CHAPTER THREE
THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT AND VERNACULAR JOURNALISM

Before the 16th century teaching in Europe’s schools also consisted only in memorizing the classical works, while the spoken languages of the nations did not make an appearance in literature. Only with Dante, who wrote in the language of his own country, was a national spirit emerging. [...] In China, speech and writing have not been congruent since antiquity, just as in Europe before the 16th century. If we want to remedy this deficiency the only way out is the use of the vernacular (baihua). Therefore, the creation of baihua journals is one step towards the unification of speech and writing. We are not advocating to give up the classical language, but just follow the practice of teaching in the West where a difference is made between national languages [taught in elementary education] and ancient languages [taught in secondary and higher education], whereas in China [teaching] one-sidedly focuses on the ancient language resulting in the existence of many illiterates.¹


As shown in Chapter Two, vernacular periodicals first appeared during the last decades of the 19th century. Reformers of the Wuxu era turned to the vernacular in an effort to bring new ideas to the uneducated masses. After a period of depression caused by the Wuxu crisis of 1898 and the Boxer Uprising, the vernacular experienced a revival as a means to enlighten the lower classes and to change local customs.

¹ Liu Shipei, “Lun baihuabao yu Zhongguo qiantu zhi guanxi 論白話報與中國前途的關係,” Jingzhong Ribao 61 (26.4.1904). Liu’s source for European history was the History of Education in the West (Taixi Jiaoyu Shi 奈西教育史) by Nose Sakae 能勢栄 (1852–1895), which was published in China in 1901 in a translation of Ye Han. The original Japanese title was Naigai Kyōiku 奈外教育史 (Tokyo: Kinkodo, 1897), see: Tan Ruqian, Saneto Keishu, Ogawa Hiroshi, eds, Zhongguo yi Riben shu zonghe mulu (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe, 1980), 289.
Li Xiaoti has shown in his ground-breaking study how a movement for lower class enlightenment unfolded after the Boxer Uprising and how the vernacular written language gradually infiltrated new realms of public life such as political news and discussion, police announcements, popular science handbooks, and traffic rules.\(^2\)

Western scholars have not hitherto carried out systematic research on the vernacular journalism of the late Qing era. In Chinese scholarship, the so-called “baihuawen movement” of the Late Qing period has often been named as one of the origins of the New Culture Movement (xin wenhua yundong 新文化運動) of the May Fourth era.\(^3\) Most of the advocates of a “literary revolution” in the 1910s, including Chen Duxiu, Qian Xuantong, and Hu Shi, gained their first experiences with baihua writing during the last years of the Qing dynasty, a fact also mentioned in Hu Shi’s autobiography.\(^4\) We therefore need to examine the role these publications played in relation to the national market for vernacular periodicals and to reassess their impact on the later “baihuawen movement” of the 1910s and 1920s.

**Vernacular Periodicals in the Revolutionary Movement**

A comprehensive history of the baihua periodicals prior to the May Fourth Movement has yet to be written. Classical histories of journalism in China such as those written by Ge Gongzhen and Fang Hanqi list a few titles. However, in many cases, later historians have not been

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\(^3\) Tan Bi’an, *Wen Qing de baihuawen yundong* (Wuhan: Hunan renmin, 1956); Chen Wanzhong, *Wu Si xin wenhua yundong de yuanhui* (Beijing: Sanlian, 1997), 131–164; Xia Xiaohong, *Wen Qing shehui yi wenhua* (Wuchang: Hubei Jiaoyu, 2001), 112–120.

\(^4\) Hu Shi mentions seven vernacular journals in total, including the *Zhongguo Baihuabao* 中國白話報, *Hangzhou Baihuabao* 杭州白話報, *Anhui Suhuabao* 安徽俗話報, *Ningbo Baihuabao* 慈溪白話報, *Chaozhou Baihuabao* 潮州白話報 as well the *Guomin Baihua Ribao* 國民白話報 and *Anhui Baihuabao* 安徽白話報. He states that these journals were generally short-lived, but does not try to analyze why. (Hu Shih, “An Autobiographical Account at Forty,” trans. William A. Wycoff, *Chinese Studies in History XII*:2 (Winter 1978–79): 39). The translator wrongly assumes that the *Anhui Suhuabao* was identical with the *Anhui Baihuabao*. Most of the periodicals mentioned by Hu were close to the revolutionary group (see below).