

Abstract

The publishing industry in the late Qing and early Republican China was prosperous. A significant feature was that publications at that time were multilingual. Tracing back to China at the turning of the century, a number of intellectuals mastered more than Chinese languages, which was a background of the emergence of multilingual writing. Multilingualism as a common feature of intellectuals in that society was an exceptional phenomenon in Chinese history. The concept of multilingualism then can be viewed on three levels, foreign languages (*waiyu*) versus Chinese (*hanyu*), vernacular (*baihua*) versus classical Chinese (*wenyan*), and dialect (*fangyan*) versus national language (*guoyu*). At the same time, many writers in the non-Mandarin-speaking areas of southern China began to experiment with writing in regional languages, as an attempt of the vernacular turn. The regional Chinese languages they used, *fangyan*, 方言, (variously translated as dialects) played a big part in the publishing field, Wu Chinese, *wuyu* 吳語 (also Wu Dialect) in particular. *Wuyu* is the common language with variations used in the lower Yangzi River, with the most representative ones Suzhounese and Shanghainese.

In this dissertation, I argue that the practice of writing in *wuyu* was an attempt of traditional intellectuals to place themselves and find a breakthrough in the process of modernization in China. The materials I have chosen are the publications written fully or partly in *wuyu*. This research will use an innovative methodology, combining close reading and distant reading. To address the complexity of the materials, this dissertation will take a transcultural perspective and engage in situated, integrated, horizontal and vertical close readings of all the related materials. Because of the large volume of primary sources, I will also apply computational analysis of the text to do quantitative research as complement.