu Zhiwei 陸志韋 (1937). "Hanyu he Ouzhouyu yong dongci de bijiao" 漢語和歐洲語用動辭的比較 (Comparison of the Use of Verbs in Chinese and European Languages). *Yanjing Xuebao*, 4(1), 225-43.
- Mair, V. H. (1997). "Ma Jianzhong and the Invention of Chinese Grammar". *Journal of Chinese Linguistics Monograph Series* 1997.10, *Studies on the History of Chinese Syntax*, 5-26.
- Masini, F. (1985). "De Saussure e gli studi di linguistica generale nella R.P.C.". *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure*, 39, 11-28.
- Maspero, H. (1934). "La langue chinoise". *Revue Bimensuelle des Cours et Conférences*, 35(6), February 28.
- Maspero, H. (1938). "Préface". Tchen, T.-M. (éd.), *Étude phonétique des particules de la langue chinoise*. Paris: Éditions Héraklès, I-VI.
- Mote, F. W. (ed.) (1967). *Two Conferences on Chinese Linguistics*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED024021.pdf>
- Münning, M. (2015). "Wáng Lì 王力 (1900-1986)". Sybesma, R. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics Online*. Leiden: Brill.
https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7363_ecll_COM_000059
- Münning, M. (2017). "Lù Zhìwéi" 陸志韋. Sybesma, R. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 653-8.

- Münning, M. (2022). *Sound, Meaning, Shape: The Phonologist Wei Jiangong (1901-1980) between Language Study and Language Planning*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.11588/hasp.939>
- Norman, J. (1988). *Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peverelli, P. (2015). *The History of Modern Chinese Grammar Studies*. Berlin; Heidelberg: Springer, Berlin Heidelberg.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-46504-2>
- Peyraube, A. (2000). "Westernization of Chinese Grammar in the Twentieth Century: Myth or Reality?". *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 28(1), 1-25.
- Pulleyblank, E. G. (2000). "Morphology in Old Chinese". *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 28(1), 26-51.
- Raj, K. (2017). "Networks of Knowledge, or Spaces of Circulation? the Birth of British Cartography in Colonial South Asia in the Late Eighteenth Century". *Global Intellectual History*, 2(1), 49-66.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2017.1332883>
- Robins, R. H. (1967). *A Short History of Linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Sun, J.; Gao, J.; Rialland, A. (2024). "Pioneering Works in Modern Chinese Phonetics: Fu Liu's Tonal Studies and Other Chinese Scholars at the University of Paris (1920s-1940s)". Paper presented at the *Sixth International Workshop on the History of Speech Communication Research* (HSCR 2024) (September 20-21, 2024). Budapest.
- Tam, G. A. (2020). *Dialect and Nationalism in China, 1860-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tchen, T.-M. [Chen Dingmin 陳定民] (1938). *Étude phonétique des particules de la langue chinoise*. Paris: Éditions Héraklès.
- Vendryès, J. (1921). *Le Langage: Introduction linguistique a l'histoire*. Paris: Renaissance du livre.
- Villard, F. (2014). "Devenir moderne, rester Chinois: Pratiques discursives autour de l'Institut franco-chinois de Lyon (1921-1946)". *Transtext(e)s Transcultures*, 9.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/transtexts.570>
- Walravens, H. (2003). "Die Hedin-Expedition 1930/1932. Briefe Sven Hedins an seinen sinologischen Mitarbeiter Ferdinand Lessing". *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens e.V.*, 173-174. 227-54.
- Wang, L. (1932). *Une Prononciation Chinoise de Po-Pei (Province de Kouang-si) Étudiée à l'aide de la phonétique expérimentale*. Paris: Librairie Ernest Leroux.
- Wang Li 王力 (1956). "Pipan wo zai yuyanxue gongzuo zhong de zichan jieji sixiang" 批判我在語言學工作中的資產階級思想 (Criticising the Bourgeois Thought in my Linguistic Work). *Zhongguo yuwen 中國語文*, November, 506-10.
- Wang Li (1980). *Jiji fazhan Zhongguo de yuyanxue 积极发展中国的语言学* (Vigorously Developing Chinese Linguistics). Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 73-80. Wang Li wenji.
- Wang Li [1943] (1985). *Zhongguo xiandai yufa 中国现代语法*. Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe. Wang Li wenji.
- Wang Liaoyi 王了一 [Wang Li] (transl.) (1934). "Guanyu yanyu de qi yuan de xin jianjie" 關於言語的起源的新見解 (New Understanding of the Origin of Language). *Guomin wenxue*, 1, 29-37. Transl. of: "Introduction: L'origine du langage". Vendryès, J. (1921). *Le Langage: Introduction linguistique a l'histoire*. Paris: Renaissance du livre.
- Wei Jiangong 魏建功 [1935] (2001a). "Zhonghua minguo gu guoli Beijing daxue jiao-shou Faguo guojia wenxue boshi Liu xiansheng xingzhuang" (About Mr. Liu, professor at National Peking University of the Republic of China and with a French literature doctorate). *中華民國故國立北京大學教授法國國家文學博士劉先生形狀. Wei Jiangong Wenji*, 5, 497-508.

- Wei Jiangong (2001b). "Zhongguo yuwen jiaoyu jingshen he xunlian fangfa de yanbian – 'Guoyu shuohua jiaocai ji jiaofa' xu" 中國語文教育精神和訓練方法的演變——《國語說話教材及教法》序 (The Evolution Educational Spirit and the Practicing Methods of Chinese Language and Literature– Preface to 'Teaching Material and Teaching Methods for Speaking the National Language'). *Wei Jiangong wenji* 魏建功文集 (Collected Works of Wei Jiangong), vol. 4. Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 392-9.
- Wippermann, D. (2003). "Die Erfassung der Spezifika des Chinesischen: ein Grundanliegen der Grammatikforschung im China des 20. Jahrhunderts". Pohl, K.; Wippermann, D. (Hrsgg), *Brücke zwischen Kulturen. Festschrift für Chiao Wei zum 75. Geburtstag* (Ostasien – Pazifik. Trierer Studien zu Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft Kultur. Bd. 17). Münster; Hamburg; London: LIT Verlag, 208-26.
- Wu De'an 吴德安 (1981). "Yuyanxuejie de jianzhushi: Ji Wang Li jiaoshou" 语言学的建筑师: 记王力教授 (The Architect of Chinese Linguistics: Remembering Professor Wang Li). *Renwu*, 109-20.
- Xia Yang 夏阳 (1988). "Wang Li de liu Fa shengya" 王力的留法生涯 (Wang Li's Career in France). *Shenzhen xueren*, 5.
- Xu Ruiyue 徐瑞岳 (ed.) (1989). *Liu Bannong Nianpu* 刘半农年谱 (Chronological Biography of Liu Bannong). Xuzhou: Zhongguo kuangye daxue chubanshe.
- Xu Youchun 徐友春 (1991). *Minguo renwu da cidian* 民國人物大辭典 (Great Biographical Dictionary of Republican China). Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe.
- Yeang, C.P. (2019). "Mechanization of Hearing in Chao Yuen Ren's Dialect Research, 1927-1936: Senses, Objectivity, and Observation". *Chinese Annals of History of Science and Technology*, 3(2), 94-117.
<https://doi.org/10.3724/SP.J.1461.2019.02094>
- Yuan, Tung-li 遠同禮 (1964). *Guide to Doctoral Dissertations by Chinese Students in Continental Europe, 1907-1963*.
<https://www.bnasie.eu/BN/Books?ID=2727>.
- Zhang Gu 张谷; Wang Jiguo 王辑国 (1992). *Wang Li zhuan* 王力传 (Biography of Wang Li). Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe.
- Zhang Shiyi 張士一 (1920). "Guoyu tongyi wenti" 國語統一問題 (The Problem of the Unification of the National Language). *Jiaoyu chao*, 1.9-10, 23-58.
- Zhang, Y.; Zhang, S. (2024). "How and Why Saussure is Misread in China: A Historical Study". *Language and History*, 57(2), 149-67.
- Zhao Shikai 赵世开 (1958). "Pipan Gao Mingkai duidai zichanjieji yuyanxueshuo de cuowu taidu" 批判高名凱對待資產階級語言學說的錯誤態度 (Criticising Gao Mingkai's Wrong Attitude Towards Bourgeois Linguistics). Beijing daxue Zhongguo yuyan wenxue xi 北京大学中国語言文学系, *Yuyanxue yanjiu yu pipan* 語言學研究與批判 (Linguistic Research and Criticism), vol. 1. Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 128-32.
- Zhao Yuanren 赵元任 (1934). "Liu Bannong xiansheng" 刘半农先生.
http://www.360doc.com/content/20/0801/14/60598436_927971658.shtml
- Zhou Xinping 周欣平 et al. (ed.) (2022). *Zhao Yuanren riji* 赵元任日记 (Diary of Zhao Yuanren), vol. 10. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan.