

China to issue new list of simplified Chinese characters

BEIJING, April 9 (Xinhua) -- For the first time in nearly 20 years, China will issue a modified list of simplified Chinese characters in an effort to further standardize a language used by billions around the world.

Wang Ning, vice director with the Institute of Linguistics under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), said Wednesday at a CASS conference on Chinese culture that editing of the new list had already been completed and changes would be published "very soon".

She did not give an exact date or tell Xinhua how the list would be made available.

"Over-simplification of some characters actually made them even harder to understand in some cases, which is the problem we are trying to address here," Wang said.

She added, the new list would involve a rather small number of changes to characters currently in use. The goal is to make them easier to learn.

On Thursday, Wang Dengfeng, vice director of the State Language Commission, confirmed the Ministry of Education was about to issue a revised character list in the near future, but did not give a specific timetable.

"We are still working on it," he said.

The Chinese mainland first introduced simplified characters in 1956. But Taiwan and the then foreign-controlled southern regions of Hong Kong and Macao retained the ancient traditional characters.

Simplified characters were created by decreasing the number of strokes to write.

In 1986, the State Language Commission issued a list of 2,235 simplified Chinese characters as a way to standardize the written form of the language.

However, some Chinese people on the mainland have recently called for the restoration of traditional characters for the purpose of "cultural preservation."

Pan Qinglin, a political advisor from north China's Tianjin Municipality, submitted a proposal to the annual session of China's top political advisory body in March this year. Pan urged the country to abolish the use of simplified characters within ten years saying they sacrificed too much "artistic quality."

Both Wang Ning and Wang Dengfeng stressed that the latest character modification had

nothing to do with restoring traditional characters.

"Switching back to traditional Chinese characters means billions of Chinese would have to relearn their mother language," Wang Ning said.

"I don't think there is any need to switch back to traditional Chinese characters, nor to make the current ones even simpler. Our top priority is to improve and standardize the simplified Chinese characters," she added.