

John DeFrancis and Zhang Yanyin, editors and contributors, *ABC English-Chinese, Chinese-English Dictionary*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2010, xi, 1230 pp., 18.4 cm., ISBN 13: 9780824834852 (softcover)

This small volume, weighing only 540 grammes, is loaded with the long lexicographic expertise of the late Professor Emeritus of Chinese Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, John DeFrancis (1911-2009), linguist, sinologist and author of series of Chinese language textbooks and dictionaries. One may say that it is his posthumous contribution to a long and collective effort to render the common language of China more easily accessible to its exterior world. It is in this context that Doctor Zhang Yanyin, of the University of Canberra, co-editor of the volume, is to be congratulated for dedicating the dictionary under review, not only to its main author but also to "China's Staunchest Advocates of Writing Reform" [p. vi], that is: 盧戇章 Lu Zhuangzhang (1864-1928) for his first alphabetic transcription schemes (1892), but also 魯迅 Lu Xun (1881-1936) and 茅盾 Mao Dun (1896-1981) for their support for the Latinized New Writing system (in the 1930s), 王力 Wang Li (1900-1986) and 呂叔湘 Lü Shuxiang (1904-1998) for promoting the alphabetic organisation of Chinese dictionaries, and 周有光 Zhou Youguang (1905- ) who has pleaded for some official adoption of "digraphy" (*pinyin* and characters) as a *sine qua non* condition for the modernisation of China in the information age.

This is exactly where the contribution of John DeFrancis' series of ABC dictionaries enters the lexicographic stage. A casual visitor of any generalist bookstore, in browsing the shelves burdened with heavy dictionaries, would think that these ABC dictionaries of the Chinese language would be targeting the beginners who know only the "a b c" of the "ideograms". DeFrancis, in his famous work *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1984), considers the term "ideogram" as one of the widespread myths about the language and preferred to call them "logograms". In fact, as any language is first 'spoken' and then 'written', there was the theoretical rationale for conceiving another way of writing the Chinese language. He developed this argument in an other masterpiece of his research, *Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989).

It is thanks to the progress of the information technologies that DeFrancis with his team of assistants and researchers started in the 1990s to build their database of the Chinese language, in order to produce various "Alphabetically Based Computerised", that is: ABC Chinese-English dictionaries, which would employ and follow the *pinyin* romanization system throughout. A series of dictionaries was launched, all published by the University of Hawai'i Press; it consists of the *ABC Chinese-English Dictionary* (1996, pocket edition 1999, 72,000 entries), the *ABC Chinese-English Comprehensive Dictionary* (2003, over 196,000 entries, on which the Wenlin Institute developed its now popular version of Chinese-English computer software), and the latest *ABC Chinese-English/English-Chinese Dictionary* (2010; 37,963 Chinese-English entries; 29,670 English-Chinese entries; a total of 67,633 items), under review.

Having great predecessors in the series, this bilingual and "twin" dictionary, as it exists only in the pocket-book format, is obviously conceived by the publishers as some advanced tool for students, be they Chinese or non Chinese. It is printed on very thin acid-free paper and with very small prints. But it gathers all the expertise and advantages of its forerunners. The main feature of its two correlative parts or sections is the constant use of *pinyin* romanisation with the Chinese characters, simplified [and traditional, in brackets] for each Chinese or English entry. This includes definitions or usage samples and translations in head or sub-head entries, be it for the alphabetical order of the Chinese-English section or for all usage given instances of the entries in the English-Chinese section. Besides, each English head-entry is followed in square brackets by its international phonetic transcription. Such a strict alphabetical order that allows quick and easy search for a term by its English spelling or by its Chinese *pinyin*, allows also comparisons with similar or identical other terms.

As far as the content is concerned, it is obvious that the main focus of the dictionary is the present colloquial language. In this respect, it is worth noting that the Chinese-English section, out of its 37,952 entries, only 4,644 of them concern single characters presented only as monosyllabic terms. On the other hand, by browsing on the list of English Abbreviations used in both sections of the volume and printed in three columns (abbreviations, terms, *pinyin* + characters) running on nearly three pages [pp. ix-xi], 46 of them concern fields of knowledge (from accounting to zoology): this gives a hint on the scope of the modern language covered in both languages of the corpus. The

translations, explications and usage samples are as brief and accurate as possible, but lexicographers know how much by so doing is left over in nuances or knowledge.

Both sections are each supplemented by a set of abundant linguistic, historical, geographical and cultural Appendices and Indexes of Chinese characters, traditional, simplified and alternate graphies. All of these data give to the “twin” dictionary under review the cultural dimensions which the “digraphy” advocated by Zhou Youguang could preserve for the benefit of many lovers of the Chinese language, spoken and written, as it has been transmitted along past ages.

Yves Camus