

Modern Chinese: History and sociolinguistics. By PING CHEN. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. xiv, 229.

Quite a few books attempt to give an English-language introduction to the Chinese language; this one falls into the same general category, but is considerably more specialized than, e.g. Jerry Norman's *Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Chen's foci, as reflected in the headings of his three parts, are: 'Modern spoken Chinese', 'Modern written Chinese', and 'The modern Chinese writing system'. The three parts comprise ten chapters plus an introduction and conclusion.

The first part has three chapters. Ch. 2, entitled, 'Establishment and promotion of Modern Spoken Chinese', covers the period of the 'Commission for Unifying Reading Pronunciation', also described in S. Robert Ramsey's *The Languages of China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), though C goes into greater detail. Ch. 3, 'Norms and variations of Modern Standard Chinese', addresses the issues of final rhotacization, neutral tones, peculiar syllables of the Beijing dialect, and differences between the Beijing dialect and standard Mandarin. In Ch. 4, 'The standard and dialects', C describes the varieties of Mandarin current outside Beijing, including those of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as other parts of the mainland, comparing use of and popular attitudes toward local varieties of Mandarin and dialects vs. the standard language.

In Part 2, C discusses the 'Development and promotion of Modern Written Chinese' (Ch. 5), leading into the May Fourth Movement effort to replace classical Chinese with the Mandarin vernacular as the standard for the written language. In Ch. 6, 'Norms and variations of Modern Written Chinese', C details influence on the written language from other dialects and foreign languages, which sometimes resulted in syntactic innovations in addition to phonetic loans and calques in the lexicon. He addresses a major general misunderstanding of the 'unified written language': Though Chinese everywhere may write their various dialects in the same way, this is in fact because they have been taught to write in MANDARIN, which is to many a second dialect/language; they do not simply write the way they speak. C also devotes considerable space to a discussion of 'Dialect Writing' (Ch. 7).

The title of Part 3, 'The modern Chinese writing system', sounds much like that of Part 2; C's focus here, however, is on the nature of the written symbol in Chinese, i.e. the characters, rather than on composition and style (Ch. 8, 'Basic features of the Chinese writing system'). Ch. 9 treats the issue of 'Simplification of the traditional writing system' in great depth. Ch. 10, 'Phonetization of Chinese', surveys the many efforts to create a system of phonetic symbols for Chinese, including one of the more interesting though unsuccessful of these, the *Latinxua sin wenz* (184ff). With such thorough coverage of noncharacter alternatives to writing Chinese, one may start to wonder whether C has a political agenda, i.e. regarding replacement of the characters with a phonetic script; yet by the end of Ch. 11, 'Use and reform of the Chinese writing system: present and future', one feels he has offered a neutral and even-handed presentation.

Chen's English style is perfectly correct and readable, though it tends to be flat in places. One odd thing is that there is not a single Chinese character to be found in the whole book. Considering the subject matter, this is hard to understand and explain.

As a study on very specific aspects of modern Chinese, particularly the written language, this book is quite thorough in what it sets out to do and is, overall, a rich and useful resource.

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