

Origins of the English Language in China: From Pidgin for Trade to Institutionalized English Education

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Abstract: This paper traces the historical trajectory of the English language in China from its earliest introduction through maritime trade to its eventual institutionalization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It begins with the Portuguese establishment of trade in South China ports during the Ming dynasty, which gave rise to Chinese Pidgin Portuguese (CPP) as the first lingua franca between China and a Western power. With the arrival of British merchants in the seventeenth century and the gradual decline of Portuguese commercial dominance, Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) emerged as a more efficient trade medium, combining English vocabulary with Cantonese syntax. The paper examines the impact of Qing isolationist policies under the Canton System, the failed British attempts to learn Chinese exemplified by James Flint, and the subsequent development of CPE glossaries and pronunciation guides such as the English Glossary. Following China's defeat in the Opium Wars, the Self-Strengthening Movement prompted the establishment of government-run language schools like the School of Combined Learning, marking the first state-sponsored English education in China. The study further discusses the role of Jesuit missionaries and the indirect influence of English through the creation of a standardized Chinese romanization system in 1958, which used the Latin alphabet to increase Chinese literacy and facilitate global communication. This historical account demonstrates how English in China evolved from a pidgin trade jargon into an indispensable tool for modernization and globalization.

1. Introduction

Terminology-wise, it should be acknowledged that the British country will be referred to as “England” before the Act of Union that combined England and Scotland in 1707, and “Great Britain”, or “Britain”, onwards. While Ireland joined Great Britain in 1800, forming the United Kingdom, the country can still be referred to as “British”, as are its citizens. In comparison, China, as a country that has long praised centralistic ideals throughout history, views its history from the point of view that China has always been China, and that the Chinese people (especially the Han ethnicity) have always been the Chinese people, despite the transition of dynasties and ruling political parties. Under this convention, Chinese people consider their history as a continuous progression of Chinese civilization, regardless of the change of the individual or group in charge, always calling their ancestors “Chinese”.

For centuries, the majority of European trade with China was conducted in China's southern ports.

Canton, Ningbo, and Amoy are all well-known ports in the world market. These port cities were geographically advantaged and had a rich commercial history that came from hundreds of years of flourishing sea trade. During the Song (960–1279 CE) and Yuan (1271–1368 CE) dynasties, China was the center of the global maritime trade. In fact, China's isolationist policies trace back to the early Ming dynasty, around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A Sea Ban was first enacted for civilians in 1372,^[1] and restrictions on unauthorized overseas contact and private seagoing vessels were reaffirmed in 1433, around the end of Admiral Zheng He's final voyage.^[2] However, near the end of the Ming dynasty, the ban became useless due to the weakening of the imperial government.

2. Portuguese Trade and Chinese Pidgin Portuguese

The Portuguese established trade connections with China during the Ming Dynasty in the early 1500s, after sea routes via the Cape of Good Hope were set up. This made the long voyage from Europe to China possible. A Portuguese fleet departing in 1517 was the first to reach China, in Guangzhou, a port city on China's southern coast. Guangzhou is located in Guangdong Province. The Portuguese gave Guangdong the name of Cantão, which was then translated into English as Canton.^[3] However, both Cantão and Canton have mistakenly become the name of the city of Guangzhou, as it was the capital of Guangdong and the only official port for Western trade; thus, trading in Canton, the province, would be equivalent to trading in Canton, the city. This essay will use the term "Canton" to refer to this port city in accordance with historical sources used. Between 1555 and 1557, they were granted permission to establish a trading post in Chinese Macau, which later became an official Portuguese colony in the seventeenth century. Chinese traders grew familiar with the Portuguese as a result of their permanent settlement in Chinese Macau. Immersed in a Portuguese-communication environment, some learned Portuguese through daily interaction with the merchants and became interpreters between the two trading parties. Chinese people also worked for Portuguese families as servants or assistants. Intermarriages between Portuguese men and Chinese women led to the birth of Macanese children, who were raised to speak both Cantonese and Portuguese.

Such bilingual groups only accounted for a small percentage of the total population, and most interactions still needed to be facilitated by linguists. But, over time, a lingua franca was formed over large volumes of Chinese-Portuguese interaction. A lingua franca is the common language used between two groups who do not share the same native language. In this case, Chinese Pidgin Portuguese (CPP) emerged as that medium. It was created naturally through interaction and consisted of "broken Portuguese", using both Portuguese vocabulary and Portuguese syntax, emphasizing the ability to deliver meaning but downplaying proper grammar; CPP was the first lingua franca between China and a Western country.^[4]

Both in trade and culture, the Portuguese had created a monopolistic but foundational European presence in China that allowed the English to slide into the Chinese trading market later in the seventeenth century using the former's language base. The English merchants still employed linguists and Macanese people to communicate with the Chinese merchants through Portuguese and Chinese Pidgin Portuguese when they first arrived on the South China coast. However, the Portuguese did not favor the presence of the new trade groups.

3. British Entry into China and the Canton System

3.1 British Maritime Expansion and Early Contact

England rose as a maritime power around the seventeenth century and started to show an interest in the Asian markets. They enjoyed Chinese tea, silk, and porcelain. The first British commercial voyage to China set out in 1596, when Sir Robert Dudley funded three ships under the reign of Queen

Elizabeth. However, the fleet was destroyed far before reaching their destination. The British ultimately arrived in China for the first time in 1637, when Captain John Weddell led a fleet of six ships to Canton, sponsored by the Courteen Association and not the EIC.^[5] The Courteen Association was the EIC's ambitious rival company. Established in 1635 under the lead of Sir William Courteen, with a trading license granted by King Charles I, the Courteen Association's goal was to break the EIC's trade monopoly with South and East Asia. The Weddell Expedition departed in April of 1636, and a fleet of four arrived at Hengqin Island, a small island south of Portuguese-occupied Chinese Macao, in July of 1637.^[6]

When the British traders first landed in China, they had to use Portuguese to communicate with the local merchants, as it had been the only foreign tongue the Chinese knew. A knowledge of Portuguese was "the first requirement" of a supercargo, the person in charge of the cargo, on a ship to China.^[7] Nevertheless, the pidgin form of Portuguese spoken by the Chinese, CPP, was "corrupt" and broken to the point where it only allowed the transfer of the simplest ideas. Furthermore, using a third, foreign language to communicate also meant long, complicated translation processes. To trade, a British merchant would have to first speak English to a Portuguese interpreter, who would translate English into Portuguese and pass the message on to a second interpreter, who would then translate the Portuguese into Chinese for the Chinese merchant, and vice versa. This system of communication was not only inefficient but also led to many misunderstandings. CPP was only meant for and capable of simple communication, like agreeing to prices and making transactions; when further details were in need of discussion, problems arose. As doing business entailed back-and-forths between different trading parties, CPP could not sufficiently match that need.

3.2 Qing Isolationism and the Canton System

The Qing dynasty, established in 1644, brought a period of extremely isolationist ideas. Once the Qing dynasty began, a Sea Ban, building on earlier Ming restrictions, was imposed through a series of policies. In 1655, the first of the policies was published, limiting civilian boat-building and commerce.^[8] Trade with foreign countries was restricted throughout its rule, only allowed in a few designated ports. Even during the dynasty's most liberalizing period, only four ports were open for foreign trade. This systematic series of restrictions came together under the umbrella term, the Canton System, which holds many individual policies that cover different areas of foreign exchange over a number of years. The influences of the System stretched far beyond the trade industry. The restrictions encouraged smuggling and corruption, and the Chinese became increasingly closed off to what was happening in the world. This eventually led to the Opium Wars of 1839-1842 and 1856-1860, as well as the many wars fought between China and other foreign powers later on. Thus, the Canton System, as perceived by the general public, is often considered a "symbol of everything that was wrong with late-Qing China".^[9]

It should be acknowledged that the "Canton System" is also commonly used to refer solely to the 1757 Edict that limited foreign trade to Canton only. However, the former definition will be used in this essay as it more proficiently summarizes the Qing trading and policy pattern than any other specific and established term. Individual policies are recognized by naming their main contents or by date of issue.

Aside from limiting open ports, Qing also employed a system of Cohong (literally, public trade firms), which was the only merchant guild authorized by the imperial government to engage in commercial activities with foreign traders. The same system is also described as a network of foreign-trade firms, while "Hong" refers to a trading firm or guild. The merchants of the Cohong are called Hong merchants. A rule was implemented in the 1740s that all foreign trade ships in Canton had to be supervised by a Hong merchant.

In 1757, the Qings welcomed their most infamous tightening of trade, namely the 1757 Edict mentioned above. This policy made Canton the only Chinese city and port that was allowed to conduct foreign trade until 1842, when the Treaty of Nanjing (formerly Nanking) was signed after the First Opium War. Two years later, the Vigilance Regulations of 1759, literally translated as the Rules on Guarding against Foreigners, also known as the Five Counter-Measures against the Barbarians, were imposed. Whereas the 1757 Edict focused more on the geographic and political aspects, the Vigilance Regulations aimed to add restrictions to the daily life of foreign merchants and prevent permanent settlement. The foreign merchants were forbidden from staying in Canton outside the trading season and bringing their wives or any foreign woman into Canton factories; they also could not bring weapons to Canton. This strict regulation was enacted because of the British merchant James Flint, whose experience also demonstrates a residential-immersion method used to teach Westerners Chinese, with the purpose of conducting smoother trade.

3.3 James Flint and Restrictions on Language Learning

James Flint, born around the year 1720, was a merchant from the British East India Company (EIC), which was created as a royally funded corporate superpower in 1600. He had been working as an apprentice for the company since his teenage years, when Captain Arthur Rigby of Normanton left him in China to “learn the language”.^[7] According to H. B. Morse’s *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China*, this prolonged immersion method proved successful, and Flint became the first British person to learn the Chinese language on record. This immersion was a method used by the EIC to train bilingual merchants. Morse also accounts for two other young men who were sent to reside in China and later sailed with the company’s ships to conduct trade.^[7] Around the mid-1740s, Flint started his career as an official interpreter for the EIC and later became a supercargo for the company: the second most important person, after the captain, on an EIC ship, in charge of managing the cargo. After 1757, Flint and many of his coworkers thought that the one-port edict hindered mutual trade benefits and decided to take the matter into their own hands. Flint captained the ship *Success* up to Ningbo (or Limpo) in 1759, trying to negotiate for the reestablishment of the Ningbo port, which was closer to the areas that produced tea and silk than Canton. His proficiency in Mandarin allowed him to communicate directly with the Chinese officials without the need for finding interpreters, which helped him attract less attention from the Chinese.^[7] Thomas Bevan, a young man who learned Chinese through a prolonged residence in Nanjing, accompanied Flint’s journey.

After foreigners were banned from learning the Chinese language in the aforementioned Vigilance Regulations of 1759, Flint’s Chinese teacher, Liu Yabin, became one of the first to be sentenced to execution, the prescribed punishment for teaching a foreigner. As Flint attempted to go against imperial rulings, the Qing imperial government viewed Liu’s act of teaching as a form of treason. Soon, under the combined effects of several like policies, contact between common Chinese people and foreigners became forbidden; only supercargoes, Hong merchants, and servants in factories were allowed to communicate with the foreign merchants.^[10] Evidently, the Chinese did not favor the British people nor the English language during this time. Foreign policy and sentiment still imitated that of an isolationist mindset.

4. Emergence and Development of Chinese Pidgin English

The Chinese eventually began to make attempts to learn English many years later, after the British trade rose in importance, above all other European trade. Chinese merchants wanted to seize this opportunity to enlarge their economic profit. Naturally, one way to increase the efficiency and quality of trade, they thought, was to overcome the language barrier between the two groups.

Chinese linguists of the port were often in favor of the Chinese side, creating a biased disadvantage

for the British merchants. Thus, despite the existence of linguists, competent and reliable translators were scarce. The British soon realized the need to communicate directly in one of their native languages. They tried to learn Chinese but found it too hard a language, then gave up this endeavor in favor of adopting the later-established Chinese Pidgin English, as it was indeed an effective medium of communication that could be acquired without immense labor. The Chinese people did not have an alphabet or any established symbols to express sound. This made it hard for both the British to learn Chinese and the Chinese to learn English. Through time and contact, a pidgin language, or lingua franca, defined a common language to foster communication, emerged.

4.1 Formation and Linguistic Features of CPE

Chinese Pidgin English (CPE), like many other pidgin languages, was not a product of intentional creation but rather grew out of spontaneous linguistic choices during interactions. CPE originated in Canton around the early eighteenth century, with first accounts appearing in 1715^[7] (some say the 1740s^[5]), and was only given a formal name around 1859. It had been colloquially referred to as the “broken English”, the “jargon”, or “mixed dialect” used at Canton.^[5] CPE started not as a language but as jargon, as the British called it. It took shape in the interactions between a small number of English traders and their Cantonese-speaking Chinese servants, who picked up some English words in their day-to-day duties. Through snippets of conversation, they were able to gain some vocabulary but no proper English syntax.^[10] Thus, the words were fit into familiar Cantonese sentence structures, and the pidgin’s unique, mixed form came to be, made up of Cantonese syntax, a few Portuguese phrases from CPP, and amounts of English words processed through Cantonese accents. Before CPE’s emergence, South China’s trade language had been the “broken” Portuguese CPP for around a century. While pidgin English is also a form of “broken” English, it was more efficient than the previous CPP, being a mix of its main users’ native languages. British and Chinese merchants could now communicate on their own, without the need for an additional linguist to relay. Pidgin English became the agreed trade language after foreigners were banned from learning the Chinese language in the Vigilance Regulations of 1759. The use of CPE eventually declined after 1890 as the use of standard English increased. CPE had always been seen only as a temporary tool, a “broken” “barbarian”.

4.2 Pronunciation Strategies and Pidgin Grammar

The Chinese people did not have an alphabet or any established symbols to express sound. This made it hard for both the British and the Chinese to learn a common language. Thus, the Chinese merchants developed a system of learning CPE where they would use Chinese characters to represent the sounds of English words, then proceeded to say the word in Cantonese, mimicking the English sound. For example, they used Chinese characters selected for their sound to approximate the English word “dollar”, even when the characters did not form a meaningful lexical unit. This diverges from the Chinese language, where words and sentences were formed by characters, all elements holding meaning. Such words were compiled into numerous dictionary-like phrase books of the period. On the other hand, the British merchants wrote out these words with the Latin alphabet, also letting the words mimic sound. Examples include “wantchee” (to want), “two muchy” (too much), “lin goo” (a linguist), “mahcheen” (a merchant), and many more.^[5]

As a pidgin language, there are a number of missing grammatical elements. For instance, no genders were present in CPE, only including “my” for first person, “you” for second person, and “he” for third person. Many words evolved to carry expanded or varied meanings. “Pay” means to give, “catchee” means to get, to bring, to find, and even to become.^[5] Some CPE expressions are still seen today, such as “chop-chop”, “long time no see” (a literal translation of a Chinese greeting; notably,

the phrase entered the Oxford English Dictionary as a standard American English idiom in the late nineteenth century), and “no can do”. However, in modern texts, these phrases are often used in a stereotypical Chinese context that sometimes implies sarcasm or racism.

4.3 Early English Glossaries and Learning Materials

The first book on the English language that was written and published in China was the English Glossary (Pellin 2019, 81),^[11] between 1747 and 1761. It is a part of Translated Terms in Chinese and Ethnic Languages,^[12] a longstanding, large but dispersed project composed of multi-language dictionaries that was compiled in 1382 in the early Ming. The collection began with the intention to facilitate foreign communication as the world became increasingly interconnected. Four hundred years later, in 1747, the emperor Qianlong ordered the project to be revised and expanded after he noticed a number of mistakes in a few works on regional scripts from the Bureau of Translation’s collection.

The English Glossary is considered China’s first-ever English textbook. It is essentially a dictionary of English and Chinese (more specifically, the form of Mandarin used in an official context in contrast to Cantonese or other Chinese dialects) in the format of a common Mandarin term paired with its closest English equivalent and a pronunciation guide. Chinese characters offered this guidance, as they were put into combinations that aimed to mimic the English pronunciation, similar to the phrase books of CPE. Together with CPE, English studies during this period were guided by the need for communication. Pronunciation guides and glossaries were created with the aim of serving this goal. There was no emphasis on grammar studies or the strict forms of English.^[11]

5. From Trade Conflict to Institutionalized English Education

The isolationist Canton System had not attracted mass criticism from Western merchants until the mid-1830s. Despite only opening one port, almost one hundred Western firms were participating in trade on the South China coast.^[9] This magnitude of trade was unrivaled, and thus the merchants considered it an efficient trading system.

5.1 Industrialization, Trade Imbalance, and the Opium Wars

However, trade became less peaceful as time went on. Later conflicts between Britain and China were largely spurred by industrialization. Near the end of the eighteenth century, Great Britain kick-started the First Industrial Revolution. Inventions such as the Spinning Jenny, which mechanized the manufacturing of thread, and the Water Frame, which provided power for the spinning machines, allowed for the industrialization of the textile industry, leading to a boom in textile production. When the steam engine was introduced into the textile industry, production rose even higher. Eventually, the British domestic textile markets became saturated. To sell their products, the British sought to increase their exports; thus, the surplus spurred a demand for expanded markets and more customers. Surveying the world, the British determined China to be of great potential. The country had approximately 313 million people in 1794.^[13] However, under the one-port-only Canton System, they were only able to reach a small portion of that population, limiting their profits from exports to China. On the other hand, the British also had to import a tremendous amount of Chinese goods due to a high domestic demand for tea and porcelain. This created a massive trade deficit, which the British sought to put an end to. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British formed a plan to drain silver from China by opening Chinese ports by force. They smuggled opium, a type of addictive drug, into China. The opium led to a national drug crisis by the 1830s, where an estimated 1% to 2% of the total Chinese population was addicted, including many high-ranking officials. Opium addiction

turned people into the “living dead”, both physically and mentally. Addicts prioritized pipes of opium over shared sallow skin, sunken eyes, and malnutrition due to suppressed appetite. Soldiers could no longer carry their weapons, and government officials began skipping their duties for more opium. In 1839, the Emperor sent Lin Zexu to Canton to eradicate the opium. Tension between Great Britain and the Qing peaked as the First Opium War broke out in June 1840.

5.2 Self-Strengthening and the Need for Western Knowledge

After losing the two Opium Wars of 1840-1842 and 1856-1860 (the latter also known as the Arrow War) with the signing of several unequal treaties, the Chinese finally started to sense that they were falling behind in the development of the world. Technology gaps led to the British deploying the HEIC *Nemesis*, the first iron-hulled ocean steam warship, while the Qing sent Chinese junks made of wood. Centuries of intellectual isolation meant they had no knowledge of the world’s rapid development throughout the Industrial Revolution.^[14] Thus rose the Self-Strengthening Movement from 1861 to 1895. The movement’s name translates literally to the Foreign Affairs Movement. It was led by reform-minded officials from the imperial government, who believed that this movement would help raise economic prospects and therefore stabilize and strengthen the country. They sought to renovate the Chinese military, economy, foreign affairs, and education by adopting Western technology and theories. This goal is vividly portrayed in the movement’s most famous motto: “learn the barbarians’ superior technologies to control them”. They followed a principle of “Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for utility” to use Western technology to support Chinese ethics or ideals.^[15] The reformers first tried to make use of Western technology directly, without learning the English language. They hired foreign experts to run their factories and ships without truly transferring understanding of the mechanics behind the technology. Soon, it became clear that while Chinese workers were able to follow physical production routines, the engineers could not even read the maintenance manuals or the blueprints. The language gap also led to scams in transactions, where foreigners sold obsolete or broken equipment to the Qing, under the knowledge that the Chinese likely did not have the linguistic or technical literacy to identify its authenticity.^[14]

5.3 School of Combined Learning and State-Sponsored English Education

The reform could not succeed without learning the language of the Westerners. Now realizing its importance, the reformers advocated for the establishment of several language schools. The most well-known of the schools is the School of Combined Learning, established in Beijing under the newly-created Ministry of Foreign Affairs in August of 1862, and closed down in 1900.^[16] The schools sought to produce young minds who were competent in foreign languages and train them to become China’s own interpreters in a multitude of languages, including English, Russian, French, and later expanding to German, Japanese, and more. This is the first time that English learning was promoted, or openly endorsed, by the Chinese government. The language served two roles for the government: to gain intellectual access to Western technology and to be able to conduct diplomatic affairs with the Western powers. Around the same time, similar language schools opened in Shanghai, Canton, and Hubei.

The School of Combined Learning can serve as a case study in analyzing government-run language schools, with an interest in their English education. The school opened with only the English department.^[16] Those for French, Russian, German, and Japanese followed. The school’s curriculum resembles that of a modern university in the diversity of its courses. Designed as an eight-year program where students enrolled as teens, the school offered well-rounded courses covering language, mathematics, natural sciences, and governance.^[16] Students were required to study language for their first two years before progressing into the sciences, also learning them in foreign languages. In this

way, language learning is treated as a system of knowledge rather than simple translation. Grammar and syntax were emphasized as a key to “standard” English in contrast to the “broken” CPE. Foreign professors of the school often insisted that English be the only language spoken in the classroom in order to create an immersive learning environment. The linguistic foundation was built upon three layers: basic elements, focused on the alphabet, pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary; grammar and syntax, translating simple texts between English and Classical Chinese; and contextual reading, translating using texts from the real world. Translation work was a large part of the learning process.

There is no official record of the number of graduates from the School of Combined Learning’s four decades of existence. One available statistic counts 120 students for the class of 1889. 20% demonstrated excellent academics while 10% had incompetent skills.^[16] Many students went on to serve bilingual causes. For instance, some aided the development of English education through their publications of English grammar books.

5.4 Social Attitudes toward Western Learning

Though Western technology and the English language have become a vehicle for the world’s development, anything Western or foreign-related was still looked down at by the Chinese people because of imperialist wars. The Chinese people often associated the English language with negative ideas of imperialism as well as values that contradict Chinese ideals. The attitude of the Chinese is reflected in the names they used for Western people. Before the late eighteenth century, foreigners were commonly described with a Chinese character that could mean either “foreigner” or “barbarian”, in contrast to a term denoting the legitimate or civilized center associated with the Chinese state. The interpretation of this terminology has attracted debate over whether it functioned as a neutral designation for outsiders or carried an insulting meaning. The latter is more likely, as found in historical context as well as the translations of such texts.^[5] Extending from such sentiments, students of the language schools also suffered from public distaste.

6. Missionary Contributions and Modern Language Reform

The work of Jesuits was also central in introducing English to China. Jesuits were members of the Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic order of priests that was founded in 1534. Before this era, Christian missions in China already date back hundreds of years. Two major periods were that in the Tang Dynasty, from the seventh to tenth centuries, and in the Yuan Dynasty, from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. A new period began in the Ming Dynasty around the sixteenth century, when the Jesuits were able to maintain a continuous effort in their missions in China. Therefore, this period helped build up more knowledge about China and distributed more information about China to the world as well. Unlike the merchants, each of the Jesuits was required to study Chinese before their arrival in China in order to conduct missionary activities with the local people. This prerequisite meant more missionaries were fluent in the native language of their target area of influence, contributing greatly to the exchange of languages between China and the West. The Jesuits established Westernized schools in the Asian area. They represent the Westernized schools founded by Western people out of religious intent, in contrast to those founded by the Chinese in attempts to catch up with the development of the world. Notable figures include Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary in China, who arrived in Canton in 1807.

Leading up to the mid-twentieth century, English had also indirectly influenced China significantly. The Chinese language is among the hardest languages in the world, largely due to its logographic nature, where each character, or logogram, holds meaning. In contrast, English, a phonographic language, uses an alphabet, the Latin alphabet, to build ideas from sounds. It was the language of the United Kingdom and the United States, the imperial colonialist and the rising superpower. As a result

of the logographic system, one would have to learn thousands of complex and unique characters to become fluent in Chinese. This made the language difficult for both Chinese and foreign people alike. When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, around 80% of Chinese people were illiterate; citizens were undereducated and unprepared for more advanced work, like industrialization.^[17] Before a standardized romanization system, learners had to rely primarily on characters to connect written form, meaning, and pronunciation. Developing a system of sound notations could help inform the pronunciation of a character before one has to remember what it looks like. Moreover, the Latin alphabet has become the most widely used writing system in the world as Western powers spread their culture through colonialism, missionary activity, and advanced technology. In 1945, the United Nations named English and French as its two official working languages. Globalization pushed for Chinese expressible using the Latin alphabet.

In February 1958, the People's Republic of China standardized a national Chinese romanization system using the Latin alphabet. The system mapped the sounds of the Beijing-based standard pronunciation of Mandarin Chinese and helped support its nationwide teaching. By autumn of the same year, the romanization system had been integrated into the elementary school curriculum.^[18] A Literacy Campaign began. Eventually, "Peking" became "Beijing" once more, and "Canton" became "Guangdong" again as well. The Chinese were able to strip away names given to them by more powerful foreigners and regain control of how their language is displayed on the world stage. As early computers emerged with keyboards built around the 26-letter Latin alphabet, derived from nineteenth-century typewriters, the importance of the romanization system was once again emphasized.

7. Conclusion

A 2000 issue of People's Daily, the largest government-run newspaper of China, published an article noting the "three most important skills of the twenty-first century": "computer literacy, English, and driving skills." Indeed, English in China has surpassed its initial functions in commerce and modernization. Now, it serves as a crucial, indispensable tool for globalization.

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