

# Morphological Changes of Chinese Under the Influence of Language Contact: The Usages of Suffix *-men* Before and After the May Fourth Movement and Its Current Usages

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## To cite this article

Ye He, Yong Zhong, Xinmei Jiang, Donald Winford. Morphological Changes of Chinese Under the Influence of Language Contact: The Usages of Suffix *-men* Before and After the May Fourth Movement and Its Current Usages. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*. Vol. 11, No. 4, 2023, pp. 126-135. doi: 10.11648/j.ijll.20231104.15

Received: June 12, 2023; Accepted: July 3, 2023; Published: July 31, 2023

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**Abstract:** The study examines the diachronic changes during the May Fourth Movement and synchronic variation of the current use of the suffix *-men*, based on data from two corpora, Center for Chinese Linguistics (CCL) and Text of Recent Chinese (TorCH). Investigation in CCL shows that the suffix *-men* had already been used as a plural marker of human nouns in Qing Dynasty, while the usage of the suffix *-men* spreads from human to non-human nouns after the May Fourth Movement. Meanwhile, the prosodic and semantic constraints on the use of the suffix *-men* with human nouns have also been greatly relaxed. Investigation of the TorCH corpus reveals information on the current usage of suffix *-men*: the constraints on the usage of the suffix *-men* after human nouns and nonhuman nouns have been further loosened and the distribution of *-men* in discourse genres varies from a higher frequency of *-men* in prose and fiction to a lower frequency in scholarly literature. In the case of the development of *-men* since the May Fourth Movement, I argue the change is due to the type of borrowing referred to as frequential copying under the framework of code-copying. Code-internal factor of the use of *-men* as a plural marker in Chinese before May Fourth Movement is a prerequisite of copying, and the extra-linguistic factors, that is, the language ideology of improving *Baihua* through copying the grammar of Indo-European languages after the May Fourth and the increasing use of English since the adoption of opening-up policy, have greatly stimulated the copying of the plural marker from model code onto basic code.

**Keywords:** Suffix *-men*, Language Contact, Explicit Marker of Plurality, Language Ideology

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## 1. Introduction

Language contact refers to the contact between two different language-speaking groups which may be in direct contact within the same community, or separated to varying degrees geographically. Language contact takes place in a large variety of contexts, including language maintenance, language shift or language creation, and it also occurs without actual social contact between speakers of different languages. The outcomes of language contact fall into two

broad categories --- those which result from borrowing and those that arise from what has been referred to variously as “imposition” or “transfer” among other terms [1-3].

This paper deals with a case of borrowing involving the suffix *-men* (-们) which was due to influence from European languages, particularly English, on Chinese over the last one hundred years after the May Fourth Movement. The social context of this borrowing did not involve direct contact between speakers of the languages. Nor did it involve direct transfer of any language element from other English to

Chinese, which often happens in bilingualism. Rather, it is argued that the change in the suffix *-men* after the May Fourth Movement is due to the type of borrowing referred to as frequential copying under the framework of code-copying.

This study is about the use of the suffix *-men* in Chinese language under the influence of Indo-European languages, particularly English, during the May Fourth Movement and after 1978. This development involves a subtype of what Johanson refers to as “selective copying”, which does not involve the direct transfer of morphemes from the source language [4]. In the case of *-men*, I argue “frequency patterns peculiar to model code units are copied onto units of the basic code so that the latter undergo an increase or a decrease in frequency of occurrence. For example, elements which already exist in the basic code, though they are more “normal” in the model code, may gain ground and become less marked” [4].

In section 2, I discuss the social context during the May Fourth Movement and after 1978, especially the language ideology of the May Fourth period. In section 3, I present a brief summary of previous studies of *-men*. Section 4 is about research questions and methods employed in this study. In Section 5, I analysis of the diachronic change and synchronic variation of the use of *-men* in three linguistic contexts (pronouns *+men*, animate nouns *+men* and non-animate nouns *+men*) based on data from two corpora, Center for Chinese Linguistics (CCL) and Text of Recent Chinese (TorCH). In section 6, it is argued that the spread of *-men* after the May Fourth Movement is in imitation of the more productive use of plural marking in English and other languages as a result of language contact and is a case of “frequential copying”.

## 2. Language Contact Phenomena

### 2.1. Language Contact During the May Fourth Movement

We believe the social factors play a key role in accelerating language contact during the May Fourth Movement. The May Fourth Movement, a movement aiming to overthrow imperialisms, led to the recent developments in the Chinese language. A great need for modernization had been perceived by Chinese elites since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Reform was undertaken in nearly every aspect of public life, like the government, educational system and economy among others, as well as language and literature. Elites of that time introduced western works into Chinese with the hope of waking Chinese people and developing our homeland. Translation works, firstly from Japanese into Chinese and then chiefly from English into Chinese, became a medium of modernizing China during the May Fourth Movement.

At the same time, elites found out the unification of oral vernacular and written Chinese was essential in popularizing knowledge and saving common Chinese people from illiteracy and ignorance. *Wenyan*, the classical literary written form and written medium for two millennia and only

mastered by learned people after solid training, was not an option. With the slogan ‘my hand writes as I say with my mouth’ (*wo shou xie wo kou*), *Baihua*, the colloquial Chinese language, first became the chosen language in the prestigious journal of *New Youth* in 1918 and was then stipulated as the educational language in all levels of schools by national government two years later.

Even though the old vernacular form of *Baihua* has been used in popular novel writing since 1600s, its deficiency in expressing rich emotions, scientific concepts and logic was quickly noticed. Scholars of that time saw the remedy for improving *Baihua* in ‘re-modelling the Chinese language in exact accordance with the rhetorical taste and grammatical order of a western language’ [5]. Fu Shinian stated directly in *How do we improve Baihua* if there is one way to improve *Baihua*, the way is to adopt syntax, semantics and morphology of western languages [6]. Lu Xun advocated for updating *Baihua* by means of imitating the grammar of western languages: “adopting grammar of western languages enables *Baihua* to be more accurate” [7]. Qu Qiubai and Luxun pointed out that “translation ... is to help us create a new Chinese modern language ... translation can certainly help us create many new words, new syntax, an abundant lexicon and a smooth, precise, correct expression.” Their view of improving *Baihua* on the model of western grammars was echoed by other scholars of that time, including Hushi, Zheng zhengduo, Jiang Baili. Thus, the literal translation has been practiced by translators in an attempt to ‘remodel the Chinese language in exact accordance with the rhetorical taste and grammatical order of a Western language’ [5]. Not long “some of the stylistic and structural features of the original were imitated through translation of Western works into the vernacular” [5]. The conscious effort of introducing foreign languages’ grammar through literal translation, plus the widespread language attitude of improving *Baihua* by means of imitating foreign languages’ grammar provide strong social support for language contact between Chinese and Indo-European languages during and after the May Fourth Movement.

### 2.2. Contact Between Chinese and English After 1978

With the adoption of the opening-up policy in 1978, the contact between Chinese language and the western languages expanded to wider domains and took more diverse forms. By opening the door, welcoming foreign investment, adopting a market economy, joining WTO and hosting the Olympic games of 2008, China has been taking on increasingly close contact with the outside world in every sphere. Reading translated works is still an important means of getting to know the western world. As far as the number of translated work is concerned, with the last forty years, the books translated from English into Chinese during 1980 to 2003 cover 74 different kinds of disciplines, whereas, the number rises sharply to 145 kinds of disciplines from 2004 to 2018 [8]. The increasing number of publications of translated work offers us a glimpse of how close the contact between China and the outside world is after adopting the opening-up policy.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the contact between China and the outside world is unprecedented and in the process the role played by English as a Lingua Franca is significant. Since the adoption of the opening-up policy in 1978, English has been considered an important language and was studied zealously throughout the country by millions of pupils, high school and college students. In 1979 English was stipulated as one of the required subjects for college entrance examination. The number of English learners began to multiply. To 2016, the number of Chinese English learners in China rose to 400 million. Through textbooks, newspaper and magazines, TV program and today's vast volume of online resources, Chinese English learners have very close contact with English. This contact has led to borrowing and other types of influence from Indo-European languages, particularly English, including changes in the use of suffix *-men*.

### 3. Earlier Studies on the Usages of *-men*

Based on Chinese grammar books, the use of plural marker *-men* differs from that of the English plural suffix *-s/-es* in the following four aspects [9-11]. First, *-men* can be employed with pronoun and with nouns referring to human beings, like 'zimeimen' (sisters/姊妹们), 'zuojiamen' (authors/作家们), while the use of *-men* after nonhuman nouns is not acceptable, unless it is used in the meaning of personification. Hence, 'shumen' (trees/树们) and 'diannaomen' (computers/电脑们) are not acceptable, unless they are considered animate. Second, *-men* is not obligatory with nouns. A noun followed by the suffix *-men* is always plural, but a noun without such a suffix may be either singular or plural. For example, 'haizi' (kid) without *-men* can be interpreted as 'child' or 'children' depending on the context [12]. Third, the suffix *-men* is incompatible with numerals. The expression of 'shi ge xiaopengyoumen' (ten little friends/十个小朋友们) is ungrammatical. It is usually 'left unmarked or else indicated by combinations of numbers and measures or by contact', such as 'san ge erzi' (three sons/三个儿子) [13]. Fourth, there are prosodic restrictions on the syllables of the noun used before *-men*. The usage of the plural marker *-men* after 2+1 three-syllable (2: two-syllable root & 1: one-syllable suffix) nouns is not appropriate [11]. It is stated that if the 1 syllable in the 2+1 three syllable word is the suffix *-ren* (people), it is simply unacceptable to add *-men* to indicate plurality. For example, it is not acceptable to add *-men* after the word 'zhongguoren' (2: zhongguo (china/中国) & 1: ren (people/人)) to indicate plurality. Some of these traditional restrictions on the use of *-men*, however, have been breaking down in contemporary Chinese.

The novel usages of suffix *-men* in contemporary Chinese have been discussed by scholars. Wang Li, the first linguist recording and discussing the influence of Indo-European languages on Chinese language, stated in his book of *Contemporary Chinese Grammar* that the suffix *-men* was restricted with the occurrence of pronoun, and there was a trend of extended use of *-men* with human nouns under the

influence of Indo-European language, especially English language [14]. However, Wang Li especially emphasized: "...but the usage of plural marker *-men* can only be used with human noun" [14]. In the book *the Evolution of Written Language since May Forth Movement* compiled by Linguistics Department of Peking University, it was also pointed out: "the convention of denoting plurality with the suffix *-men* is only confined with personal pronouns and nouns denoting persons" [15]. Kubler, based on the investigation of the novel *Home* published in 1932 by Chinese writer Ba Jing, expounded that the tendency of using the suffix *-men* as a plural marker of nouns denoting persons has increased since the May Fourth Movement [13]. In her study on the effect of translation between 1905 to 1936 to modern Chinese language, Zhu noted he tendency of extending usage of the plural marker to nonhuman nouns and explicitly stated the usage was still confined within the rhetoric usage of the personification [16]. Hsu, according to her study of the two-day issues of the newspaper Central Daily News (on October, 11, 1989 and January 16, 1990) published in Taiwan, stated that the extension of "the use of the pluralizer *-men* to nouns denoting persons is very common in newspapers" and "it is now extended to nonhuman nouns, though such usage is still rare" [5]. At the same time, she argued that though the extension of the suffix *-men* to nonhuman nouns has not been found in her research corpus, "one cannot exclude the possibility that the extension may happen someday, as long as this trend of Englishization continues". According to researches on the usages of *-men* in two Chinese newspapers published in 2002, Guo observed that the structure of "non-human nouns + *-men*" was not only used in rhetorical device of personification but also used in non-rhetoric sentences [17]. Zhang in his paper on the summary of the usage of *-men* in Chinese language explained that the tendency of the suffix *-men* extending to nouns denoting objects, thought slight, is worth noticing [11].

Since Wang Li's study, the studies sketched the development of *-men* chronically after the May Fourth Movement, that is, under the influence of Indo-European languages, the usage of plural suffix *-men* extended from pronouns to human nouns and the use of nonhuman nouns + *-men* begins to appear. But what evidence is there that the usage of human noun + *-men* appeared only after the May Fourth Movement. And what different were there between the usage of the plural marker *-men* before and after the May Fourth Movement? No relevant comparative study has been conducted. Methodologically speaking, most of the work on the development of the usage of *-men* since the May Fourth movement is based on limited and sporadic language examples. Only three empirical studies on the development of the usage of *-men* have been conducted so far [5, 13, 17]. Furthermore, the scope and domain of their language data is limited. As stated earlier, the studies made by Kulber and Hus focuses on one novel published in 1932 and two issues of newspapers published in Taiwan [5, 13]. The largest data comes from the data drawn from one-year two newspapers published in 2002 [17]. Then what is the general trend of the

usages of *-men* during the 100 plus years after the May Fourth Movement? No such research has been made either.

## 4. Research Questions and Research Method

This study will examine the development of the usage *-men* before and after the May Fourth Movement and the current usage of *-men* and aim to answer the following questions: 1) What are the changes of the usages of *-men* in the scope of prosodic and semantic constraints after the May Fourth Movement? 2) What the distribution of *-men* of current usages in discourse genres? 3) How does language contact influence the usages of *-men* in contemporary Chinese?

As shown from figure 1, the May Fourth Movement falls within the period of Republic of China (ROC). In order to gain a clear picture of the development of the usage of *-men* after the May Fourth Movement, a comparison of the usage of *-men* as plural marker in Qing Dynasty and in the period of Republic of China (ROC) will be made.

This study is based on two corpora: CCL and TorCH. CCL, created at the Center of Chinese Language, is a collection of Chinese language of 120 million Chinese characters based on Chinese historical periods. The sub-corpus of CCL of Qing Dynasty (1864-1911), with the total of 48 million characters, is composed of literary novels published in Qing Dynasty, and the sub-corpus of CCL of ROC (1912-1949) is made up of 50-million-character literary publications of that period. Both the token and types of the uses of suffix *-men* in the Qing dynasty and ROC will be calculated in order to show

the frequencies and productivities of the uses of *-men* in two periods.

As the sub-corpus of modern Chinese of CCL covers TV program transcripts and Chinese translation work, TorCH is used to examine the current usage of *-men*. TorCH is a two-million-word collection of Chinese publications published in 2009 and 2014 created at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Types of the uses of *-men* in TorCH will be recorded in order to understand the productivity of different uses of *-men* in varied genres.

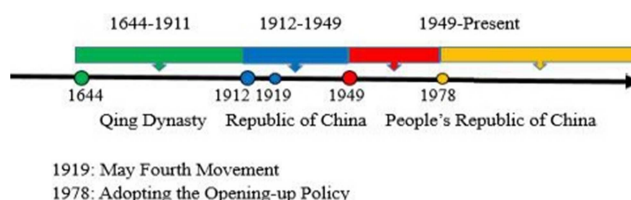


Figure 1. Timeline of historical eras and social events pertaining to this study.

## 5. Results of the Analysis

### 5.1. The Use of *-men* in Qing Dynasty and the Period of ROC

In Table 1, an overview of the tokens and types of *-men* is provided, which are usages of pronoun + *-men*, human noun + *-men* and nonhuman noun + *-men* found from the corpora of CCL from the period of Qing Dynasty and the period of ROC.

Table 1. Occurrences of *-men* in Qing Dynasty and in ROC.

Period	Pron.+ <i>-men</i>		Human noun+ <i>-men</i>		Nonhuman noun + <i>-men</i>			
					Animate noun		Inanimate noun	
	Token	Type	Token	Type	Token	Type	Token	Type
Qing (1644-1911)	27495	8	4541	264	15	9	1	1
ROC (1911-1949)	36419	11	7012	590	176	103	7	6

### 5.2. The Usage of Pronoun + *-men*

The data in table 1 shows that the use of *pronoun + -men* is more common in the period of ROC, as there are 27,495

tokens representing eight types of occurrence of *pronoun + -men* in the data from in Qing Dynasty and 36,419 tokens representing twelve types in the ROC data.

Table 2. Types of Pronoun+*-men* in the Qing Dynasty and in ROC.

Period	Pron.+ <i>-men</i> (Type)
Qing (1644-1911)	women (1PSuffix) 'we/我们', zamen (1PSuffix) 'we/咱们', anmen (1PSuffix) 'we/俺们', wumen (1PSuffix) 'we/吾们', nimen (2PSuffix) 'you/你们', rumen (2PSuffix) 'you/你们', ermen (2PSuffix) 'you/尔们', tamen (3PSuffix) 'they/他们', women (1PSuffix) 'we/我们', zamen (1PSuffix) 'we/咱们', anmen (1PSuffix) 'we/俺们', nimen (2PSuffix) 'you/你们', rumen (2PSuffix) 'you/你们', ninmen (2PSuffix) 'you/您们' tamen (3PSuffix) 'they/他们', tamen (3PfemaleSuffix) 'they (female)/她们', tamen (3PobjectsSuffix) 'they (animal&object)/它们', yimen (3PfemaleSuffix) 'they (female)/伊们', zijimen (RefP Suffix) 'ourselves/自己们', suimen (InterrogativeP Suffix) 'who (pl)/谁们'
ROC (1911-1949)	

As shown in table 2, the sub-corpus of ROC the usages of *wumen* (1PSuffix) 'we/吾们', *rumen* (2PSuffix) 'you/你们' and *ermen* (2PSuffix) 'you/尔们' are not found, for the three usages belong to *Wenyan* and therefore were out of fashioned in the period of ROC (see the discussion of the social

background to contact in chapter II). The usages of *tamen* (3PfemaleSuffix) 'they (female)/ 她们' and *tamen* (3PobjectsSuffix) 'they (animal&object)/ 它们' are newly-created types found in the corpus of ROC.

For thousands of years there is no distinction of male

third-person pronoun and female/nonhuman third-person pronouns in Chinese language, the pronoun *ta*, written into 他, has been used to refer to all third persons. It has only singular form when used to refer to nonhuman objects. The distinction between the third pronouns is influenced by the distinction among the male/female/nonhuman third-person pronouns in Western languages. It is recorded that the writer Zhou Shuren firstly used *ta/她* to refer to female third-person pronoun in the process of translating from Indo-European languages in the early twentieth century. Elites of that time “felt inconvenient and saw the in-distinction of male/female/nonhuman third-person pronouns in Chinese language as a deficiency.... They began to imitate western languages to remedy this defect by creating words to refer to female third-person pronoun and nonhuman third-person pronoun” originated from the creation of two Chinese pronouns *ta* (3Pfemale) ‘she’ and *ta* (3Pobject) ‘it’ during the May Fourth Movement [18].

Another plural form found in the data, *zijimen* (reflective pronoun suffix) ‘ourselves/自己们’, is a new word, highly similar to the literal translation of English word ‘ourselves’. The form *suimen* (interrogative pronoun suffix) ‘who/谁们’ is only used in northern dialects. The comparison of the types of pronoun+*-men* in the Qing dynasty and in ROC shows the usage of pronoun+*-men* is more productive in ROC and the

influence of Indo-European language, especially English, played an active role in promoting the productivity of the usage of pronoun+*-men* in ROC.

### 5.3. The Usage of Human Noun + *-men*

The frequency of human noun +*-men* increases significantly in ROC as 7012 token of human noun +*-men* are found in the Qing Dynasty and 4541 tokens of human noun+*-men* in that of ROC. The type of human noun +*-men* also sees increase in ROC as 286 types of human noun +*-men* are found in the Qing Dynasty and 590 in ROC. The number of token and type of human noun+*-men* shows the occurrence of human noun +*-men* has been commonly used in Qing Dynasty and both the increases in token and type shows the combination of human noun +*-men* becomes more productive in ROC.

Firstly, in terms of the usage of 2+1 (2: two-syllable root & 1: one-syllable suffix) three-syllable human noun+*-men*, Zhang states that the use of the suffix *-men* after 2+1 three-syllable (2: two-syllable root & 1: one-syllable suffix) nouns is not appropriate [11]. However, three types of this usage are found in Qing Dynasty and the use rose sharply to 35 in the period of ROC. The increase shows the prosodic constraint on the noun used before the plural maker has been much loosened.

Table 3. Type of 2+1 three-syllable human noun +*-men* in the Qing Dynasty and ROC.

Period	Type	Number of suffix	2+1 three-syllable human noun + <i>-men</i>
Qing (1644-1911)	3	2	<p>-zi (-子): lao ma zi men (old nanny suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘nannies/老妈子们’, nv hai zi men (female child suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘girls/女孩子们’.</p> <p>-er (-儿): nan hai er men (male child suffix -er suffix -men) ‘boys/男孩儿们’.</p> <p>-zi (-子): lao ma zi men (old nanny suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘nannies/老妈子们’, nvhai zi men (female child suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘girls/女孩子们’, laopo zi men (old woman suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘old women/老婆子们’, er hun zi men (two fool suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘thugs/二混子们’, erliu zi men (two drift suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘thugs/二流子们’, goutui zi men (dog leg suffix -zi -men) ‘henchmen/狗腿子们’, laoyou zi men (old oil suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘wily old birds/老油子们’, shaofu zi men (cook man suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘cooks/烧夫子们’, yufan zi men (fishing seller suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘fish-sellers/渔贩子们’, jiaohua zi men (cry flower suffix -zi suffix -men) ‘beggars/叫花子们’.</p> <p>-er (-儿): laoniang er men (old woman suffix -er suffix -men) ‘old women/老娘儿们’, dage er men (old brother suffix -er suffix -men) ‘old brothers/大哥儿们’, laojiao er men (old actor/actress suffix -er suffix -men) ‘old actors/actresses 老角儿们’, anqi er men (angle suffix -er suffix -men) ‘angles/安琪儿们’, mingjiao er men (famous actor/actress suffix -er suffix -men) ‘famous actors/actresses/名角儿们’.</p>
ROC (1911-1949)	35	9	<p>-zhe (-者): congbei zhe men (admire suffix -zhe suffix -men) ‘admirers/崇拜者们’, xianshi zhe men (free eat suffix -zhe suffix -men) ‘loafers/闲食者们’, jingzheng zhe men (compete suffix -zhe suffix -men) ‘competitors/竞争者们’, ken zhi zhe men (colony suffix -zhe suffix -men) ‘colonizers/垦殖者们’, fandui zhe men (oppose suffix -zhe suffix -men) ‘opposers/反对者们’, daibiao zhe men (represent suffix -zhe suffix -men) ‘delegates/代表者们’</p> <p>-ren (-人): putong ren men (common suffix -ren suffix -men) ‘common people/普通人们’, zhishi ren men (do thing suffix -ren suffix -men) ‘administers/执事人们’, jicheng ren men (inherit suffix -ren suffix -men) ‘inheritors/继承人人们’, zhongguo ren men (China suffix -ren suffix -men) ‘Chinese (pl.)/中国人们’, yingguo ren men (England suffix -ren suffix -men) ‘English (pl.)/英国人们’, jiaxiang ren men (hometown suffix -ren suffix -men) ‘fellow-townsmen/家乡人们’</p> <p>-gong (-工): zhutie gong men (cast iron suffix -gong suffix -men) ‘iron-casters/铸铁工们’, caishi gong men (quarry suffix -gong suffix -men) ‘quarry-men/采石工们’</p> <p>-jia (-家): ziben jia men (capital suffix -jia suffix -men) ‘capitalists/资本家们’</p>

Period	Type	Number of suffix	2+1 three-syllable human noun + <i>-men</i>
			yishu jia men (art suffix <i>-jia</i> suffix <i>-men</i> ) ‘artists/艺术家们’ -yuan (-员): zhaodai yuan men (host suffix <i>-yuan</i> suffix <i>-men</i> ) ‘hosts/hostess 招待员们’, banshi yuan men (do things suffix <i>-yuan</i> suffix <i>-men</i> ) ‘办事员们’ -jiang (-匠): biaohu jiang men (paste suffix <i>-jiang</i> suffix <i>-men</i> ) ‘pasters/裱糊匠们’ -fu (-妇): Kanghu fu men (nurse suffix <i>-fu</i> suffix <i>-men</i> ) ‘female nurses/看护妇们’

Examining the suffix of 2+1 three-syllable nouns, the study finds evidence of a tendency toward increasing use of suffixation in Chinese, as shown in Chart III. Suffixes used in the three types of Qing Dynasty are traditional Chinese suffixes, *-zi* (-子) and *-er* (-儿). The suffixes demonstrate great varieties in the period of ROC, as newly-appeared suffixes are used, like *-zhe* (-者), *-jiang* (-匠), *-fu* (-妇), *-guan* (-官), *-ren* (-人) and *-jia* (-家). These new suffixes are “affixation of morphemes which are equivalent to the corresponding morphemes in Indo-European languages and are introduced under the influence of the morphology of Indo-European languages.” [15]. The increasing usage of suffixes in the 2+1 human noun is a proof of morphological change in Chinese language under the influence of language contact after the May Fourth Movement.

Secondly, the usage of *zhu* (all/ 诸)/*zhong* (all/ 众)+human noun +*-men*. As previously mentioned in part III, the suffix *-men* is optional in Chinese language and it is not necessary to label words denoting meaning of a group of people with *-men*. As to whether the suffix *-men* can be used after nouns modified by pronominal plural marking morphemes like *zhu* (诸), *zhong* (众), linguists have different opinions. Some stated that it is redundant to use *-men* with nouns modified by *zhu* (诸) or *zhong* (众), as it is “the un-Chinese usage” and the usage is a case of Europeanization of Chinese language after the May Fourth movement [19]. Some however, pointed out that the usage of *-men* after the nouns modified by “*zhu* (诸)/*zhong* (众)” doesn’t originated from Europeanization and labeled it as a traditional Chinese usage [20].

In Qing Dynasty, five types of the usage are found. For example:

- 1) 诸位们听真, .....  
Every everyone suffix-men listen clearly  
Zhu wei men ting zheng  
Every one (present) please listen clearly, ....
- 2) 宝玉只和众丫头们掷骰子.....  
Baoyu only conj. group maid suffix-men throw dice  
Baoyu zhi he zong yatou men zhi touzi  
Baoyu just plays dice with all maids (present).

In ROC, there are eleven types of the usage. For example:

- 3) 他说出话来:“诸位老师们”!  
3P speak out words adv:“Every classifier teacher *-men*.”  
Ta shuo chu hua lai: “zhu wei laoshi men!”  
He (finally) speaks out: “Every teacher presents today!”
- 4) 街上的众百姓们  
Street PRP CON every common people suffix-men

Jie shang de zong baixing men  
无 不 拍手 大赞。

none Neg applause big praise  
wu bu paishou da zan

Every common people in the street applause and give high praise.

The data shows two facts. One is that the use of *-men* after nouns modified by pronominal plural marking morphemes *zhu* (诸), *zhong* (众) to denote plurality appeared in Qing Dynasty, though it was very minor. The other is that the usage became more common in the period of ROC.

Thirdly, one example of numeral classifier + human noun+*-men* is found in the sub-corpus of Qing Dynasty, while the number of numeral classifier + human noun+*-men* sees increase in the sub-corpus of ROC with five examples found in ROC. For example:

- 5) 七个 小辈们 交了一回  
Seven classifier junior suffix-men fight PRF one round  
Qi ge xiaobei men jiao le yi hui  
手。  
hand  
shou.

Seven small youngsters fight for the first round.

- 6) 你们四位太太小姐们玩  
2P suffix four classifier Mrs. Miss suffix-men play  
nimen si ge taitai xiaojie men wan  
会儿好 啦!  
moment good EXC  
huierhao la

It is nice for you five ladies enjoy yourselves!

- 7) 邀请 彭玉麟 和 萧满 两位 们  
Invite name conj name two classifier suffix-men  
Yaoqing Pengyulin and Xiaoman liang wei men  
到 衙 扶 乩。  
come government office e practice divination  
dao ya fu ji.  
Two people, Pengyulin and Xiaoman, were invited to (the) government office

In Chinese grammar, the plural suffix *-men* and classifiers are mutually exclusive and the two devices of plurality cannot co-occur [21, 22]. Therefore, *-men* is incompatible with numeral classifiers. The type of the co-occurrence of classifiers and plural marker *-men* increases in ROC, compared with the type in Qing Dynasty. It indicates the constraint on the plural suffix *-men* used after numeral classifiers became much loosened after the May Fourth Movement.

#### 5.4. The Usage of Nonhuman Noun + -men

As shown in Chart I, ten types of *nonhuman nouns* + -men are found in Qing Dynasty. Among the ten types, there are nine types of *animate nonhuman noun* + -men and one type of *inanimate nonhuman noun* + -men. The nine types are all used in rhetorical device of personification and from two novels about imaginary fairy worlds, *Eight Immortals Crossing Ocean*/《八仙过海》 and *Lv Ye Xian Zong*/《绿野仙踪》.

In ROC, there are 109 types of *nonhuman noun* + -men found. Besides the sharp increase in instances of the usage of *nonhuman noun* + -men, the usage also breaks the boundary of confining in the rhetorical device of personification and begins extending to different rhetorical devices of metaphor (example 8 & 9). For example:

8) 虾仁们的横行霸道是理所当然的。  
Shrimps -men CON disrespect Verb obvious ADV CON.  
xiaren men de hengxingbadao shi lisuodangrang de  
Shrimps' defiance of laws are obvious.

9) 载过这些篇的杂志们  
Publish IMP these classifier CON magazine suffix-men  
zai guo zhxie pian de zhazhi men  
允许我把它们收入。  
allow me ba them accept.  
yuxu wo ba tam shouru zhe  
I am very grateful for the magazines which publish these articles allow me to.

10) 这本里万分感谢。

This book PREP million portion thanks.  
ben shu li wan fen ganxie  
This book contain (my) million thanks.

The example of “nonhuman noun + -men” from the sub-corpus of ROC is even used in its literal meaning:

11) Ade, 我的蟋蟀们!  
Good-bye, my CON cricket suffix-men!  
Ade, wo de xisuai men!  
Bye-bye, my crickets!  
Ade, 我的覆盆子们和木莲  
Good-bye 1P CON mulberry suffix-men CON magnolia  
Ade, wo de fupengzi men he mulian  
们!  
suffix -men  
men  
Bye-bye, my mulberries and magnolia.

In example 11, the German word *Ade* meaning Good-bye is used. The combination of Romanization writing system with Chinese character is also a proof of the influence of Indo-European language on Chinese language after the May Fourth Movement.

The only example of inanimate nonhuman noun + -men found in Qing Dynasty is +shown as following:

12) 我带来三身衣裳靴们。  
1P bring ADV three classifier clothes boot suffix -men  
wo dai lai san shen yisang xue men  
I bring along three clothes and boots.

This is a very special usage: *numerical classifier* + *inanimate nonhuman noun* + -men. According to the history of Chinese language, the usages of *nonhuman noun* + -men and -men used after noun modified by numerical classifiers once appeared in work of the 16<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of Altaic language. As the Mongolia Empire grew out of power in the latter period of 16<sup>th</sup> century, the usage has not appeared in Chinese since then. Recent studies on Chinese dialects show that the combination of classifier and the plural -men exist in dialects to denote plurality, such as the dialects of Gansu, Hebei and Shangdong regions. Thus, the single occurrence of example 11 might be the writer's personal style influenced by their own language.

Generally speaking, the comparison on the usage of *nonhuman noun* + -men in Qing Dynasty and ROC reveals that the usage of *nonhuman noun* + -men becomes more common in ROC and the semantic constraints on the use of the suffix -men after nonhuman noun is much loosened.

## 6. The Current Usage of -men

For the purpose of examining the current usage of -men, TorCH (Text of Recent Chinese), a corpus of two-million-word collection of Chinese publications published in 2009 and 2014 is selected. Even though the size of TorCH is smaller than the near 50-million-character of sub-corpora of CCL, TorCH is the newest corpus of contemporary Chinese available. Furthermore, articles in TorCH are classified into four different genres, namely fiction, prose, learned (academic journal) and press (government document reports), which enables a close study of the spread of different usages of -men in different genres and therefore gain understanding the level of acceptance of the usage of -men in Chinese.

Table 4. The use of the suffix -men and the distribution of the usage in four genres.

Genre	Pronoun + -men (type)	Human noun + -men (type)	Nonhuman noun + -men (type)	
			Animate	Inanimate
Fiction	8	77	7	0
Prose	6	126	9	4
Learned (academic journals)	4	15	0	0
Press (government document reports)	6	46	0	2

#### 6.1. The Use of Pronoun + -men

Nine types of *pronoun* + -men were found in TorCH:

women (1P suffix) ‘we/我们’, nimen (2Psuffix) ‘you/你们’, tamen (3Pmalesuffix) ‘their (male)/他们’, tamen (3Pfemalesuffix) ‘their (female)/她们’, tamen, 3P



(object&animal) suffix, ‘their (object/animal)/她们’, *ninmen* (2Psuffix) ‘you/您们’, *anmen*, (1P (dialect) suffix), ‘we/俺们’, *zamen* (1P (dialect) suffix) ‘we/咱们’, *suimen* (Interrogative P suffix) ‘who/谁们’. The following two types appeared in the sub-corpus of the period of ROC are not found in TorCH: *yimen*, (3P (female) suffix) ‘they (female)/伊们’ and *zijimen* (Ref Psuffix) ‘ourselves/自己们’. Both *yimen* and *zijimen* are created by Luxun, an activist who upheld the modifying of *baihua* through copying the Indo-European languages. As it shows that the novel usages of pronoun *+men* did not catch on after the May Fourth Movement.

### 6.2. The Use of Human Noun *+men*

There are 274 types of human noun *+men* in TorCH. Compared with 590 types in the ROC sub-corpus of 50 million characters, the rate of occurrence of tokens of human noun *+men* is significantly higher in TorCH which contains only 2 million words. It indicates that the range of the usage of human noun *+men* is further enriched.

Query of human noun *+men* in TorCH also shows that the restraint on the syllable of human noun has further loosened. There are 44 types of “2+1 three-syllable human noun *+men*” in the corpus of the period of ROC of CCL (50 million words), while there are 48 types of “2+1 three-syllable human noun *+men*” in TorCH (2 million words). The increase shows that the usage of “2+1 three-syllable human noun *+men*” has become more common and the plural marker *-men* becomes an explicit plural marker of plurality.

There are occurrences of the suffix *-men* marking the plurality of human noun modified by the morpheme of *zhu* (诸/all) or *zong* (众/all) in TorCH. For instance:

- 13) 迷 得 全 校 小 追 星 族  
Fascinate ADV whole school little idolater suffix-*zhu*  
mi de quanxiao xiao zhuixin zhu  
们 集体 放 弃 了 他 们 曾 经 崇 拜 的  
PIU collectively abandon IMP their once worshipped  
men jiti fangqi le tam cengjing congbaide  
歌星。  
superstar.  
gexin

The little idolaters of the whole school are so fascinated that they all forget once-worshipped superstars.

- 14) 围 观 的 男 女 老 少  
Onlooking CON the female the male the elder the young  
Weiguan de nan nv lao shao  
们 正 看 得 目 不 暇 接。  
men PL IMP watching MOD eye no to see  
men zheng kan de mu bu xiajie

Onlookers, the men, the women, the elder and the young are feasting their eyes on (fascinating performance).

In example 13, 小追星族们 (little idolater *-zhu-men*), the derivational suffix *-zhu* (*-族/groups*) denotes the meaning of a group of people. According to the prescribed Chinese grammar, it is redundant to use *-men* to mark the plurality of the word which is in the plural. So is the example 14. The noun 男女老少 (the male, the female, the elder and the young) has obvious meaning of a group of people, so the

suffix *-men* is unnecessarily used to mark the plurality because the context is clearly shown it is in plurality as there are four groups of people. The “extra” use of *-men* after the nouns which are in the plural meaning indicates the number is more and more explicitly marked by the once-obligatory plural marker *-men*.

### 6.3. The Use of Nonhuman Noun *+men*

In TorCH, there are twenty nonhuman noun *+men*. Among the twenty types, eight are used to denote its literal meaning. The numbers of nonhuman noun *+men* used to denote its literal meaning surpasses the numbers of nonhuman noun *+men* used in figurative senses. For example:

- 15) 按 物 以 稀 为 贵 的  
According to object PREP scarcity is rare CON  
Ang wu yi xi wei gui de  
标准, 老鼠 们 还 挤 不 上 排 行 榜。  
criteria mouse *-men* IMP crowd no into ranking list.  
biaozhun, laoshu men hai ji bu shang paihang bang.  
According to the criteria of value depends on rarity, mice cannot be listed in this ranking.

- 16) 你 也 没 办 法 随 时 了 解 电 池 们 的  
You also no method anytime monitor battery-*men* CON  
ni ye mei bangfa suishi liaojie dianchimen de  
充 电 进 度。  
charging speed.

cong dian jindu

You also have no method to monitor the charging speed of batteries

In terms of the distribution in four genres, the usage of nonhuman noun *+men* occurs in all three genres except the learned genre of academic articles. Firstly, as the usage has appeared in more serious style of press, it is believed that the usage nowadays has been more widely used and fairly well accepted. Secondly, the zero occurrence of both animate nonhuman noun *+men* and inanimate nonhuman noun *+men* in the learned genre of academic articles shows that the usage of *-men* in labeling the plurality of nonhuman nouns still needs time to be fully accepted in Chinese language.

### 6.4 The Novel Usage of *-men*

In TorCH, there are four examples of English letters *+men*. For example:

- 17) MM 们 一 定 要 注 意 。

- 18) 即便如此, 仍然没有阻止 CEO 们对创新的执着追求。

The word MM from example 17 is the abbreviation of Pinjin of *meimei* ‘sister’. Citygod, the administrator of city, is a coined English word by the writer himself. Obviously in the example of 18, CEO is an English abbreviation for Chief Executive Office. The combination of English alphabet with Chinese suffix *-men* as shown above not only reflects the influence of English on Chinese language but also the trend of explicit use of the suffix *-men* to indicate plurality. These examples not only appear in the genre of free-style novel and prose, but also in the genre of press. This shows that



employing *-men* to indicate plurality is well accepted in Chinese language nowadays,

Besides, the example of *-men* is used after newly-risen popular colloquial form of address.

19) 我先 闪 了 啊, 亲爱的 们。

1P firstly leave PRF EXC dear *-men*.

wo xian shang le a qinaide men

All my dear fellows, I am leaving.

20) 亲 亲 们 对 妮 子 真 是 太 好 了。

dear dear *-men* to nizi really V very good PRF.

qing qing men dui nizi zheng shi tai hao le

My dear friends are really nice to nizi.

Qinqin (亲亲) and qiaide (亲爱的), originated from conversations between online-sellers and consumers, now has become popular online chatting and colloquial way of addressing people. The combination of *-men* with qinqin and qiaide shows the productivity of *-men* in Chinese language.

## 7. Discussion

In Chinese grammar, number is obligatorily expressed only for the pronouns. As Norman stated: "The same plural suffix found in the pronouns, *-men*, can also be employed with nouns referring to human beings [9]. However, the resulting forms differ from English plural nouns in several ways. They are not used with numerals. They are not obligatory in any context; and they tend to refer to groups of people taken collectively". The development of suffix *-men* as observed in this study shows different picture from the traditional usage prescribed in grammar books.

The findings of this study suggest that, firstly, the plural suffix *-men* had already been used with nonhuman nouns in Qing Dynasty, but the usage is very rare. Secondly, after the May Fourth Movement, the frequencies and varieties of the uses of human noun *+men* and nonhuman noun *+men* increased rapidly. The rare or minor usages of *-men* that had appeared in Qing Dynasty quickly developed into major, more commonly accepted usages in the three-decade period of ROC. Furthermore, the scope of use of nonhuman noun *+men* spread beyond the rhetoric device of personification. The constraints on nouns used before *-men* are also loosened. In general, the tendency of using *-men* to mark plurality in Chinese language began to take shape and grow to be more prominent after the May Fourth Movement.

Changes in use of *-men* of this study were brought about by translation and conscious efforts in improving *Baihua* by means of imitating western languages during the May Fourth Movement. The spread of *-men* was a case of "frequent copying" based on wider engagement with Chinese and Indo-European languages represented by English during the May Fourth Movement and after 1978. As discussed in part II, elites of the May Fourth Movement, namely Fu Shinian, Luxun and Hu Shi, avidly advocated the language attitude of modifying Chinese language by the means of the grammar of Indo-European language. They were not only advocators, but also practitioner of the language attitude in their translation and literature creation. They upheld the belief that literal

translation has very important function of helping creating a new modern Chinese language [13], so in their daily translation, they adopted the strategy of literal translation with the intention of introducing the grammar of western languages into Chinese. And in their own writing creation they used new expressions, new words and new grammars borrowed from western languages. Even though there were resistance from some old-fashioned scholars, the initiative, active and self-conscious imitating of Indo-European languages and adopting the Europeanized Chinese language in translation and creation has become a trend and acknowledged by large groups of scholars [16].

The Code-copying Framework is a modal for understanding the spread of *-men* due to language contact [4]. Through copying the way of using an explicit marker to denote plurality from Modal Code, that is Indo-European languages, onto the basic code of Chinese, the suffix *-men*, an obligatory plural marker, firstly began to break constraints and is more frequently used to denote plurality in Chinese language. A great increase in the use of *-men* during and after the May Fourth Movement is probably the result of the experience of some translators used *-men* to translate western plurals. Translators who used *-men* to translate western plurals probably did so for at least two reasons: some may have simply want to be faithful to the original, believing that if there was a plural form in the foreign language text there must be a corresponding plural in their translation; on the other hand, some translators may have purposely introduced these plurals because, as they felt, the Chinese language was too "unscientific" and needed a clear distinction between singular and plural [23]. Therefore, under the conscious effort of differencing singular form and plural form in Chinese language, the restricted usage of *-men* has been greatly loosened. It is interesting to note a line from poems composed in the 1920s and 1930s 三株们红们的玫瑰花们/ three classifier *-men* red *-men* conjunction rose flower *-men* / three red roses, which in form is similar to the equivalence in French, the measure, noun and adjective all agree in number [13]. Even though this kind of extreme imitation did not spread, it indicated the strong trend of using *-men* to denote plurality in Chinese language after the May Fourth Movement.

This trend continued and became more prominent after 1978 when China adopted the opening-up policy. Since 1978, English has been considered a very important language and has been studied zealously throughout the country by millions of pupils, high school and college students. The grammatical concept of number demonstrated through *-s* and *-es*, without exaggeration, is etched in the awareness of all English-learners. With the awareness of number in language use, the usage of *-men* is further activated among generations and generations of English learners in China and then spread among larger population.

Though the density of indirect language contact is comparatively low, the social factors during the May Fourth Movement and after 1978 promote the contact and accelerate the use of *-men* to be a marker of plurality in Chinese.

At the same time, we also notice that some usages of *-men* did not show any increase, as there is no usage of numerical classifier + noun *+men* found in TorCH. This may be due to the resistance from the Chinese grammar, as numerical classifier and the plural marker *-men* are not compatible in Chinese language. Even though we did not find the usage in TorCH, there are studies mentioned the more frequent occurrence of this usage in Taiwan Chinese [5]. So we cannot exclude the possibility that the usage may happen some-day as long as the trend of language contact continues.

## 8. Conclusion

Facing the influence of Indo-European languages on Chinese, scholars criticize the borrowing of certain language elements with the fear of “corrupting” Chinese. Looking back the past one hundred years, Europeanization of Chinese language actually has brought many changes to Chinese language by enriching vocabularies, prefixes and suffixes, sentences patterns. As indicated in the study, the quick expansion of *-men* owing to language contact facilitates the establishing of a plural marker in Chinese language, and therefore facilitates the expressiveness of Chinese.

On the one hand, no language is an island. The influence of other languages owing to direct or indirect language contact has induced language changes in Chinese and will continue to bring about language changes. On the other hand, language itself is a living organism with the function of self-modifying. Over long period, by means of self-modifying mechanism Chinese itself has kept some aspects that enrich the expressiveness and filter out some elements that may impede communication. As long as the fundamental features of Chinese exist and the modifying system within Chinese functions, the Chinese language will continue to develop with vitality with new blood infused through language contact.

## Acknowledgements

This study is sponsored by “the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities” (NR2014033) and “The Foreign Language Education Funds of Jiangsu Province” (2020WYKT056).

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