Modern Chinese

The Chinese language, spoken by over one billion people, has undergone drastic changes over the past century in a way unparalleled at any time previously. This book presents a comprehensive and up-to-date account of the development of Modern Chinese from the late nineteenth century up to the 1990s, concentrating on three major aspects: Modern Spoken Chinese, Modern Written Chinese, and the Modern Chinese writing system. It describes and analyses in detail, from historical and sociolinguistic perspectives, the establishment and promotion of Modern Spoken Chinese and Modern Written Chinese and the reform of the Chinese script. Through an integrated discussion of these three areas of the language it highlights the close interrelationships between them and reveals the interaction of linguistic, historical, and social factors in the development of Modern Chinese.

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Modern Chinese

History and Sociolinguistics

PING CHEN
This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Chen Yujia.
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Preface

The Chinese language has undergone drastic changes over the past 150 years in a way that is unparalleled in Chinese history. In writing this book, I have hoped to present a comprehensive account of the development of Modern Chinese mainly from the late nineteenth century up to the 1990s, concentrating on three major aspects, namely Modern Spoken Chinese, Modern Written Chinese, and the Modern Chinese writing system. I have attempted to describe and analyse the establishment and promotion of Modern Chinese in its spoken and written forms, and the reform of Chinese script in a historical and social context. Treating the topics in question in an integrated way, I hope I have been in a position to reveal the close interrelationships between spoken Chinese, written Chinese, and the Chinese writing system, and to highlight the interaction of linguistic, and historical, social factors at work in the process. In this book, which has incorporated my own research results over the years and the gains of the latest research reported in the literature in Chinese and Western languages, I have aimed to provide readers with up-to-date findings in the field.

The book was written primarily for students and teachers of Chinese language and Chinese linguistics. It may be used for the relevant subjects at the upper undergraduate and postgraduate level at university, or read by those who have studied Chinese for some years. I will be very pleased if my fellow researchers in Chinese linguistics also find something useful in it. Since the linguistic phenomena are discussed in close connection with the historical and social context, and with frequent reference to similar phenomena in other languages, it will also appeal to specialists in other fields of Chinese studies, specialists in historical linguistics and sociolinguistics, and to anyone who takes an interest in Chinese language, Chinese literature, Chinese culture, and Modern China.

I am grateful to many people for making the completion of the work possible. First of all, I must acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to Lü Shuxiang, who initiated me in the study of Chinese language both in the traditional philological approach and from the perspective of modern linguistics, and was the first to arouse my interest in many of the issues under discussion in this book when I was an MA student under his supervision in the Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He has been a shining example for me to emulate in scholarly research. I am greatly indebted to Sandra A. Thompson for her interest in
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Finally, I wish to record my gratitude to my wife, Jean, and to our children Fay and Laura, for their unfailing love and support.
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Other versions of parts of the work have appeared elsewhere:

Chapters 5–6

Chapter 7

Chapter 10

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Abbreviations

CL classifier
DUR durative aspect
PFV perfective aspect
Q question