

NOTICES OF BOOKS

- (1) *Cantonese Primer*. 粵語入門 (By) YUEN REN CHAO 趙元任
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege),
1947, 242 pp., 22s.
- (2) *Character Text for Cantonese Primer*, (By) YUEN REN CHAO,
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege),
1947, 112 pp., 14s.

This *Cantonese Primer* may well be hailed as a major event in the history of the investigation and description of Chinese dialects other than Pekingese. Professor Chao presents us with a fascinating, comprehensive, accurate, and up-to-date description of the Cantonese dialect, illustrated by 24 lessons, most of which are in the form of conversations. The lessons are preceded by an extensive introduction and followed up by a vocabulary and index to the notes. In the companion volume (2), the Chinese text of the lessons is set out in Chinese script, and furthermore a key to the exercises and examples for the writing of Chinese characters in their proper order of strokes (limited to the characters of the first eight lessons) have been included.

In the main volume, the lessons are set out in a romanization devised by the author, with the English translation on the opposite page, and with notes at the end of each lesson. The romanization follows the principles of the "National Romanization" (for which, as is well known, Professor Chao is primarily responsible), but the greater number of tones (9 plus 2 "modified" tones) was bound to result in a much more complicated system. In accordance with the historical development of the tones, two rows of initials are distinguished. The upper-tone initials (*p, ph, mh, f, t, th, nh, lh*, etc.) are contrasted with the lower-tone initials (*b, bh, m, v, d, dh, n, l*, etc.) corresponding to the Chinese terms 上 *shang* and 下 *shiah*. This may have been unavoidable. But the system as it stands fails to impress on the student that for Cantonese the days when two pitches had to be distinguished are gone and that in the present system of tones we cannot but distinguish three pitches, high, middle, and low, ignoring even then the important fact (which can be read from the musical notation included in Professor Daniel Jones' *Cantonese Phonetic Reader* and reproduced by the author) that the 下平 *shiah pyng* tone starts at a lower pitch than the 下上 *shiah shaang*, 下去 *shiah chih* and 下入 *shiah ruh* tones so that, I think, it is not accurately described as "21" by the author in the system of tone-letters with the *shiahshaang* given the value 23, and *shiahchih* 22 and the *shiahruh* 2 or 22.

A very important feature of the book is the marking of the two modified tones throughout the lessons as opposed, for instance, to O'Melia's book where the student is often referred to oral instruction by the Chinese teacher as far as these two tones are concerned.

Far too much material is included in both the introduction and the notes to allow even the attempt of a summary. These must and, I trust, will be read not only by all future students of Cantonese, but also by students of other Chinese dialects and of the Chinese language in general, none of whom can afford to ignore this very important contribution.

W. S.

Concise Dictionary of Spoken Chinese 國語字典 (By) YUEN
REN CHAO and LIEN SHENG YANG 趙元任·楊聯陞合編
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege),
1947, XXXIX, 292 pp., 32s. 6d.

Certain features of this dictionary make it unique in its kind and besides constitute a definite advance on our knowledge of the Chinese language. As the most important of these features I regard the indication, in the case of each single word (character), of its occurrence in a free or bound position, *i.e.*, whether it can be used singly or occurs only with suffixes or as an element of a compound. To give an example, under *chyi* 臍 "navel", one finds that in the colloquial language this word occurs only in the compound *duhchyi*(*yeal*) 肚臍眼兒 "navel". This certainly is very useful to know for the student of colloquial Chinese who through this entry gets the warning that he must never use the word *chyi* "navel" by itself. But apart from this practical purpose, one can readily see that a dictionary which notes the alternatives "free" or "bound" in the case of each single character, is a mine of information which may lend itself to very important subsequent research. Questions like the following come to the mind at once. "How many of the characters included in the dictionary occur only 'free' or only 'bound', how many occur with the suffix *-tz* or *-l*, what is the distribution if we proceed to grouping words according to their meanings (*e.g.*, parts of the body)? Are practically all verbs free and all nouns "bound", etc., etc.?"

A second remarkable feature is the attempt on the part of the authors to be as complete as possible in the indication of the classifier, called "auxiliary noun", to which also a special appendix is devoted.

A third feature may be placed first by persons who are primarily interested in a dictionary as a means of finding out about meanings of words. I think it is safe to say that this dictionary includes a great number of meanings even of well-known words which so far have not been noted in any other dictionary.

Beyond the purpose of listing meanings and usage of single words, the first of the two authors has also attempted to include as many compounds (particularly of the spoken language) as he possibly could. Furthermore, he has attempted, when using the *G(woyew)* *R(omatzyh)* transcription, to convey information beyond what the "National Romanization" was meant to give (*viz.*, the sounds and tones of the National Language), by adding certain features of dialects other than Pekingese. This attempt fortunately resulted in the choice of heavy type for G.R., although the preface almost apologetically states that "national romanization is used in addition to the usual Wade-Giles orthography". Among other interesting features, grammatical contributions to the usage of words like *le* or *de* may be mentioned, or (in the introduction) new observations on tone sandhi, etc. Beginners may wish that a larger size had been chosen for the characters, but both they and the more advanced students cannot fail to derive great benefit from this dictionary. The two authors and the publishers must be congratulated on this very important lexicographical contribution.

W. S.