CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE WRITTEN WORD: THE CHINESE APPROACH TO BEGINNING LITERACY INSTRUCTION

by

Linda Laplace

B.A., Université de Montréal, 1988

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Faculty

of

Education

© Linda Laplace 1997

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

March 1997

Your file Votre reference

Our file Notre reference

0-612-24178-5

Canadä

APPROVAL

NAME   Linda Laplace

DEGREE   Master of Arts

TITLE   Choreography of the Written Word: The Chinese
                  Approach to Beginning Literacy Instruction

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Heesoon Bai

_____
Andre Obadia, Professor
Senior Supervisor

_____
Diane Dagenais, Assistant Professor
Member

_____
Dr. J. W. Walls, Professor
School of Communication
Simon Fraser University
Examiner

Date: March 25, 1997

ABSTRACT

This study explores contemporary Chinese views and methods to beginning literacy instruction from a linguistic and historical point of view. It is aimed at providing educators in Canada and elsewhere, with knowledge of Chinese students' learning style. The study focuses on the grade one reading classroom, for it is at this level that basic concepts about the written language are being introduced.

The data concerning present day Chinese reading classrooms were gathered in mainland China from the nationally prepared primary school teacher's manuals and children's textbooks. To supplement these data and evaluate their relevance to the teaching practice, three grade one language classrooms were observed, and interviews with Chinese teachers, school principals, and parents were conducted.

Learning to read and write in Chinese requires the mastery of a large number of Chinese characters. For this reason, reading research in China has focused on designing methods that could accelerate and consolidate the learning of characters in order to allow early introduction of texts that matched the cognitive development of the children entering school. Three methods are currently used: the Pinyin, the contextual, and the concentrated character recognition methods.

Prevalent in the Chinese language classroom are rituals of gestures and behaviours that shape the lesson rhythm, many aspects of which are reminiscent of a Confucian educational tradition that emphasised moral conduct. Traditionally, the reading process was conceived as involving the mind/heart, the eyes and the mouth in an action of careful inquiry, communion with, and pondering of the text. Today still, reading instruction at the lower grades centres on developing students' awareness of text content and the assignment of the right pronunciation to each written sign, by bringing children to read aloud fluently and with expression. Whole-class teaching is the dominant means of instruction and lessons revolve around the teacher and the textbook. More collaborative modes of teaching are found in "out-of-class" language activities.

Suggestions for teaching foreign languages to Chinese students are provided at the conclusion of the study.

DEDICATION

A mes parents pour la tendresse qu'ils ont mis à m'élever

et l'énergie qu'ils ont toujours su déployer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

At the base of most traditional arts in China is a reverence for the gesture. Chinese calligraphic art, painting, opera, and martial arts, all consist of the mastery of a series of set gestures which, one may hypothesize, are remnants of a traditional culture which emphasized rituals and etiquette. In the first grade Chinese classroom, physical gestures and rituals are an integral part of the learning process. Beginning readers and writers learn the gestural and behavioral discipline of reading, writing and attending lessons.

In suggesting that Chinese was learned "by eye and by hand", Leòng (1978) is echoing an idea proposed in the book on learning English *Language by ear and by eye: The relationships between speech and reading* (Kavanagh & Mattingly, 1972). Leong means by this that the number of different but visually similar characters to learn in Chinese requires careful observation of their structure and their mastery through repetitive writing.

The focus of this thesis is on the beginning reading instruction in Chinese. It examines some aspects of the contemporary language classroom from a linguistic and historical perspective. This study also attempts to demystify some popular views on the nature of the Chinese script, views that have served many claims regarding semantic and phonetic processing in reading. The Chinese writing system has often been called a "semantic script" providing in this way a comparative basis with a "phonetic script" such as English (see Kolers, 1970, for example). I suggest that this view is somewhat distorted by its focus on the differences between the scripts and completely disregards the phonetic commonalities present in Chinese and English scripts.

1

Background and Statement of the Problem

There is much research on various aspects of reading and reading instruction written in different languages. Comparative studies of reading also abound as witnessed by several bibliographical works (Hladczuk & William, 1992; Hladczuk, William, & Hladczuk, 1989; Malmquist, 1982; Rasnak, 1989). Different ways of understanding the act of reading have produced different reading models (such as top-down, bottom-up models; psycholinguistics models; schema theory models; and interactive models) which in turn, gave rise to new approaches to reading instruction or to a different focus of attention during instruction (analytic and synthetic phonics methods, whole-word and meaning emphasis approach, programmed methods, linguistic methods, whole-language approach, and language experience approach). These reading models and approaches to reading instruction, however, all originated from Western countries which share similar scripts and philosophical tradition. China, with its specific writing system and philosophical heritage, offers an alternative point of view for research in this area.

Questions at the centre of this study are: How do Chinese educators conceive of reading? How is reading being taught in China? How did the present practice in reading instruction come into being?

To answer these questions, I will examine, throughout this study, the different views through which Chinese educators today understand the reading process and the teaching of reading, and how these views compare with those of the past.

I have decided to focus on the initial period in which children are taught to read and write because it is the time when a series of new concepts concerning written signs is being introduced. This period consists of a form of "initiation" which marks the official beginning of children's participation in the vast corpus of their written culture. Children are not only being taught to interpret the written signs according to social conventions, but also to manipulate and use these signs to express themselves. Paradoxically, reading and writing

2

become both agents of enculturation, and of autonomy.

Although the body of work in English on Chinese education is considerable (see for example the bibliographical study of Parker & Parker, 1986), studies on beginning reading instruction of Chinese remain sparse. This scarcity of studies can be partly explained by China's long closure from the rest of the world, the language barrier, and the difficulty in obtaining access to Chinese documents.

Psycholinguistic aspects of reading in Chinese is the field of reading that is best documented. Numerous cross-cultural experiments involving Chinese children have been conducted, most of which have been conducted in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chen & Tzeng, 1992; Ju & Jackson, 1995; Lam, Perfetti, & Bell, 1991; Lee, Uttal, & Chen, 1995; Lee, Stigler, & Stevenson, 1986; Shwedel, 1983; Stevenson, Stigler, Lucker, & Lee, 1982; Tzeng & Hung, 1980 among many others). The majority of this research is aimed at providing evidence for or against the importance of phonological awareness in reading Chinese characters.

Several studies also exist that centre on analyzing the content of primary Chinese textbooks (Doolin & Ridley, 1968; Kwong, 1985; Martin, 1975; Sheridan, 1992a; Sproul, 1978; Unger, 1977). Aside from Sheridan's study, this research is composed of socio-political studies preoccupied with the socialization of Chinese children and not studies of the pedagogy of reading. Moreover, most of these studies provide accounts of the period from the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) to the early 1980s. The textbooks have been changed since then. This body of work, nonetheless, contains translations of selections from Chinese primary school readers and observations that have allowed me to draw comparisons with the newly-edited textbooks of the 1990s.

Closer to the pedagogical interest of this thesis, are the works of foreign language teachers on the views and methods of reading instruction in China (Dzau, 1990; Everett, 1990; Kun, 1990; Meyer, 1990; Ping, 1994; Sampson, 1990; Wang & Earle, 1972).

3

However, these studies are concerned with the field of foreign language or second language instruction to adult Chinese learners, and not with providing an indepth study of beginning literacy in Chinese. Nevertheless, valuable insights of Chinese students' habits and conceptions of reading can be gained from them.

Although useful information could be gleaned in all the works mentioned above, few recent studies focusing on the pedagogical aspect of beginning reading in Chinese were available aside from the studies of Marcia Sheridan (1985, 1990, 1992a, 1992b). She is the only author who has repeatedly examined and briefly reported on the subject. Some of her reports are relatively detailed in describing initial reading instruction in the Chinese language (see Sheridan, 1992a), but the Chinese reading materials she used are already outdated. Hudson-Ross and Dong (1990) have also published an article in *The Reading Teacher* which provides a vivid narrative picture of lower grade language classrooms. They draw interesting comparisons between Chinese and American literacy classrooms from both the point of view of the insider and the outsider to each culture (Dong is a Chinese teacher visiting the United States and Hudson-Ross is an American teacher who taught in China in 1987). While Dong focuses on the positive aspects of literacy instruction in her country, such as reforms and different educational opportunities now available, Hudson-Ross reports on difficult learning conditions: the cold stone classrooms, the easily crumbling chalk, the large number of pupils in each class, the control of pupils' posture, the sternness of the teacher and her day-long lecturing. In the same manner, Dong notes with surprise "the personal nature of American classrooms" and "the exuberance of American children's discussions" which she finds "overpowering and seemingly pointless" (p.122).

Other descriptions of reading instruction are available in English in the report of the U.S. Reading Team, on a three-week tour in the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) in 1984. This report provides valuable data from a wide range of perspectives on the Chinese approach to reading: observations of comprehension instruction, the relationship of the script

to reading, attitudes toward education, structure of the reading classroom, and reading activities. This study, however, was conducted over ten years ago, and reforms have taken place since the report was produced.

Besides these reports, short overviews that are aimed at providing a broad picture of literacy instruction at the elementary and secondary levels have been published. Unfortunately, these studies tell us little about initial literacy instruction (Miao, 1992; Pope, 1982).

In contrast, a substantial body of research that has examined the question of beginning reading instruction in English, is available in North America. To name only a few, Clay (1989, 1991), Juel (1988), and Perfetti, Beck, Bell, and Hughes (1987) did longitudinal studies in which they gave descriptive accounts of what happens to the child in the early years of written instruction; the work of Adams (1990), Giasson (1990), Giasson and Thériault (1983), and those of Frank Smith (1971, 1973), provide a comprehensive source of knowledge about reading instruction. A growing number of case studies and ethnographic research reports give detailed information of literacy practices around the world (see Reder, 1990 for further references). Yet, in this latter category, few provide information on beginning literacy in China.

Purpose of the Study

Given the lack of information on beginning reading instruction in China in the English or French languages, the main purpose of this research is to provide a detailed descriptive and analytical account of   1) the formal initial learning of reading and writing of Chinese first graders;   2) the key concepts through which Chinese educators understand the pedagogy of reading;   3) the constancy and changes in views and instruction of reading within the past and present orthodoxy.

To do this, I have divided this study into the following chapters:

- **Chapter Two—The Chinese writing system and literacy in China,** in which I introduce terms and characteristics specific to the nature and the learning of the Chinese writing system. I also present debates, within and outside of China, regarding the survival and nature of Chinese characters and the subsequent changes in this system.

- **Chapter Three—Legacy of the past: the Confucian scholars.** In chapter three, I review the main traditional views of reading held by influential Chinese scholars and describe how these views were (or perhaps, were not) reflected in the classical education that the young pupils received. Given my limited knowledge of the classical Chinese language, I have relied heavily on translations and interpretations made by American and European scholars. Works of American missionaries living in China in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries were also consulted. These provided interesting accounts of the primary reading instruction of those periods.

- **Chapter Four—Contemporary views of reading instruction.** This chapter centres on the contemporary views of reading pedagogy held by Chinese educators and as expressed through the presently used teachers' manuals and children's textbooks, and also through interviews with teachers, parents, and school authorities. These interviews were conducted during my stay in China from September 1995 to July 1996.

- **Chapter Five—Beginning reading instruction in three urban Chinese schools.** This chapter gives a descriptive account of aspects of today's reading instruction in grade one Chinese classrooms. It results from the analysis of the teachers' manuals, the children's textbooks, and other relevant sources in Chinese and English; mainly a recent Chinese encyclopedia of primary education, Chinese language instruction videos, and ethnographical accounts of Chinese classrooms by

foreigners. The analysis is supported by my fieldwork observations of grade one classrooms in two primary schools of a large city in central China.

- **Chapter Six — Discussion and conclusion.** Chapter six synthesizes the results of the study and highlights, more specifically, the changes in the past and present views of reading pedagogy of Chinese educators. Suggestions are also provided for Canadian teachers working with students of Chinese background and to foreign language teachers planning to work in China.

Literacy and Reading

I endorse Peterson's (1994) claim that literacy is "a form of social practice, which varies" (p.142), as opposed to a pure form of intellectual activity. However, I establish a distinction between two words often used interchangeably: "literacy" and "reading". I conceive of "literacy" as a broad socio-cultural and politically-embedded phenomenon and of "reading" as a purer form of intellectual activity in which universals can be extracted from taking apart the reading process in different languages.

In the present study, I was interested in both the more abstract reality referred to by the term "literacy" and the more concrete activity expressed by the word "reading". In fact, I considered that the constant passage from abstract to concrete levels of language was necessary if I was to provide a comprehensive view of reading instruction in China.

The social aspect of literacy has been repeatedly demonstrated by researchers. Several studies of Chinese children's textbooks have served to demonstrate that literacy was a strong agent of socialization and of political indoctrination (Kwong, 1985; Martin, 1975; Sproul, 1978; Unger, 1977). Studies in other societies, such as the recent study of Muthwa-Kuehn on South Africa (1996) for example, showed that literacy instruction, in this case English literacy instruction during the apartheid period, contributed to maintain both black teachers and students in a state of oppression.

It is clear that literacy practices are rooted in social and political norms and purposes that vary among cultures, and that a study on reading instruction must take them into account. This is why I have considered it necessary to devote one chapter to the examination of the traditional norms and purposes of literacy in pre-communist China. This helps to avoid the pitfalls of finding in the Communist regime, all the reasons for the norms that characterize reading instruction in China today.

Significance of the Study

It is my hope that this study will contribute to a clearer understanding of aspects of reading instruction in China and of the Chinese writing system, as well as generate new insights for researchers not only in the field of reading instruction, but also in disciplines such as ESL (English as a second language), multicultural education and sociolinguistics. As Cousquer noted (1990), written Chinese has often been considered as belonging to an "archaic" stage in the evolution of writing systems. Studying similarities and differences in the views of reading and instruction of a character-based orthography provides a means of reflecting on our own practice in Canada.

Also, an increasing number of Chinese students form the population of Canadian schools. It is hoped that this study will benefit teachers and researchers by helping them to increase their understanding of the background of these students, and more particularly, the way they approach the reading of texts as well as their behaviour in the classroom.

Furthermore, on the basis of my own experience teaching French and English in China for two years, once in 1989-90 and again in 1995-96, I believe this study can help foreign language teachers going to work in China to better prepare themselves and devise more appropriate teaching strategies "for an effective transition from the native to the target norms" (Alptekin, 1988, p.112).

Last, I would add that this study is justified by the simple fact that it originates from a

real interest in the intrinsic value of the Chinese language and culture.

Methodology

This study consists of a conceptual analysis that has been supplemented with a short period of fieldwork. For reasons that I describe in the section "Limitations and validation of the study", the circumstances did not allow me to conduct extended ethnographic fieldwork. However, I sat through three grade one language lessons at two different schools, and interviewed school principals, elementary language teachers, and parents, in three schools. Because my fieldwork was limited, I have preferred to work from recent written and audio-visual sources in Chinese, available to me during my stay in China from September 1995 to July 1996 (appendix 1 provides a list of the Chinese primary sources used in this study, as well as a list of the interviews and the classrooms observation conducted).

Chapter two and three were constructed both from English and Chinese sources and are concerned with the nature of the Chinese writing system and the literacy tradition. For chapter four and five, I have worked primarily from the national Chinese elementary school teachers' manuals and the children's textbooks, as well as with a newly published encyclopedia on Chinese primary schooling, studies on reading, and Chinese academic journals of primary language education.

Oral sources were gathered through recorded or reported interviews with Chinese teachers, principals, and parents. Interviews with the principals of the three schools were oriented towards getting a general view of the school life such as schedules, curriculum, rules, activities, and the financial circumstances of the school. I had prepared a list of questions ahead of time, to guide these interviews and to help in comparing the answers of the informants between the three schools.

I proceeded differently for interviewing the teachers. I used techniques drawn from the work of Spradley, *The ethnographic interview* (1979), to prepare both general and more

specific questions. Most of them, however, were generated during the interviews out of the dialogue itself. The questions were designed from the three types of ethnographic questions described by Spradley, i.e., descriptive, structural and contrastive, and were aimed at getting at the "emic", or insider's point of view. Descriptive questions allowed me to encourage my informants to expand on their experience as teachers so I could begin to understand what aspects of reading instruction and events in the classroom were important to them. It was also for me a way to become familiar with the language they used to describe their field. For example, I asked a teacher to describe what she did in a typical language classroom from the time she walked in, and encouraged her to explain further, the terms she was using.

Structural questions were intended to discover categories in the way teachers organized their knowledge about instruction. These questions were often complementary to descriptive questions. When I asked the teacher to describe a typical language class, she responded by explaining the different steps she followed to organize her class. All I had to do then, was to invite her to pursue this direction, by simply asking questions such as, "Then what do you do?" or "What comes after the writing practice?". I could also have asked her directly , as I did in another interview, to tell me what the steps of teaching reading were.

Contrastive questions were more specific and aimed at understanding distinctions teachers made among different words or events. For example, I asked a teacher who had taught reading to all the elementary grades to explain the main difference between teaching reading at the lower and middle grades or between grades one and two.

As for the classroom observations, I followed the basic procedure of writing descriptive fieldnotes outlined in Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Since I was the only one recording events of the classrooms, I focused mainly on finding the structure unfolding in the language classroom, and observed the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the students. I did not make use of any lists of preset categories to record behaviors. I simply tried to record as much as I could about what was happening at the

10

moment. In the hour after the class, I reconstructed my notes into a narrative form, added details, and proceeded to a first analysis of recurrent themes and events that were present in the classroom. This became easier after the third visit because, although limited, I had a basis for comparison. I examined the same class twice, once in the first semester on October 26, 1995, and again near the end of the next semester, on May 14, 1996. I was also invited to observe a first grade language class in another public school, larger than the others, on March 28, 1996. The principal and the first grade language teacher of the third school agreed to meet with me for an interview, but politely refused to let me sit through a lesson. My interpreter explained this by the fact that the school was considered to be very poor financially and that it would give me a bad impression of Chinese schools.

All three schools were located in a large urban area in a province of the interior. Two of the schools were annexed to a university, i.e., that they were administered by the university, and the third one was a public school under direct municipal administration.

Limitations and Validation of the Study

Throughout this study, it has sometimes been difficult to establish relationships of trust with Chinese schools authorities. This happened for several reasons: recent history, ethical conduct requirements, the "official party line", "saving the face" of the nation, and institutionalized guidelines to deal with "foreign guests".

Intellectuals in the P.R.C. have been barraged with criticism, dismissed, put in jail, and sometimes tortured, at several occasions in the recent past. The "Cultural Revolution" from 1966-1976, which greatly affected the system of education and its members, literally stopped the entire system for a decade. Teachers and school officials were regarded as traitors and barriers to changes brought upon the country by the proletarian revolution because they represented the old "bourgeois" class society. They were dismissed from their functions, submitted to self-criticism, in some cases physical torture, and many were sent to the

11

countryside to be rehabilitated, to "learn from the peasants", and to "learn from physical labour". Some of them were replaced by inexperienced revolutionary party members who remain in place today (Wu, 1987). Many of those teachers who were dismissed during that period were able to reestablish their function, after the advent of new Party leaders at the death of Mao in 1976 (Pepper, 1991). Almost anything in the area of education was susceptible to be taxed as "bourgeois" during the Cultural Revolution, a pretext for dismissal and rehabilitation. Unofficial contacts with foreigners were strictly forbidden and enough to put anyone in a threatening situation (for more detailed accounts of this period, see among others, the works of Stanley Rosen,1982; Bernstein, 1977; and Unger, 1982). Thus, it would be naive to believe that this past does not still interfere with today's relationship between Chinese educators and foreigners. For example, during an interview with a principal (who was also the math teacher), I asked if I could look at the most recent outline of primary language education. A polite refusal came in the form of "I am not sure you can". A similar answer was given to me by the same person at a request for the document on the national planning of the primary school curriculum: "I don't think you can look at it either". When I later asked my interpreter the reason why she thought he refused to show me these documents, her answer was simple: "He has been a teacher for a long time, you know; he is a very careful man" (Interview 96.04.09). The same documents are available in our Asian studies libraries in North America and excerpts can be found in various educational journals. The documents in themselves are not highly secret, but the handing of a document to a foreigner is a political act, which, in a sudden shift of policy, can have unwanted consequences. The principal was simply protecting himself from such an eventuality.

Related to this past, the ethical requirements of the Canadian university where this thesis was proposed, constituted another barrier for research in the People's Republic of China. The necessity of obtaining the signature of the participants prior to the research besides their verbal agreement, strongly displeased many informants formerly eager to participate. These written

requirements were eventually waived but, unfortunately, too late. Once again, the political implications of signing a form for a foreigner may have undesired results (for this reason, the names of the interviewees and of the schools are being withheld from print). Moreover, the ideas presented in the forms explaining the ethical conduct of research were foreign to the Chinese context.

Other foreign researchers in China have also reported similar problems (see for example, Wu, 1987, and Dumont, 1984). Wu (1987) conducted a study on Chinese preschools in the 1980s, and noted that what was revealed to foreigners was directly linked to the political mood of the moment:

> Changing political, social, and economic realities powerfully affect Chinese preschool pedagogy as well as the kinds of statements Chinese parents, teachers, administrators, government leaders and other citizens are willing to make publicly about their preschools. What Chinese feel is wise or proper to say to foreign guests changes with the prevailing political mood. (p.117)

This "prevailing political mood" constitutes what I have referred to earlier as "the official party line". The party line dictates what must be revealed or said to foreigners about different aspects of the reality in China, regardless of the facts. A Chinese parent one day confided to me, that in today's China "you can pretty much say whatever you want, unless it is against the law"... His intention of course was to express a certain liberalization of speech happening in China. It is actually becoming quite unclear what areas one should or should not discuss, and people remain cautious when discussions take place among a group of people.

Because of this phenomenon, I was sometimes left with the feeling of being in the middle of a "conspiracy". Public information is heavily controlled by the media and to a lesser extent, by the people themselves. Patriotism and the protection of the Mother Land, are themes of everyday life. "Saving the face" of China, is a real concern for many and it is bluntly represented through the media. News on television and on the newspapers are endless lists of the daily progress of Chinese society and of the policy of the "Four Modernisations" (agriculture, military, education, and science and technology). We will see in the next chapter

of this study, that national statistics are, more often than not, suspiciously overly optimistic.

Wu (1987) encountered the objections of many of his informants of big cities for having chosen to videotape in a preschool they considered backward: " Your foreign audiences will think we are very primitive" (p.118). Wu explained that their objections did not deny the representativeness of his sample population but rather the fact that it was "too typical, in their minds, of the kind of plodding mediocrity they are trying to leave behind in preschool education" (p. 120). A similar argument was used to explain the refusal of one school to let me visit the language classroom.

Because of this political and social atmosphere, it is sometimes very difficult—if not impossible— to distinguish the facts from fiction. I have encountered on several occasions, a deliberate concealment or "omission" of the truth. In this context, fieldwork becomes very complicated at times. As expressed in Wu's above quotation, foreigners in China are "foreign guests". This means that at the announcement of the arrival of a foreign visitor, the schools must prepare. At several occasions, before my visits to the schools, informants revealed to me that the teachers and principals had been busy "preparing for my coming", "tidying up the classroom" and even "hanging up curtains in the windows". I was lucky in a sense to be working with schools that had never been visited by foreigners. Wu reported that "to make a good impression on foreign guests, frequently visited kindergartens in China's larger cities spend considerable time and energy preparing shows of children's songs and dances" (p.83).

Despite all of this, I have tried to work closely with my Chinese informants to further and validate my understanding of the subject matter and to verify the accuracy of my observations by sharing them with the teachers. I also compared my understanding of events with my interpreters. All of the latter were native to the location where the research was conducted, had a child attending the schools we visited, and were fluent in English. Since the purpose of this study was to gain insight into Chinese views on reading, it was fundamental that I establish the means to have my interpretations evaluated by the community. Therefore,

interpretations of the fieldnotes and data gathered during interviews, as well as interpretations taken from written sources (teachers' manuals, textbooks, journals, and studies on reading) were submitted to the interviewees, mostly the teachers, for validation. Most of these meetings were on a one-to-one basis, facilitating the communication between the interviewee and the researcher. These meetings were recorded and reviewed with the help of an interpreter, knowledgeable in the field of education. The transcription of the interviews with the interpreter was useful to verify my understanding of key terms and reduced the risks of faulty translations of important terms. During my undergraduate years as a student of the East Asian Centre of the University of Montreal from 1985 to 1988, I had studied Chinese language, literature, and philosophy for three years. Despite many years of practice after graduation, and although it was the second time I was spending a year in China, my oral Chinese was not fluent. For this reason, I was always accompanied by Chinese interpreters during my visits to the schools and during interviews with the participants to make sure I was correctly understanding what was being said and in order to facilitate communication.

Lastly, I would like to point out that the observations contained in this study belong entirely to an urban educational environment and what is reported here is, therefore, not necessarily representative of the situation in rural settings. Cleverley (1991) has discussed the difficulty of obtaining reliable evidence of the conditions of rural education from official academic sources and national newspaper such as the *People's Daily*. Many of the problems with official publications and Chinese scholarship, which he highlighted, I have found true also of the general situation of education throughout the country and in fields other than education. The following are general issues regarding the validity and interpretations of official publications discussed in Cleverley (1991) that should be kept in mind when doing research or when reading about China:

- Any writings about educational reforms convey political statements, which are directly or indirectly controlled by the state. Therefore, one can expect to find

that most scholarly writings obey official policies.

- Attempting to achieve consensus among scholars is an important aspect of a tradition that seeks to establish or preserve public harmony.
- Traditionally, Chinese scholarship does not require that all sources be clearly identified in writing, an area which presents problems in the interpretation of statistical data.

On this last matter, Cleverley rightly added: "Chinese statistics are no more accurate than those of other countries where material advantage can flow from the magical art of figuring" (p.55).

CHAPTER 2

THE CHINESE WRITING SYSTEM AND LITERACY IN CHINA

In order to understand the Chinese pedagogical approach to reading, it is necessary to examine some of the characteristics of the Chinese writing system. I will, therefore, present some basic concepts that underlie the nature and the functioning of this particular form of script, discuss the debates over its survival, the consequent changes it underwent and consider various issues regarding the state of literacy in China over the past decade.

I have judged appropriate also to include a discussion of certain questions often raised in North America, concerning the Chinese language. In the 1970s, some researchers (Gleitman & Rozin, 1977; Makita, 1968, 1974; Rozin, Poritsky, & Sotsky, 1971; Steinberg & Yamada, 1978-1979) believed that reading disabilities were almost nonexistent in learning Chinese (also in Japanese) and consequently claimed that Chinese characters were easier to learn than alphabetic writing systems. Chinese has served to exemplify a "semantic" writing system and used to support the whole-word approach to reading. We will see that sound and meaning elements are equally represented in Chinese and may be as equally unreliable. Lu Xun, a most revered modern Chinese writer, pointed out that Chinese characters "have become ideographs which no longer resemble the forms, or phonetic ideographs which no longer indicate the sound" (cited in Chou, 1958).

Characteristics of Chinese Writing

We will see in the section entitled "the reform of the language" that many people, among whom we find both Chinese and foreign linguists and educators, consider Chinese characters difficult to learn and unfit to the development of mass education and social modernisation. In

order to clearly assess the situation, it is necessary to further examine some aspects of the Chinese language. The following discussion will also explain some fundamental concepts that guide beginning reading instruction in Chinese.

Characters and Words

Chinese characters or *zì*, are the basic semantic and phonetic units of the Chinese writing system. A character stands alone or more commonly in combination with another character to form a word, but it does not undergo morphological changes. The function of words in Chinese is often flexible, and it is common to use the same word as a noun, a verb, an adjective, or adverb in different contexts. For example, in the phrase *nèiróng fēngfù* (a rich content), *fēngfù* is an adjective meaning "rich", while in the phrase *fēngfù nèiróng* (to enrich the content), *fēngfù* functions as the verb "to enrich" (Li & Cheng, 1988).

A Chinese character, therefore, represents sounds of the language and is closely equivalent to a syllable, most of the time meaningful by itself; it is a kind of morphophoneme which can form either a word or a syllable of a word. In today's Chinese lexicon, words are generally formed of two (dissyllabic) or more characters (polysyllabic), the majority being dissyllabic (Jiang & Li, 1985). To illustrate the distinction between a character and a word, let's look at the following sentence:

我是学生 (*Wǒ shì xuésheng*) : I am a student
我 *(Wǒ)* : I
是 *(shì)* : to be
学生 *(xuésheng)* : student

This sentence has three words but four characters, the word for student being formed by the combining of two characters. By itself, the first character (学) in the word student means "to study". As for the second character (生) of the word student, it may have several meanings when met alone such as "to give birth" or "to grow". In Classical Chinese,

18

because the language tended to be monosyllabic (Granet, 1968), the "word" was then a closer match to the concept of "character". Today, however, it is sometimes difficult to identify what constitutes a word since Chinese characters alone can potentially act as such. Moreover, entries in Chinese dictionaries are made on the basis of single characters, each given at least one meaning. Each character is then followed by a list of words and idioms where it appears in the first place of each word. For instance, the word 古物 *gǔwù* (antique), will be found under the entry character 古 *gǔ* (ancient).

The majority of Chinese words resemble English compound words. In the example just cited, the word "antique" is formed of the character 古 *gǔ* meaning "ancient" and 物 *wù*, things. Many other words are made up of these characters. To cite only a few examples:

古人 *gǔrén* : ancient + person= the ancients; the people of ancient times
考古 *kǎogǔ* : to examine+ancient=archeology; to engage in archeological studies
物理 *wùlǐ* : things+reason; logic= physics
宝物 *bǎowù* : precious+things=treasure

There are some instances, however, where the characters that form a word are not —or do not seem to be— related to the modern meaning of the word. For example, the word 浑厚 (*húnhòu*) which means "simple and honest" is formed by the character 浑, "muddy" or "muddled" and the character 厚, "thick". There are apparently no logical relationships between the meaning of the characters that formed the word *húnhòu*, and its present meaning, although this relationship may have existed in the past.

It is sometimes difficult for a beginning reader to identify the boundary of a word because it is the character in Chinese which is separated by a blank space, and not the word as in alphabetic languages. Therefore, when the beginning readers of Chinese encounter a series of unknown characters, it is impossible for them to tell which characters belong together semantically.

All Chinese characters occupy an identical space on a page regardless of the complexity

or simplicity of their constituents. They sit in an imaginary square in which each components is well balanced. When practicing writing characters, beginning writers in Chinese schools use squared sheets or notebooks prepared specially for this purpose. As early as grade two, children will also practice tracing characters with a paint brush (the Shanghai. Zhejiang. Beijing and Tianjin Group. 1985). Besides teaching children to appreciate the aesthetic value of written Chinese, this practice trains them to visualize the characters in space and solidly position them in their imaginary square (fig. 1).

Fig. 1   Chinese characters. regardless of the complexity of their structure, occupy an identical space.

Rules of Character Construction

Children in grade one are introduced to the fundamental concepts and mechanics behind the construction of characters. These are the concepts of stroke (*bǐhuà*). of radical (*bùshǒu*, also known as classifier), as well as the mechanics of character construction: the stroke order, the directional rules of tracing, and the spatial arrangements of all the components. Mastering these mechanics will improve the child's ability to memorise the characters and to write efficiently at a reasonable speed. Children will also learn the name of each different stroke and radical, a requirement that will help them to discriminate the constituents of a character and facilitate teaching.

The strokes are the elements with which a character is being traced. In order to become efficient in constructing characters. the beginning writer learns to name and to trace a set of basic strokes and their derivatives according to rules of order and direction (see appendices 2 and 3). The consistency with which a character is written develops speed and helps retention

20

by developing automatism. It trains a mechanical memory similar to the one leading the fingers of a pianist on the keyboard.

The discrimination of each stroke and respect of the stroke order, besides being essential for learning to write, are also necessary skills for dictionary search. Although there are many dictionaries since the nineteen fifties which are classified according to the alphabetical order of the *Pinyin* system (a phonetic system of transcribing the characters sound by using the Latin alphabet), character or word search in Chinese dictionaries is traditionally done following an index of radicals or an index of the number of strokes (all three systems of search are now commonly incorporated in dictionaries). The character 明 *ming* (bright), for example, can be found alphabetically either under *ming*, or by following the radical index under 日 *ri*, the sun, as well as by the stroke index under the column for characters compo: d of 'eight strokes'.

The *radical* or *classifier* is a semantic unit used in the classification of the characters. As a general rule, radicals form the left part of characters but they are often found in other positions. In the example given above, the radical for the character *ming* meaning bright, was the sun and appeared on the left side of the character. To give further examples, let's look at the radical "mouth", 口 *kou*, in the following characters:

1. 叫 *jiào*   : to name
2. 吃 *chī*   : to eat
3. 叶 *yè*   : leaf
4. 兄 *xiōng*   : elder brother
5. 句 *jù*   : sentence

In these characters, the radical is found sometimes on the left side in (1), (2), and (3), at the top of (4), or in the interior position (5). The two-volume Chinese-English dictionary of the Shanghai Jiaotong University (Wu, 1994), comprise a listing of 365 different characters with the mouth radical. We can see also from the example above, that radicals do not always provide semantic clues to the global meaning of characters; some of the words in the list

seem somewhat related in meaning (1), (2), (5), in the sense that they are activities (1 and 2) or the result of the activity (5) of the mouth, but the other two are not as semantically transparent (3), (4). Their contemporary meanings bare no obvious relationship to each other or to the word mouth. This relationship may have been obvious in the past, but characters have changed in form and meaning over the ages. For this reason, it is more accurate to say that the radicals, although meaningful in themselves, do not always contribute to the meaning of characters in which they appear.

If the Chinese writing system has fascinated many Westerners, it is probably because of this intermingling of semantic elements. The radical, the character, the word, all possess and suggest different levels of meaning. It is also the case for the phonetic elements, figurative in nature. We have seen, however, that the radical is not a completely reliable semantic element and that together with many characters, does not contribute to the global meaning of today's Chinese lexicon. A common reaction among outsiders to the Chinese culture who begin to study Chinese is to make the "autopsy" of Chinese characters in search of fanciful interpretations that would explain the relationship between small meaningful units. This tendency to engage in obscure "etymo-cosmological" explanations when one comes in contact with Chinese characters is humorously expressed by DeFrancis (1984, p.96) in the following passage:

> Whodunit buffs, for example, by exercising their little grey cells can doubtless offer a solution to the mystery of how the character 刷 (shuā "brush") acquired its meaning from the combination of radical 18 刂 (dāo "knife") and the two additional components 尸 (shī "corpse") and 巾 (jīn "shroud"). While such explanations may be useful as mnemonics they essentially belong to the category of folk etymology, a favorite pastime of students of Chinese.

We will see that this overemphasis on the semantic aspect of characters contributed to the myth that readers of Chinese read directly to meaning without phonetic recoding.

Nature of Chinese Characters

This general tendency to overemphasize the semantic attributes of characters and minimize — in the worst case ignore — their phonetic indicators appears also when it comes to describing the nature of Chinese characters. It is commonly expressed by the habit of referring to Chinese characters as "pictographs" or more commonly as "ideographs". "Pictographs" consist of symbols depicting concrete things or actions while "ideographs" are "symbols that represent meaning without indicating pronunciation" (DeFrancis, 1989, p.279). In fact, of the 48,641 Chinese characters listed in the imperial Kangxi dictionary dating back to the eighteenth century, only 3% of the characters could be classified as pictographs and ideographs as opposed to 97% characters consisting of semantic-phonetic compounds (De Francis, 1984). However, a great number of these characters are not in common use today. Standard Usage dictionaries usually contain between 3,500 and 11,000 different characters. Of the characters in usage today, Zhng (1984) estimates that 80% of them are phonetic compounds, a percentage still quite high but relatively lower than the one provided by De Francis. As for Zhang (1985), he estimates their number to be 85% of the most frequently used Chinese characters. Zhou (cited by Sheridan, 1985) suggests, however, that only 39% of these compounds are helpful in correctly pronouncing a new character. The reason for this being that the pronunciation of characters has changed throughout the centuries. Moreover, it is also necessary to master a considerable number of characters before being able to make use of their phonetic indicators. Nevertheless, these numbers still suggest that the Chinese writing system, despite all that has been said about it, is as greatly sound based, if not more so than meaning based. In his 1989 work on writing systems, DeFrancis, on whose work this discussion is largely based, mentioned that specialists of the evolution of written Chinese now tend to agree that from a very early stage, pictographs would have been used phonetically in writing other homophonic words. As the lexicon increased, scribes began adding a semantic descriptor (the radical) to discriminate among characters used essentially for their homonymic quality, thus clarifying

their meaning and also facilitating their classification. This view is contrary to the widespread belief that characters evolved throughout the ages, from being essentially semantic symbols (pictographs and ideographs) to becoming increasingly phonetical (phonetic compounds). In fact, studies of oracle bone inscriptions are providing increasing evidence of early phonetic use of characters with later adjunct of semantic elements (see the works of Boodberg 1937, 1940, 1957, Boltz, 1986, and Barnard, 1978, cited in De Francis, 1989). Phonetic use of characters would then date as far back as the first sets of written data available from China.

Phonetic compounds are characters that comprise a component which indicates the pronunciation of the character, generally placed on the right side of the character, and a component that indicates its meaning, the radical, generally appearing on the left. Here are a few examples of phonetic compounds:

1. 松   2. 讼   3. 蚣   4. 翁

The above characters are respectively pronounced "sōng"(1), "sòng"(2), "gōng"(3), "wēng"(4), sounds sometimes differing only in tone (1 and 2), sometimes partly related (2 and 3), and sometimes quite different (1 or 2 with 4), but all containing the phonological component "公" (gōng). Phonetic indicators, as well as semantic ones, are in both cases unreliable because of the subsequent changes in the evolution of Chinese both spoken and written: the pronunciation and the meaning of many characters have changed throughout history. They give only approximative clues and can often be misleading because they allude to more ancient forms of spoken Chinese. However, according to a study by Hung and Tzeng (1981), adult Chinese readers would have an average 40% chance of pronouncing an unknown character correctly, a result consistent with the 39% estimate of Zhou mentioned earlier. Because this category of characters is by far the most common, some authors have suggested replacing the term "ideographs" to refer to the Chinese writing system, by the one of "ideophonographs" (Alleton, 1970) or "morphosyllables" (DeFrancis, 1984).

.If the term "ideograph" has been widely used by both Chinese and foreigners, it is because it was a popular term used by linguists themselves (De Francis, 1984, 1989). More common now is the term "logograph", from the Greek *logos* meaning "word", to refer to the system as a whole. Although more accurate than "ideograph", this term is also misleading because it reinforces the idea that the language is monosyllabic and that characters are equivalent to words. If this may be true in some instances, we have seen that the majority of words today are dissyllabic and that it is more appropriate to take characters as morphemes (except in the case of some foreign words where the characters are used for phonetic purposes only).

De Francis (1989) classifies written Chinese as the "syllabic system" grouped together with Japanese, and as belonging more specifically to the sub-group "'meaning-plus-sound' syllabic system" along with Sumerian and Mayan scripts (Japanese belonging to the "'pure' syllabic system" category). This classification is generally accurate in describing the strong tendency of written Chinese towards being syllabic, each character representing a meaningful syllable, although a few occurrences do not agree with that description[1].

Changes in the Style of Writing the Characters

The style in which Chinese is presently written dates back to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) (Alleton, 1970). This means that from the stones on which they were carved to today's computers screens where they are being processed, Chinese characters have more or less kept their original structure. The language certainly underwent changes, its grammar was

---

[1]Not all characters may be considered representing one syllable and not all are meaningful. One may argue, for instance, that sounds such as *zhuan, zhuang, guang, liang,* represented by only one character, consist of two syllables as opposed to one (*zhu-an, zhu-ang, gu-ang, li-ang*). These sounds, however, are generally considered diphtongs. Also, certain characters have lost their semantic value and have taken on an essentially phonetic value following the tendency of Modern Chinese to form bisyllabic words. This is the case for example, of the phonetic adjunct of the character *zi* to form bisyllabic words such as in *qiezi* (eggplant), and *zhuzi* (bamboo) in which the first characters (*qie,* and *zhu)* give their meaning to the words and could perfectly stand alone by themselves. Another example is the two characters in *putao* (grape) where neither character carries meaning in isolation (Li and Cheng, 1988).

25

modified over the centuries, writing styles became diversified, the constituents and the meaning of some characters changed, but overall, the structure of Chinese characters has remained the same. Given that they know the non-simplified version of Chinese characters, present day Chinese citizens can easily read the characters of texts dating as far back as the Han period though they would not necessarily understand the meaning of the text unless they have a certain knowledge of the classical style of writing.

Debates over the Chinese Writing System and the Language Reform

In the nineteenth century, increased contact with foreign countries would greatly shatter China's social organization. The brutal assault by foreign powers, an increasing presence of missionaries working at establishing educational institutions, and a growing number of Chinese students returning from studying abroad, all contributed to an increasing need to transform the old imperial educational system into a more modern system capable of revitalizing the whole structure of society and strengthening the nation. To further this goal, the language posed several problems to the intellectuals and leaders. The vast majority of the society was illiterate, and spoke different dialects, often mutually unintelligible. As for those who had received traditional training, their classical education focused essentially on the mastery of classical literature and made no provision for knowledge in science and technology. Moreover, they were trained in writing compositions for exam purposes, in a style incomprehensible to commoners, and were often incapable of carrying out basic practical writing assignments such as writing letters, reports, or inventory of household property, because they had never encountered, in the Classics, the characters necessary to perform this task (Smith, 1899).

Reforming the language both at the spoken and written levels had become imperative if China was to modernize. In 1913, one year after the foundation of the first Republic,

Mandarin was proclaimed the official language of instruction at the Conference on Unification of Pronunciation. Originally called *guānyǔ* (Officials' Speech), Mandarin was the dialect of Beijing and was used by imperial officials of different dialectical backgrounds to communicate with each other. It was renamed *guóyǔ* i.e., "National language" at the 1913 conference and later became *pǔtōnghuà*, the Common Speech, under the Communist Party. The new policy was carried out mainly in the language classrooms while teachers of other subjects would commonly resort to teaching in their local dialect. The teaching materials provided to the teachers were in the National Language which they would read following the local pronunciation. For speakers of some dialects, this involved a few grammar and vocabulary changes as well (DeFrancis, 1984).

During the same conference, phonetic symbols derived from Chinese characters and inspired by the Japanese kana symbols, were also adopted. Called "Phonetic Alphabet" (*zhùyīn zìmu*), the first role of this system was to indicate the standard pronunciation of Chinese characters, a useful tool for beginning readers. In the past, children learning to read relied entirely on a literate person for learning the pronunciation of characters. The Phonetic Alphabet could be learned in six to eight weeks. For those who already could speak Mandarin, phonetic adjuncts could allow them to read independently. For non-Mandarin speakers, however, it meant learning to read in a completely different dialect, a task, in some cases, equivalent to the learning of another language.

From the 1890s to the official adoption of the Pinyin system (based on the Latin Alphabet) in 1958, reformers and linguists worked at designing different phonetic systems or studied existing ones. A few of these systems were implemented in different regions for relatively short periods of time. The type and purposes of these phonetic systems and the extent of their proposed adoption, raised heated debates, some of which still linger today. The following questions were at the heart of dissensions among reformers:

1) Should the phonetic system be used to replace Chinese characters entirely or be used only as an adjunct to indicate their pronunciation?

2) What form should the phonetic system take? Should the Latin Alphabet be used as in Vietnam or should the new script be derived from Chinese characters as in Japan?

3) Which speech should the system represent? Mandarin only or dialects also?

Some reformers expressed views often tinted with despair. In the troubled period of World War I and its aftermath, the philologist Qian Xuantong, for example, would go as far as to suggest the complete replacement of the Chinese language with Esperanto (DeFrancis, 1984). This period also saw the appearance of several radical literary and political groups of young intellectuals, often returning from foreign countries, who urged the country to abandon many aspects of the old culture. These groups gained an influence after the May Fourth Movement in 1919, a nationalist surge started by students of the Beijing University and provoked by the news of the transfer of German possessions of Chinese territories to Japan. This movement was at the origin of a literary and cultural renaissance (Gernet, 1972). One major change that occurred at the time, was the replacement of the classical style of writing by a vernacular style (*báihuà*) closer to speech and based on the Beijing dialect. Although the vernacular style kept many elements of Classical Chinese (DeFrancis, 1984), this huge transformation was breaking with thousands of years of tradition. Some, including the writer Lu Xun, demanded further that alphabetical writing replace Chinese characters. Lu Xun also advocated the use of this script to devise basic literacy education for the people in their own dialect. At the time, Mao Zedong shared this view (DeFrancis, 1984).

The next major series of reforms came after the Communist Party took power in 1949. By then, it was no more a question of getting rid of Chinese characters but to undertake their simplification and design a phonetic script that would help their learning. The new view adopted by Mao was that the language reform "should not be divorced from reality or make a break with the past" (cited by DeFrancis, 1984). The "reality" was that the vast bulk of the

educated were literate in Chinese characters and that the new government needed their support and active participation in carrying out the immense task of rebuilding an overpopulated country torn apart by successive wars and changes of forms of government. Many intellectuals had opposed the "Scheme for Simplifying Chinese Characters" published in January 1956 by the State Council (Chou, 1958). In a speech delivered two years later, Zhou Enlai, then Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, called for the support of those opposing the Scheme and tried to appease their fear of becoming "illiterate" (Chou, 1958, p.10):

> How can we become "illiterates"? Of course, some characters may be unfamiliar. But if we use a little mental effort, the fears will vanish into thin air. For the sake of the broad mass of the working people and the millions of children, the intellectual should not begrudge the little extra thinking involved.... Since the simplification of the characters is in the interest of the whole of the people, we intellectuals should actively support the work instead of passively accepting it. We should consider the question of the language reform from the standpoint of the six hundred million people and not from personal likes and convenience.

There is no doubt that the mastery of several thousands of Chinese characters is difficult to achieve without committing many years to their study. This commitment could hardly be made by the peasants in the countryside who had to spend long hours working in the fields and attending to various other tasks. These people formed the vast majority of the population. Those in charge of carrying out the language reform continually stressed the difficulty of learning Chinese characters. In the same speech, Zhou added (Chou, 1958, p.18):

> I think we should admit that Chinese characters are difficult to read and write and therefore hard to remember. Not only children who begin to learn characters, but some adults who have studied many years are still unfamiliar with a number of characters or may mispronounce them.

If China was to become a modern egalitarian state, it was imperative to find means to provide the broad mass with basic literacy instruction, at least among the new generation, if it was too late to reach older ones. The reform carried out in the fifties focused on the three following aspects: the simplification of Chinese characters, the popularization of the Common Speech (*pǔtōnghuà*), and the adoption of the Pinyin system. We will look further into each of

29

these aspects of the reform since they played a significant role for beginning reading instruction and are still in effect.

1. The Simplification of Chinese Characters

The aim of the simplification of characters was to make them easier to learn by reducing the number of their strokes and also eliminating characters, sometimes by merging two characters into only one new form. In the fifties, 544 original characters were simplified into 515 new characters and 54 radicals were also simplified. Examples of the different strategies used in the simplification process is shown in figure 2. According to Wu Yuchang (1958), Director of the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language, the simplification reduced the average number of strokes per character from 16.08 to 8.16 strokes, a reduction by half of the original number of strokes for the characters in the list. Further simplification was carried out also in the sixties, bringing the list of simplified characters up to a count of 2,238 (DeFrancis, 1984). In 1979, Zhou Youguang (cited by DeFrancis, 1984) published an article in which he found that on the basis of texts containing 250,000 characters, the average number of strokes decrease only from 9.15 to 7.67, results significantly different from the count of Wu performed strictly on the list of simplified characters.

擠 → 挤	書 → 书	語 → 语
Simplification of the phonetic component	Simplification of the shape based on cursive writing	Simplification of the radical component
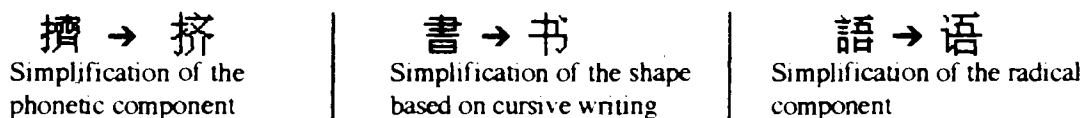
Figure 2. Some strategies used in simplifying Chinese characters.

In some instances, the old form of writing the characters is still in use today in the P.R.C. In a recent article published in the *China Daily*, Ye (1996) expressed some concerns regarding the extensive use of the complex form of Chinese characters for street signs. According to the author, in the city of Xiamen, "at least 90 per cent of the street placards and shop signs are in unsimplified Chinese characters" (p.4). This number would also be

representative of the situation in many other Chinese cities and that, despite governmental regulations. Generally speaking, for aesthetic reasons, the old form of the characters are preferred in calligraphic art. This form is also still the current script used by Chinese communities outside mainland China.

For the most part though, the government has been successful in implementing the use of the simplified characters. With the exception of some historical works, publications are written in simplified characters.

2. The Popularization of the Common Speech (*Putonghua*)

The second task of the Reform Committee was to universalise the Common Speech, but this time, as the exclusive standard. The stated aim was to facilitate "national construction" (Chou, 1958, p.14) by reducing dialectical barriers, an initiative that had been attempted in 1913. The standard pronunciation of *Putonghua* remained based on the Beijing dialect, while the grammar and vocabulary were representative of most Northern Mandarin dialects and of the modern vernacular literature (Li & Thompson, 1984). According to Wu (1958), 70 per cent of the Chinese-speaking population spoke Northern dialects.

Putonghua was to be first popularized in the schools, the media, and among government workers. This decision must have displeased much of the Southern population, most of whom spoke radically different dialects, since they were the ones who would have to display the strongest effort. It also meant that before Southerners could master the Common Speech, they would be at a disadvantage in some work situations and that their children would be (in theory) schooled in a dialect they could not understand. For those children speaking a dialect radically different from Putonghua, i.e., mutually unintelligible such as Shanghainese or Cantonese, learning to read meant learning to read in another language-dialect. According to DeFrancis (1989), "it takes more effort for a Cantonese to learn to read and write in the national standard than it does for a Spaniard to learn to read and write French" (p.95).

To encourage all to actively learn Putonghua, the Ministry of Education, the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language, and provincial and municipal organizations compiled and published textbooks on Putonghua in various dialects. Zhou suggested that local groups organize oratorical contests in the official dialect and highly praise students and teachers who spoke it well (Chou, 1958). He also stressed that the popularization of Putonghua did not aim at prohibiting or eliminating dialects, but at the facilitation of national exchange. By the same token, he invited those who already spoke Putonghua to learn other dialects.

If praise may have been a source of motivation for some to learn the standard dialect, other incentives happened to be more effective, as this interview with a Cantonese shop assistant shows (cited in Yu, 1996): "I used to be very reluctant to speak putonghua for the sake of 'face.' But now I'm willing to speak it because of 'notes' (money)" (p.9).

3. The Adoption of the Phonetic Alphabet Pinyin

Closely linked to the popularization of Putonghua, is the official adoption of the Chinese phonetic alphabet called Pinyin in 1958 (Pope, 1982). The Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet stated that Pinyin be used "to annotate the characters phonetically and to popularize the common speech" (Chou, 1958, p.17). Since Pinyin indicated the standard pronunciation of Chinese characters via the Latin alphabet, it was a useful tool in learning Putonghua. There were many advantages to the adoption of Pinyin. I have outlined here the reasons provided in the report of Wu Yuchang on the Draft Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet in 1958 (p.50). The Pinyin system could be used:

- to give the pronunciation of the Chinese characters so as to improve the efficiency in learning and teaching Chinese characters;

- as an aid in teaching and learning Putonghua and to compile textbooks, reading materials, charts and dictionaries;

32

- to serve as a common basis on which national minorities who had no writing system could create one, and those who used a different one (Tibetan, Mongolian, Arabic, and Korean alphabets) could adapt theirs. It would also facilitate printing and the mutual learning of the languages;

- to solve the problems of translating names of people, places, scientific and technological terms;

- to help foreigners learn Chinese to promote international exchange;

- to easily compile indexes for dictionaries, directories, library catalogues and cards, archives, and various other reference materials and case history files;

- so Chinese linguists could further study and experiment with the transformation of the Chinese written language into a phonetic language;

- to solve problems of telegraphic codes, flag signals, and serial numbers on industrial products.

Today, Pinyin is widely used to transcribe Chinese characters phonetically within and outside China (I use it in this thesis). The State Education Commission (later SEC) allows 66 class periods for its instruction at the first grade which represents the six to eight first weeks of the first semester. This time varies depending on the familiarity of the pupils with the Common Speech. Once they are familiar with all the sounds and can read short passages in Pinyin, Chinese characters are introduced. We will examine Pinyin instruction in more depth in later chapters. Let us say for now that according to some Chinese researchers, the adoption of Pinyin would accelerate the learning of characters and contribute to a better acquisition (Dai & Lu, 1985). The readers used in the P.R.C., always introduce a new character with its phonetic transcription. This way, children can learn characters by themselves by being able to associate their sound. Even if many Chinese characters contain phonetic clues (phonetic compounds), we have seen that these clues are only approximate and much too numerous (more than 800) for a beginner to use them to sound out characters. One must already be a

fluent reader to recognize and make use of the phonetic components.

As to the question of whether or not Pinyin or another phonetic system would eventually replace Chinese characters, the leaders in 1958 remained non-committal. Both Zhou Enlai, in his speech, and Wu Yuchang. in his report. however, stressed that characters were bound to change in the future following a historical trend of evolution. Zhou stated:

> As to whether or not they [Chinese characters] will remain permanently unchanged, whether they will change on the basis of their original form, or whether they will be replaced by a phonetic language—Latin letters or other phonetic scripts—we need not draw a hasty conclusion. Any language is, however, subject to change, as evidenced by the changes of the characters in the past. There will be changes in fut█. We can also say that there will be a day when the languages—written and spoken█of the different peoples of the world will gradually become one and the same (Chou, 1958, p.28).

Wu Yuchang (1958) expressed a very similar point a view: "Like the languages of all other countries, the Chinese language is bound to become a phonetic language at long last" (p.43). They also tried to appease those who feared that the adoption of a Latin alphabet may harm the patriotic spirit of China because it was a foreign script: "We can say that the Latin alphabet is a set of symbols of international usage, and no country can claim it as its own....The adoption of the Latin alphabet will. therefore, not harm the patriotism of our people" (Chou, 1958, p.27).

Pinyin plays an important role in the spread of Putonghua and is also a very useful tool in inputting Chinese characters into computers. According to Yu (1996), there would be more than 500 different methods of inputting Chinese characters, many of which are based on Pinyin. Those who do not speak Putonghua or speak it with difficulty, will have great trouble in making use of this important input method.

Another change to the writing system worth mentioning is the adoption of horizontal print. Traditionally, Chinese was written from top to bottom and from right to left. This tradition remains, but mostly outside the People's Republic of China, in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Even in these areas, however, there is a new tendency towards horizontal left to right print (Chen, 1992). According to studies by Chen (1992; Chen & Chen, 1988) horizontal

script would be easier to understand than vertical script. However, the text in these studies was displayed on computer screens and the results may be partly attributed to the fact that Hong Kong Chinese undergraduates are more used to reading computer screens horizontally than vertically.

Literacy in Chinese

There is no doubt that improvements have been made and tremendous efforts displayed in trying to eliminate illiteracy in China since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949. Much work remains to be done, however, especially in the countryside, and in mountainous and remote areas (Shi, 1996). Also, with the promulgation of the Nine Year Compulsory Education Act in 1986 and the decision by the State to decentralize the financing and responsibilities for basic education, old problems are reemerging and the historical disparity between the urban and rural educational level continues to increase.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the task of eliminating illiteracy has been accomplished. In recent years, advance in adult literacy campaigns has been counteracted by an increasing number of primary school dropouts before the fourth grade, "adding 2 million illiterates every year", and a relapse into illiteracy by those new literates not exposed to reading after a few years (Shi, 1996, p.4). Shi reported in the *China Daily* of April 18, 1996, that according to the vice-minister of the State Education Commission (SEC), Wang Cunming, "China still has 145 million illiterates, about 12 percent of the population", and "35 million of that number are aged between 15 to 45" (Shi, 1996, p.4). Compared to 1949, this represents a tremendous decrease. At the time, 80 per cent of the population was illiterate, with a 90 per cent illiteracy rate for rural areas (Liu, 1992; Shi, 1996; Zhang & Wei, 1987).

However, chances are that Shi's numbers are underrated and allow for a definition of literacy that is of a very low level. Zhou Youguang of the Committee of the Language Reform, indicated to this effect that "the statistics used to bolster the claims of success are most

unreliable since people are not willing to make a serious count because 'they want to show the success of literacy education'" (cited by DeFrancis, 1984, p.211). This tendency is probably true not only for China but represents a serious limitation of quantitative studies of a country-wide nature. In China. this problem is also aggravated by the urgency of "saving face" and by "incentives" sometimes imposed unto teachers and learners by county, town and village authorities, responsible for coordinating literacy work. Liu (1992) reported that in some areas, authorities responsible for adult literacy education require both teachers and learners to sign contracts regarding the standards and time limits at which adult learners should "become literate" (p.338):

> The teacher's responsibility: to teach according to the plan and curriculum and to ensure the learners reach literacy standard in a certain period....Teachers who have made remarkable achievement are rewarded, otherwise they have to carry on teaching *without any pay*....
> The learners' responsibility: the illiterate have to sign contracts with the village committee to clarify the standard of learning *and the time in which they will become literate* . If they fail to reach the defined standard, they have to continue learning and pay the fees until such time as they meet the requirement. (italics are mine)

Under such circumstances, one can imagine that a learner may be considered "literate" after a very short period of time. Liu's conclusion on this procedure is worth noting (p.338):

> The above methods have made sure that literacy work at every level has been emphasized. Responsibilities, rewards and punishments are explicitly clarified, thus ensuring active participation of all social forces.

Regarding the level of literacy, Jiang and Li (1985), researchers for the Central Institute for Educational Research in Beijing, estimate at 2,400 the number of most frequent characters in use and suggest that these make up for about 90 % of the characters contained in ordinary publications. According to them, a person who would have mastered these characters would be functionally literate. In the six years of primary school, students are required to master around 3000 characters. A person who would have a knowledge of 4,000 to 5,000 characters would be considered to have an education equivalent to the secondary level. There is also a general agreement that a person who can recognize 2,500 to 3,000 characters can read the

newspaper and can be considered literate (Pope, 1982).

It is important to note that the definition of literacy is limited to the count of known characters and there is no mention made of reading comprehension. Moreover, surveys on literacy are based on even lower levels of character knowledge than those mentioned by Jiang and Li. Zhang Shaowen from the Adult Education Department of the SEC, wrote that the state regards anyone reading less than 500 characters illiterate and requires that workers read 2,000 characters and farmers 1,500. Those who read at a level between these numbers are considered semi-illiterates (Zhang & Wei, 1987). Not only do the character quota for basic literacy change with the type of occupation, but it is also considerably lower than the standards described earlier for functional literacy estimated between 2,400 to 3,000 *most frequently used* characters.

At the time when United States threatened to carry out economic sanctions against the P.R.C. over copyrights issues and following conflicts over Taiwan, a series of articles appeared in the *China Daily*, that highlighted the failures of American society. Among these, an article published on March 11, 1996, compared the illiteracy rate of United States with the one of China ("Illiteracy", 1996, p.4):

> According to a report entitled 'US Department of Education', semi-illiterates account for about half of the US population. Among them, 42 million are semi-illiterates at the lowest level, while another 52 million semi-illiterates are only a little better educated. Semi-illiterate refers to the ability to read but not understand the meaning of common words. . . . China, on the other hand, through consistent anti-illiteracy efforts, reduced the number of illiterates and semi-illiterates (referring to those at or under 15 years of age who can not read or read very little) to 15.88 per cent of the total population in 1990 and further to 12.01 per cent. or 145 million people, in 1995, as against 80 per cent in 1949, when the People's Republic was founded.

This report is in many ways problematic. First of all, it does not give the percentage for the total population of the United States. Secondly, the situation in United States is hardly comparable with the one of China, since there are no signs that Chinese literacy census take reading comprehension into account; "read very little" may simply mean that they can only recognize a small number of characters. To be significant, the comparison of these data would

37

have to be the results of similar criteria and methods for defining and determining literacy levels across surveys, circumstances which are most unlikely in this case. Thirdly, the anonymous writer speaks of the total population of illiterates in China, but at the same time of the illiterates and semi-illiterates as "referring to those at or under 15 years of age who can not read or read very little". Does this mean that illiteracy does not exist after the age of 15 in China or rather that 12.01 per cent of the total population at or under 15 years old are illiterates or semi-illiterates (in which case, the data are not very helpful since generally speaking, one is not born literate)? Finally, the numbers, taken from the same source as in the previous article of Shi (1996) seen above, contradict themselves since Shi states that "35 million of the number [145 million of illiterates] are aged between 15 to 45".

Several problems hinder the elimination of illiteracy. The countryside especially, where according to the last report of UNICEF (1996) 70 percent of the population reside, suffers greatly from a lack of funding in education. Other problems, many a consequence of this shortage of funds, include lack of schools, of qualified teachers and school administrators, a high dropout rate at the primary level, a low rate of school enrollment in some areas (especially of girls), a relapse into illiteracy after schooling, and the reemerging idea among some parents that "studying is useless" (Chang & Shang, 1990; Zhang, 1990). In the past decade, the principal role played by the central government to remedy the situation has been to pass resolutions, adopt laws and then summon regional governments to find means of enforcing them. On April 18, 1986, following a resolution of the CCP regarding reforms of the educational system issued the year before, the People's Congress adopted the "Compulsory Education Act" extending "the six-year basic education system to a mandatory nine-year education system" (Wang, 1990, p.487). This law, still in effect today, requires that every child attends a minimum of six years of primary school and three years of junior middle school, or five years primary school and four years junior middle school in some rural regions. This law was adopted despite the fact that universal primary education had not yet

been achieved. Wang (1990) suggested that the intention behind this policy "was to eliminate some six million dropouts from primary and lower middle schools each year, and to show the whole nation how the central government elected to tackle this problem" (Wang, 1990, p.488). This further expansion to a nine-year compulsory system required that access to primary and junior middle schools be somehow facilitated and that more schools be built and provided with the necessary staff and equipment. Wang (1990) pointed out that before the adoption of the Resolution, there were no signs that a feasibility study was conducted or that other sectors were consulted. In the Resolution, the state also decided to decentralize the financing and the responsibility of providing basic education, a decision that resulted in growing disparities.

What is the situation of basic education ten years after the "Compulsory Education Law"? The Chinese *Encyclopedia of Primary Education* (Zhang et al.,1994) reported the existence of 713, 000 primary schools in 1992 housing 122.013 million pupils (131.95 million in 1995, Wang Hui, June 1, 1996), and a teaching staff of 6.2 million. The system is enormous and reforms are slow to take place in some areas. This is the case in spite of the fact that, with the single-child law put in effect in 1979, there has been a continuous decrease in the number of primary school pupils (Zhang et al., 1994).

The last year census reported that 98.5 per cent of school aged children attended school in 1995, with 91 per cent having access to the nine-year compulsory education (Wang, 1996), numbers which appear suspiciously high considering other reports regarding serious problems of financing basic education in the rural areas and the high dropout rates of those regions (Chang & Shang, 1990; Yang, 1990; Yeung & Bannister, 1995). The SEC, this year, announced that China would attain a 100 per cent literacy rate among youth and achieve its nine years of compulsory education by the year 2010 (Cui, April 20, 1996). The nine year compulsory education policy is presently mainly effective only in the three municipalities of Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai and some coastal provinces and not yet universalized in these areas. It is the government's hope that nine-year education will be achieved in these areas in a

year or two (Zhang, June 14, 1996). If this is the case for these regions which have enjoyed

the biggest part of the national investment and constitute the most advanced regions of the

country, one may suspect that the situation in the interior lies quite behind the objective of

universal basic education. In the same article, Zhang made the following statement regarding

the new six-year investment plan (1995-2000) launched in 1995 by the central government,

and funded at 39 per cent by the central government and 61 per cent by local revenue (Zhang,

June 14, 1996, p.4):

> Under the plan, nine-year compulsory education will be realized in regions whose
> population accounts for 85 per cent of the country's total. Primary school compulsory
> education will be realized in regions whose population accounts for 95 per cent of the
> total. And three to four years of primary school compulsory education should be
> provided across the whole nation.

From this, we can infer that the countryside and interior regions particularly, are still

lagging behind the economic and educational advance of urban areas and coastal regions.

Chang and Shang (1990) reported for 1989 that, although the overall income of many peasants

was increasing, this income still remained much lower than that of the cities. Many peasants

could not afford to pay the minimal tuition fees for sending their child to school. The quality

of education was also very low, the best teachers and educational equipment and facilities

being concentrated in urban zones where most of the national education budget was being

spent (the highest percentage going to higher education institutions). In the early -1980s, the

state drastically decreased the number of senior middle schools in the countryside by almost 70

per cent. With very few possibilities of advancement, disillusion and cynicism grew among

the peasants who felt that studying was useless. Parents could no longer justify paying for

their child labouring in the classrooms while they could be helping them in the fields. The

general poverty level and hardship gave way to an increase of the suicide rate (2.95 per

thousand in 1988 in the countryside and 1.63 for urban areas). There are no signs that the

situation reported at the time be different from the one facing the peasants today (Chang &

Shang, 1990).

Many Chinese authors have complained of the lack of government funding (Chang & Shang, 1990; Hu, Mao, & Jiang, 1992-93; Zeng, Chen, Tang, & Liu, 1990; Zhang, 1990) and the "official party line" answer is that "it is not easy for the central government to set aside so much money from its tight budget to support education" (Zhang, June 14, 1996). Meanwhile, other articles of the *China Daily* in 1996 publicised the purchase of various military equipment and the expansion of China's space program. According to data provided by the World Bank, China's expenditures in education for 1993, have been of only 2.2 per cent of the national expenditures compared to 16.4 per cent for defence expenditures (*Asia 1996 Yearbook*, p.14). These numbers offer a sharp contrast with those of the State Statistical Bureau of China for the year 1992 which report that 24.6 per cent of the national expenditures went to subsidize education and that only 9.6 per cent went for defence.

To fill the gap, national charity projects have been set up to help children continue their education. The Project Hope, established in 1989, called for donations from the Chinese people and international communities in helping to build schools and assist children in poverty by paying for their schooling. Another charity project, the Spring Bud, supports schooling for girls.

Meanwhile, the SEC and the National People's Congress (NPC) continue to encourage local leaders "to inject more funds into basic education" without imposing extra financial burdens on local farmers (Cui, May 8, 1996, p.1). Tours of inspection are organised to see that the Education Law is being given priority and that there are no diversions of educational funds for other purposes. Local governments are setting up various professional training programs to help raise the academic level of teachers and headmasters (Cui, Jan. 22, 1996). Despite this, the teachers' and students' working and learning conditions remain less than desirable in many areas. Long delays in paying primary and secondary teachers' wages, poorly maintained schools, and low-quality teaching equipment are pending problems that wait to be resolved (Ma, May 31, 1996, p.1).

Must the high rate of illiteracy and the slow technological development of China be blamed on China's writing system? The problem is far more complex. One only has to look at Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan[2] among others, where the complex form of Chinese characters is still in use, to see that obstacles to technological development and to the spread of literacy lie in other areas than just the nature of the writing system. China's recent history is marked by successive periods of chaos, wars, rebellions, foreign invasions, and changes in forms of government. It took time to implement a new system of education and this system is still struggling to survive in some regions and to provide basic education to children. These factors probably played a more central role in determining the present state of literacy in China than the nature of the written language. That Chinese is a cumbersome script in certain tasks relevant to the modernisation of a country is undeniable. An example of this is the amount of time required for inputting Chinese characters during word processing compared to its much more efficient Pinyin counterpart. However, other factors also account for differences in the country's development on the international scale.

Reading Researchers and the Reading Process in Chinese

Today, reading researchers in the West, more and more centre their studies on higher aspects of text processing such as the construction of text comprehension rather than engaging in the long-lasting debates over phonics versus whole-word instruction. However, besides a few recent studies (Shu, Anderson, & Zhang, 1995), most cross-cultural reading research implicating Chinese children has centred on these debates, partly because the nature of Chinese script is thought of as "ideographic", providing a terrain of evidence for tenants of the whole word approach. I will discuss here the two questions that have played a most important role in

---

[2] Japan uses a combination of writing systems which still makes use of two to three thousands Chinese characters (*kanji*) to form words of rather common usage. It has also developed his own system of phonetic symbols derived either from cursive form of Chinese writing (hiragana) or segments of regular form characters (katakana). *Kanji* are combined to *hiragana* symbols to form words.

42

those debates and contributed to the myth that Chinese characters were essentially semantic symbols.

Do Chinese readers go directly from print to meaning or is the reading process mediated by an acoustic image? In the past, many authors (Gleitman & Rozin, 1977; Kolers, 1970; Liu, 1978; Margouliès, 1957; Rozin et al., 1971, among others) have argued that readers of Chinese characters went directly from print to meaning without sound recoding. For these authors, a language like English would use a path where sound mediates between the graphic input and meaning, while Chinese would go directly from print to meaning. In contrast, a series of empirical studies (Erickson, 1972; Tzeng & Hung, 1980; Tzeng, Hung, & Garro, 1978; Tzeng et al., 1977) have shown that speech recoding occurred as the principal mode of processing Chinese characters, although direct access to meaning may also occur. The latter, however, is much more difficult to test.

It is not unlikely that readers of Chinese, similarly to readers of alphabetic scripts, follow both paths of reading, i.e., that in some cases meaning is directly accessed from print and in other cases it is being processed via speech recoding. Important factors that determine the processing path are the level of familiarity of the readers with their script, their experience as readers, their general level of knowledge, and their cognitive ability (Lee, Uttal, & Chen, 1995). Increased prior knowledge of a script through more extensive reading and a richer life experience should contribute to speed reading and improved understanding, two qualities often associated with efficient readers (Giasson, 1990; Harste, 1989). Because of their limited experience with print, beginning readers must acquaint themselves with lower-level reading processes such as grapheme-phoneme recognition in alphabetical script and sound-character association in Chinese. Personal factors would, therefore, play a more important role than the differences in orthographies. Kolers (1970) was mistaken when he divided existing writing systems in the world between two large categories: phonetic and semantic, using Chinese to

exemplify the latter category. We have seen that the nature of written Chinese is not essentially semantic, and that at this time, we have more evidence of speech recoding in processing Chinese characters than of direct processing of meaning. This does not mean, however, that semantic clues intrinsic to the structure of characters are not being used as much as their phonetic components. As DeFrancis (1984) pointed out, "Whether or not readers [of Chinese] make use of the phonetic information available to them . . . cannot be answered merely by looking at the characters" (p.166). The same can be said of its semantic elements.

Is learning to read in Chinese easier than in an alphabetical script? This question is closely related to the previous one and to date we have no reliable evidence of whether or not this is the case. Although some authors have suggested that Chinese characters were easier to learn than an alphabetic script (Rozin, Poritsky, & Sotsky, 1971; Steinberg & Yamada, 1978-1979), their research does not substantiate their claims. In both studies, the samples of characters were much too small to compare with the number of characters a Chinese child needs to learn to acquire basic literacy. Moreover, the second study contained serious methodological flaws.

In the first study, Rozin, Poritsky, and Sotsky (1971) tried to show that eight American children with reading disabilities could easily learn Chinese characters. Because these children were able to learn thirty Chinese characters to which an English meaning had been given, they concluded that the success of these children was due to the fact that Chinese script was not mediated by sound to access meaning, a conclusion somewhat suspect and that has very little to do with Chinese writing itself or how it is processed. The authors would probably have obtained the same results using geometric figures with an attached English meaning. The large number of characters Chinese children must learn probably constitute the most difficult part of their learning to read. After having learned a certain number of characters, children begin to encounter characters with similar shapes and components, and it is necessary to provide them

44

with help to discriminate among these characters. The textbooks at all levels of the primary grades contain exercises to teach children to recognize similar phonetic patterns, as well as similar semantic patterns found in different characters. This important aspect of the learning of the script is absent from the study by Rozin, Poritsky, and Sotsky. The following is an example of such exercises taken from the second volume of the first grade language textbook currently used in the schools (People's Education Press Language Bureau [PEP], 1995b, vol. 2, p.55):

---

bǐ yì bǐ,   zǔ chéng cí yǔ xiě xià lái
比 一 比,   组   成   词 语 写 下 来
[Compare. make up words and write them down.]

木 (   ) 大 (   ) 叫 (   ) 活 (   ) 清 (   ) 该 (   )

本 (   ) 太 (   ) 听 (   ) 话 (   ) 请 (   ) 孩 (   )

In this exercise, the child is asked to compare each character of the first row with the one right below it. The first two characters 木 and 大 serve as radical in the characters 本 and 太 placed below them. The same radicals (口) can be found on the left side of the characters of the third column. The remaining pairs of characters share the same phonetic indicators. Such exercises are more frequent from the second semester of grade one until the end of grade four, a period in which children are asked to master (read and write) close to two thousands characters and to recognize an even greater number.

The second study by Steinberg and Yamada (1978-1979) shows serious problems in its methodological design. These flaws are covered at length in an article by Tzeng and Singer (1978-1979). Briefly, the researchers were interested in knowing if *kanji* (Chinese characters used in writing Japanese) were easier to learn than *kana* (a system of symbols that represent syllables of Japanese). To answer this question, they taught two *kanji* and two *kana* to three

45

and four-year old Japanese children. Besides using a sample much too small for each category, they did not pretest the children on familiarity with the various symbols. In addition, the *kana* were taught in isolation and were given to compete with meaningful *kanji*. There is little doubt that meaningfulness helps learning, but this does not necessarily mean that we can conclude, as they did, that *kanji* are easier to learn. The researchers cite the study of Rozin et al. (1971) mentioned above to support their conclusion that "teaching reading on a word basis may be more effective than on a syllable basis" (p.98). As Samuels, La Berge, and Bremer (1978) remarked, this may be true for teaching a small number of visually distinct words to the beginning reader. But for the teaching of Chinese characters, difficulties arise as the number increases. According to the President of the Chinese academy of Science, it would take about two more years to learn to read Chinese characters than to read in a phonetic script (cited in Sheridan, 1983).

Steinberg and Yamada raise another point that is of interest for this study. They explain that "one of the main reasons Japanese do not suffer from reading deficiencies to any extent is that most of their learning involves kanji (1,850), all of which are associated with meaning" (p.98). These researchers cite Makita (1968) who reported a low incidence of reading disabilities in Japanese children but attributed it to the regularity and simplicity of the *kana* rather than *kanji* system. As we will see below, a rarity of reading disabilities was also reported for Chinese.

Before moving on to the question of reading disabilities, I would like to address one more study conducted among American and Taiwanese first-graders by Lee, Stigler, and Stevenson (1986) who obtained interesting results. Chinese children scored higher on reading tests and reading comprehension at their grade level than American children. On the other hand, among the best readers of both groups, American children could read more words beyond their grade level. This was explained by the fact that they were able to sound out the words. As for the better scores obtained by the Chinese children at their grade level, it was

attributed to factors other than linguistic: they spent more time in school and attending to their task, did more homework, and received more encouragement from their parents and their teachers for persisting with their hard work. The latter are cultural factors that need not be overlooked and that we will encounter again later in this study.

Are there fewer reading disabilities among the Chinese? In the past, several researchers have argued that differences in orthographies was a significant factor in the occurrence of reading disabilities across cultures, and that there was a lower incidence of reading disabilities in Chinese and Japanese because of the nature of their writing systems (Gleitman & Rozin, 1977; Makita, 1968, 1974; Rozin, Poritsky, & Sotsky, 1971; Steinberg & Yamada, 1978-1979). However, some cross-cultural studies among Chinese, Japanese, and English children revealed no significant differences across the three cultures (Lee, Stigler, & Stevenson, 1986; Lee, Uttal, & Chen, 1995; Stevenson et al., 1982). Recently, Japanese researchers Hatta and Hirose (1995) inquiring further into earlier claims by Makita, found that 11% of the fifth grade Japanese children participating in their experiments were reading two or more grades below the other students, a common criterion for assessing reading disability. They conclude (p.245):

> First, though we have systems of writing which are different from other countries, we have reading disabilities as the other countries have. Based upon the recently developed standardized reading test, the incidence rate of reading disabilities corresponds to the one in other countries. This fact suggests that the orthography is not a crucial causal factor to reading disabilities.

In the study conducted by Lee, Stigler, and Stevenson (1986), the percentage of Chinese and American fifth graders reading three grades below the one they attended was similar, with 3% for Chinese children and 3.5% for American children.

Therefore, Chinese and Japanese children, like those who learn alphabetic scripts, also have reading disabilities. The perceived low incidence of reading disabilities in China and Japan may be due to the fact that reading disabilities are not a centre of focus for research on

reading in these countries. In an addendum to the article of Butler (1976) on reading problems in Chinese, the Dr. Wei-fan Kuo, professor of special education in Taiwan, stated that "it appears doubtful that specific reading disabilities, as defined by American authors, exist among Chinese pupils" (p.130). During interviews I conducted with Chinese teachers and school officials, problems in reading were not acknowledged. If a child had trouble following the rest of the class, it was often attributed to a lack of diligence. The reverse was also true: "gifted" children were considered to be so because of their hard work and ability to study on their own (Stevenson, Lee, & Chen, 1994). However, problems in reading Chinese do occur as in any other language. Butler (1976, p.124) outlined the most common difficulties encountered in reading and writing Chinese:

> Commonly, children encounter difficulty in maintaining the correct stroke sequence, distinguishing similar looking characters, pronouncing the same character in its appropriate intonation when it is used in a different context, and handling homonyms (which are frequent in the Chinese language).

It is also important to differentiate between children just beginning to read and more experienced readers. A study by Shu, Anderson, and Zhang (1995) has demonstrated, for example, that Chinese fifth graders were able to use contextual clues available to them, both in the form of stories they read and in the structure of unfamiliar words, to teach themselves the meaning of new words. Third-graders, however, did not yet seem able to make use of these strategies. This was even more significant in children who read more extensively. The strategies used by the best Chinese readers paralleled those used by mature Chinese readers:

> Skilled adult Chinese readers report that they rarely use a dictionary when they meet new words while reading. Integrating word structure information and the context clues surrounding an unknown word, they usually figure out the meaning of the new word. (p.90)

More life experience, knowledge, and extensive reading are all factors that contribute to the making of an efficient reader despite the nature of the script. But in China, diligence is considered paramount in school achievement. The emphasis that is given to ability in America

and most Western European countries is regarded as suspicious in China and Japan:

> Chinese and Japanese educators and psychologists tell us they cannot understand why Westerners place such importance on innate abilities. They consider this a self-defeating emphasis, one that potentially limits the achievement of average and gifted students alike. Average students may begin to doubt that they can succeed even if they do work hard, and gifted students may come to believe that their high abilities are sufficient for ultimate success. (Stevenson, Lee and Chen, 1994, p.128)

Cultural Contribution of Chinese Characters

Gernet (1972) to whom we owe credit for a phenomenal study of Chinese history, pointed out that however complex the Chinese writing system is, and however inconvenient it may appear to some, it contributed to the unification of the Chinese empire and the spread of its culture to surrounding countries. It rendered possible written communication between groups speaking different dialects or languages, not only within the empire but beyond. It was adopted for many centuries by Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, despite the fact that the languages of these countries were very different from Chinese. Moreover, because it could better resist phonetic transformations than an alphabetic script, it kept alive and accessible an incredible amount of written material from near to very remote periods of the civilisation.

Although Gernet's statement accounts for historical facts, one must also be aware of the effort deployed by the countries, mentioned above, to adapt written Chinese to their own spoken language. At the initial stage, they simply used Chinese to read texts. Slowly, they tried to develop their own system adding a local pronunciation. Reading sometimes required a real gymnastic of the mind. DeFrancis (1989) mentioned that in Japan, before the Japanese devised their own writing system, classical Chinese texts were read aloud in Japanese, the reader mentally switching the word order of the Chinese text to suit proper Japanese syntax. When the Japanese sinologist Saionji Kinkazu came to China in 1974 with a delegation to apologize for the harm done by Japan during the World War II, he expressed his regrets with the following statement:

Even though China suffered damage from the invasion of Japanese militarists, this was only a matter of a few decades. On the other hand, historically China has been causing difficulties for Japan in two respects. One is Chinese characters; the other is the philosophy of Confucius and Mencius. Confucian philosophy has influenced the traditional Japanese way of thinking for over 1,700 years, and for this I feel very sorry" (cited in DeFrancis, 1984, p.278).

Moreover, we have seen that reading was also harder for children of a dialect radically different from Mandarin. Although the main difference lies in pronunciation, there are also differences in vocabulary and grammar that cause some difficulties.

The eminent linguist Y.R. Chao (1968), listing criteria for efficiency of symbol systems, concluded that Chinese ranked first in "elegance" (symmetry of symbols and information value per chunk) but low in all the other areas. DeFrancis (1989) came to a similar conclusion, considering Chinese characters at the top of all other writing systems for their aesthetic quality but the lowest for their efficiency, while Pinyin came first, together with Finnish because of their high level of accuracy in sound-symbol correspondence. His evaluation is broadly based on the ability of scripts "to serve the needs of the people who use them" (p.267).

Nevertheless, much could be said about the contribution of Chinese characters to Chinese culture and to other civilisations who used or still use them. Gernet (1972) noted that, surprisingly, it is in China that we find the earliest shorthand writing, using simplified cursive characters to record discussions or meetings of a political, legal, or even religious nature. China has also known block printing and the movable printing press before other nations functioning with an alphabetic script.

There is a strong emotional attachment to the Chinese characters expressed, among other things, by the fact that Chinese writing has never ceased to be a very popular art form in China. As in any other art form, calligraphy is given to the public to be read and interpreted. It is not the characters themselves that are being read here, the calligraphy sometimes being so cursive as to be beyond recognition, but the mind of the calligrapher as expressed in the intermingling of black ink strokes and white space. Throughout China, one can see

calligraphy of past and contemporary leaders carved on stone tablets at temples or historical sites, among which stands Mao Zedong's (Mao Tse Tung) powerful and elegant calligraphy.

Also, Chinese script, maybe more than other forms of writing, exercised a certain fascination both outside and inside the borders of China. The French sinologist Marcel Granet (1968) described the Chinese language as "emblematic" (p.42), the written sign system capturing concrete values as well as the affective and concrete power of the spoken word. This part of Granet's description of Chinese characters focuses on the figurative aspect of the writing and its ability to evoke actions, objects, and living beings in their relationship to each other. It is perhaps this "emblematic" quality of Chinese characters that has captivated many Chinese people and foreigners.

It is said, in the founding myths of Chinese civilisation, that a minister of the Yellow Emperor *(Huáng Dì)* invented writing after observing the little tracks left by birds on the ground. Another tradition attributes the development of writing to divination practices, the diviners also being the scribes of the kingdom. It was commonly believed that divine wisdom had been preserved in the way the characters were structured. The Yellow Emperor, a mythical hero, to whom is attributed the founding of the first dynasty, first ordered the world by giving "correct designations" *(zhèng míng)* to all things. Each of the families of the kingdom received a name that would typify its virtue (Granet, 1968, p.47).

Chinese characters in some ways are still viewed as possessing a certain magical power. Revered by both the literate and illiterate, people still exchange written characters of good luck during festivals or post the traditional couplets on both sides of their doors to invite good fortune. It may often be a simple matter of keeping the tradition alive, though it exemplifies the belief that the written word is a means to converse with the invisible forces of nature who manage the events of the world.

Summary

In this chapter we have looked at the characteristics of the Chinese script, the changes it underwent, debates over its survival, the state of literacy in China, and some aspects of the reading process in Chinese. Basic concepts concerning Chinese characters and the rules of their construction, as well as characteristics of word formation have been explained. We have also seen that terms such as "pictographs", "ideographs", and the now popular term "logographs" misrepresent the nature of Chinese characters mostly because these terms neglect the phonetic value of characters in emphasising their semantic elements. This misrepresentation gives rise to an idealisation of the script among some reading researchers, and is used to support certain approaches to beginning reading instruction in America.

The ability of Chinese characters to promote mass literacy is still a much debated subject, and although much progress has been made in reducing illiteracy, China still has over a hundred million illiterate people and is facing an array of other related problems in managing its extremely large educational system. However, emotional attachment to the script remains very strong, and the voice of those promoting the replacement of Chinese characters by Pinyin or the promotion of Pinyin to an equal status with Chinese characters, remains in disfavour.

After having seen how the nature of the script determines specific aspects of instruction, we will see, in the next chapter, how tradition contributes to a particular understanding of reading and how this understanding translates itself further into the teaching of beginning reading.

What the Great Learning teaches, is — to illustrate illustrious virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence.... The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.

-"The Great Learning ", *The Four Books* . Trans. by James Legge. 1966

CHAPTER 3

LEGACY OF THE PAST: THE CONFUCIAN SCHOLARS

In the previous chapter, we have seen distinctive features of the Chinese writing system. In this chapter, we will see how these particularities, together with the social framework, gave rise to certain views and practices of reading unique to China.

Reading appeared early in China. According to Mote (1971), the earliest literate stage for which we have verifiable data, is between 2000 and 1500 B.C. The well developed writing system, in place by then, most probably dated back to a thousand years earlier or more. Amazingly, the large body of literature that developed early in Ancient China was to remain alive and highly influential for thousands of years. In fact, much of this ancient literature is available in the China of the 1990s. Bookstores always offer old or newly edited versions of very ancient works for both a specialised or a popular audience, with special illustrated editions for children.

An indepth study of any aspect of Chinese education must necessarily take into account the scholarly tradition which shaped it. Many schools of thought existed in China, but Confucianism became the orthodoxy and the main force behind the transmission of the literary tradition. Confucian scholars structured and controlled the formal education system throughout the majority of Imperial regimes. Their educational theories also decided the ways

in which reading was understood, and how its instruction was carried on.

This chapter first discusses the Chinese terms commonly used to refer to the idea of "reading" and then moves on to explore the views of reading held by influential Confucian scholars. The chapter ends with a description of certain aspects of beginning reading instruction during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Masculine pronouns are often used, in this chapter, to refer to the student and the teacher, because with few exceptions, women were generally excluded from the education system.

Views of Reading and Confucian Educational theory

The reading process was commonly held as progressing through three stages: "to the mind, to the eyes, to the mouth" (Rawski, 1979, p.51). The concerted action of the mind and the eyes ordered recitation and the three together contributed to long-lasting retention. Failing to engage the mind, the eyes, and the mouth in a simultaneous action, would result in temporary, partial, or complete lack of retention.

Definition of the Terms Referring to Reading

Today, different terms are used to refer to reading, each slightly differing in meaning. Yet, these terms, still contain remnants of the idea that reading sprung from the common action of the mind, the eyes, and the mouth. The terms *dúshū and kànshū*, for example, are both common in speaking of the act of reading in general, or even more broadly sometimes, of 'studying' or 'going to school'. *Dúshū* taken in its literal sense, means 'to read books aloud' and *kànshū* to 'look at books'.

When speaking of reading as a phenomenon and a field of inquiry, Chinese educators and scholars used the term *yuèdú* . *Yuèdú* is used to form such words as *yuèdú lùn*, theories of reading, *yuèdú fǎ*, reading techniques, *yuèdú yánjiū*, research on reading. Zhou Zhenfu, in the preface to a work on classical theories of reading by Zeng, Zhang, and Huang (1992),

pointed out that in ancient times, besides referring to the act of reading per se, the expression *yuèdú* encompassed the deeper idea of the "investigation of things" (*géwù*), of "probing into things" (*tuījiū shìwù*) (p.1). This meaning, as we will see below, is an important concept in Chinese philosophy. The first character in *yuèdú*, 阅 (*yuè*), originally meant to count (*jìsuàn*), and later acquired the meaning of 'inspecting' (*jiǎnyuè*) as in *yuèbīng*, to inspect or review troops, and the one of 'examining' or 'testing' (*kǎohé*) (*Hànyǔ Dà Zìdiǎn*, 1989). The second character, 读 (*dú*), means to recite or read aloud.

It is intriguing that the mouth is seen as a necessary part of the reading process. Silent reading was rarely advocated in those days for several reasons. Firstly, the humming or chanting of the Classics was seen as a means of capturing the spirit of the literature of the ancients (Elman & Woodside, 1994). Secondly, reading aloud was necessary to teach Chinese character recognition. It was the only way a child could learn to associate sound and meaning to the shape of each character. The teacher read aloud a line of text that the child followed in the book. Finally, reading aloud was also a means of supervising the progress of the students and making sure they used the standard scholarly pronunciation of the characters, rather than that of the many dialects which co-existed in the empire.

Confucian Ideals of Society and the Goal of Education

Reading was rarely distinguished from the idea of studying, which in turn was broad in meaning. For this reason, it is sometimes hard, and at other times impossible, to disassociate the study of theories of reading with broader theories of education and learning.

The early Confucian thinkers, who were the first to shape the ideals of education found in the Classics, lived through the troubled period of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256). The three most influential thinkers among them were Confucius (551-479), Mencius (*c.* 371?-289?), and Xunzi (*c.* 298-238). At the time, growing political and social chaos reigned, and the kingdom was being dismantled from within by rival local powers, which eventually

55

formed small kingdoms and fought one another. Consequently, numerous families of nobles lost their titles and property, while specialists and officials of the court dispersed into the population. The leadership was infiltrated by greedy men seeking power and profit for themselves (Fong, 1985).

Given the chaotic state of their society, it is not surprising that the early Confucian thinkers sought, in education, a means to restore and preserve the political order of the country. From very early days, education in China served to prepare men for leadership and public service. In preparing his disciples for eventual official positions, Confucius stressed the individual's responsibility in improving the lot of humankind. Confucius was himself a *rú* official — a class of scholars specialising in the study of the Six Classics and the Six Liberal Arts[3] — and had served an important position in the government, before he was dismissed at the age of fifty, following a political intrigue (Fong, 1985). His philosophy of education centred on the art of governing a country through virtuous behaviour. De Bary (1991) explained that Confucius, following ideals present in the founding myths, transferred roles traditionally attributed to the monarchs unto those individuals receiving an education. This means that with him, the educated person became the new bearer of the stability of the society and of its moral state. In that, Confucius reaffirmed the belief that at the beginning, sage-kings governed the world and transformed the people, guided by their moral virtues and ritual observance. Because the successive kings of Zhou had failed at this task, the society was precipitated into chaos. Men of merit and high virtue were needed to reestablish the social order throughout the kingdom. From the time of Confucius and on, it became the task of the teacher to form such men (DeBary, 1991).

---

[3] The Six Classics are the earliest literary works of China having been written between the period of the ninth and the sixth century B.C. (Gernet, 1972). They include the *Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing*), the *Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing*), the *Book of History* (*Shu Jing*), the *Book of Rites* (*Li Jing*), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun Qiu*), and the *Book of Music* (*Yue Jing*, lost before the third century B.C.) (Chan, 1989). They have often wrongly been attributed in whole or in parts to Confucius. These works were in fact anterior to him, although he greatly contributed to their transmission (Fong, 1952). The Six Liberal Arts are rites, music, archery, chariot-driving, calligraphy, and mathematics (Yang, 1993).

Learning and Reading Theories

Learning was, therefore, a matter of becoming virtuous. But how did one go about it? The *Great Learning (Dà Xué)*, a chapter of the *Book of Rites*, explained the steps of the attaining moral excellence. These steps are outlined in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter and commented upon by Zhu Xi (1130-1200), a Neo-Confucian philosopher of the Song dynasty (960-1279). Although his views were not necessarily the ones of the ancient Confucian masters, his interpretations quickly gained official recognition and his ideas had a long lasting influence on Neo-Confucianist education in the last four dynasties of the empire. We will see in subsequent sections, that his view and proposed approach to reading had dominated the curriculum for hundreds of years and that aspects of it can still be found in today's classrooms (a topic discussed in chapter four).

Becoming a *Junzi*

The different stages of the learning process were aimed at becoming a *Junzi*, an authentic man devoid of self-deception. Because the virtuous influence of the *Junzi* was far-reaching, for Zhu Xi and most Confucian thinkers, his self-transformation led to social renovation (DeBary, 1989). Such a man led and ordered the world without seeking fame and power.

The path towards becoming a *Junzi* started with educating the self. In doing this, the reading of the Classics was a means to foster good moral values, talents, knowledge, ritual observance, and good conduct. Through his self-cultivation, and his clear understanding and practice of the rites set before him by the sage-kings, the educated man, eventually came to understand the relationships among things and events of the world; he became acutely aware of the links that united himself to the rest of the world, and particularly to humankind.

As expressed in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, self-cultivation began with

the "investigation of things" to extend one's knowledge. Zhu Xi explained:

> If we wish to carry our knowledge to the utmost, we must investigate the principles of all things we come into contact with, for the intelligent mind of man is certainly formed to know, and there is not a single thing in which its principles do not inhere. (The *Four Books*, Qin, 1992, p.9)

"Investigating things" consisted of developing a gradual understanding of the essence, the principles, and the relationships among people, events, and all other things of the world. "After exerting himself in this way for a long time", continues Zhu Xi, "he [the learner] will suddenly find himself possessed of a wide and far-reaching penetration. Then, the qualities of all things, whether external or internal, the subtle or the coarse, will all be apprehended, and the mind, in its entire substance and its relations to things, will be perfectly intelligent" (p. 9).

The steps toward attaining perfect intelligence consisted of intermediary stages of the moral cultivation of the person, and of the consequently growing sphere of influence on others. These steps were "becoming sincere in one's thought to rectify one's heart", "rectifying one's heart to cultivate one's person", "cultivating the person to regulate one's family", and to "regulate one's family to order the states".

Power of Transformation of Books

Although investigating things meant much more than merely accumulating literary information, the study of the Classics remained an important means of expanding one's knowledge. Books were the source of vast knowledge and carried with them, the wisdom of the ancients. For this reason, they were also a powerful means of transforming the individual. However, the study of books had to be carefully monitored[4]. In a passage of the *Li Ji (Book of Rites)*, Confucius is reported saying that he could know from a person's manners and character, which of the Six Classics the man had been taught. In the same passage, he warned

---

[4] This power of books to transform the character of a person was a double edge sword. In later dynasties there will be a growing concern for protecting the child against the evil of "licentious" literature.

against the unfortunate pitfalls of studies limited to only one Classic and the consequences of this limitation on the learner's personality (*Li Ji*, Book XXIII, trans. of Legge, 1966, vol. 28, p.255) :

> When you enter any state you can know what subjects (its people) have been taught. If they show themselves men who are mild and gentle, sincere and good, they have been taught from the Book of Poetry. If they have a wide comprehension (of things), and know what is remote and old, they have been taught from the Book of History [Book of Document]. If they be large-hearted and generous, bland and honest, they have been taught from the Book of Music. If they be pure and still, refined and subtle, they have been taught from the Yî [Book of Changes]. If they be courteous and modest, grave and respectful, they have been taught from the Book of Rites and Ceremonies.\ If they suitably adapt their language to the things of which they speak, they have been taught from the Khun Khiû [Spring and Autumn Annals]. Hence the failing that may arise in connexion with the study of the Poems is a stupid simplicity; that in connexion with the History is duplicity; that in connexion with Music is extravagance; that in connexion with Yî is the violation (of reason); that in connexion with the practice of Rites and Ceremonies is fussiness; and that in connexion with the Khun Khiû is insubordination.

The reading curriculum consisted of the careful study of the Classics and the ritual texts. Xunzi said, "learning begins with the recitation of the Classics and ends with the reading of the ritual texts" (Dawson, 1978, p.88). However, the study of books remained an incomplete investigation if the moral knowledge gained from one's studies was not practiced. *The Analects* begins with this question Confucius asked of his disciples: "Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals?" (Lau, 1992, p.3).

There were two aspects to practice: *doing* and *thinking*. Without the integration of both, learning was again, incomplete. Lin (1988) explained that reading coupled with life experience in society was considered insignificant if not modulated by careful reflection. On the one hand, the cumulation of information with no attempt to relate it to one's own experience was of no use in transforming the individual. On the other hand, lack of literary knowledge led towards conclusions based on shallow experience (Lin, 1988).

The concern for the application of what had been learned is reflected in a principle of reading called *dúxíng jiéhé*, literally "integrated reading (recitation) and practice". Of similar nature, there were the principles of "integrated reading and thinking" (*dúsī jiéhé*), and

59

"integrated reading and study" (*dúxí jiéhé*). All three principles were aimed at rendering reading a meaningful act by associating it with appropriate intellectual activities and practice (Zeng, Zhang, & Huang, 1992, p.4-5).

Reading as Attitude and Communion

For the Confucians, efficiency in reading texts was, above all, a matter of attitude. They stressed that students be determined, diligent, open-minded (associated here with modesty), interested, eager, and persistent in their readings (Zeng, Zhang, & Huang, 1992).

Mencius (371?-289?), an influential philosopher born a few generations after Confucius, was concerned with decontextualised reading which, he considered, distorted the meaning of a text by insisting on its details, such as taking certain words and phrases out of their context. He warned against losing "the inherent thought" that allowed the reader to understand the general meaning of a work (Chai et al., 1965, p.201).

This idea of capturing a work's "inherent thought" is found again in the work of a later scholar named Liu Xie (*c*.465-520). Liu Xie's work *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wénxīn diāolóng*), marked the beginning of Chinese literary criticism. It is a first attempt at exploring aspects of style and the nature of writing. In this remarkable work, Liu Xie proposed that the task of a reader was to capture the inner feeling of a work through the words of a writer. "If he can trace the waves back to their source", he said of the reader, "there will be nothing, however dark and hidden, that will not be revealed to him" (Shih, 1983, p.509). Reading was for Liu Xie, a process of seeking the author's intention beyond the form. As for writing, it proceeded in the opposite direction: "When the emotions are moved, they express themselves in words; and when reason is born, it emerges in a pattern" (p.308). These passages present reading and writing as an affective bond, a communion between a reader and a writer. Without the quest for interacting with the thoughts of the writer, the reader could not access the literary mind (the meaning of the author) behind the

carved dragons (the form) (Shih, 1983). Liu Xie believed that the ability to understand the profound grew with one's experience and knowledge. For this reason, he recommended reading widely. This perspective, we will see, changed as the corpus of literature grew to the point that it was impossible for one to cover a wide range of texts and still carefully ponder their content.

Comprehension in Reading

It may be surprising, given the image often presented to us in the West of rows of Chinese students blindly memorising entire books, to find that so far, most Chinese scholars emphasised understanding in reading. In fact, they will insist, time and again, that reading was not a simple exercise of the voice or of blind retention of massive amount of materials by students, but was aimed at reaching their mind in order to transform it. Without this communion, reading had no significance; meaning was the 'raison d'être' of reading. In the classroom practice, however, these principles were often ignored.

With scholars of later dynasties, there was an even greater concern with reading comprehension. This may be indicative of a felt need to redress the practice in the schools. Two reasons may explain their insistence on reading comprehension: the existence and nature of the imperial examination system in place, and the complexity of the young pupils' textbooks.

The examination system, put into place for the first time under the Han dynasty (206 B.C.- 220 A.D), was a means of recruiting state servants and contributed largely to the official establishment of the Confucian ideology over other schools of thought (Fong, 1985). By the time of the Song dynasty, this system was well rooted in society. In theory, the examinations were opened to all young people who showed merit and application in their studies. This system put immense pressure on teachers and students. The faster the pupils could pass the examinations, the higher were their chances of pursuing further levels of study. This way,

their merit would be reflected on their teachers and their families. Ambitious clan members and parents often saw their child's education as nothing but a way towards upward mobility. In this context, spending classroom time discussing with children the content of readings —which were generally too complex for them anyway— may not have been considered the most effective way of teaching. The teacher was viewed as the bearer of knowledge, and it was he who had to instruct the pupil on what to think. The safest way (and maybe the fastest) to prepare pupils for the exams, was to 'stuff' not only the Classics into their mind as fast as they could so they could attend the exams, but also to supply them with probable questions and answers, an approach not unknown to today's teachers whose task is to prepare their students for entrance examinations or language ability tests such as TOEFL.

As for the pupils' textbooks, their content was much too difficult for young children. Used from the twelfth century to the first four decades of the twentieth century, the *Trimetrical Classic (Sān ZìJīng)*, one of the most popular textbooks a young reader would first encounter, started this way: "Men at their birth, are by nature radically good, in their natures they approximate, but in practice differ widely" (trans. is taken from Smith, 1899, p.82). This was obviously quite remote from a six to seven year old child's daily preoccupations. Because of this, the teacher would resort to obliging the pupils to memorise their textbooks, hoping that it would stay within them until they reached an age where they would become enlightened on the content of what they had learned.

A scholar of the sixth century, Yan Shitui, protested against this widespread tendency to simply train the child in meaninglessly repeating what the teacher said, pointing out that this was not a way to prepare them for serving in the government. "The reason for reading books and acquiring learning," he said, "is basically a desire to enlarge the mind and make perceptive the eye, and to improve one's conduct" (Dien, 1960, p.46).

Zhu Xi's Contribution to Reading

By the eleventh century, Confucianism had entered a new period of development under the influence of —and often in reaction to— Buddhism and Taoism, a bleak political situation, and the invention of the printing press. Characteristic of this influence, is an explosion of new publications, a growing interest in metaphysical themes, as well as an increasingly critical attitude towards texts and reading. Guided by this critical attitude, some Confucian scholars of the Song dynasty embarked upon a re-examination of the original texts of the Classics, which gave rise to a series of new commentaries (Gardner, 1986). This period is referred to in the West, as Neo-Confucianism (Jullien, 1989; Fong, 1985).

With the invention of block printing some time in the eighth century, Feng Dao's first printing of the nine Classics[5] between 932 and 953, and Bi Sheng's invention of the movable type printing press in the eleventh century, literary research and discussion on reading were greatly stimulated (Carter & Goodrich, 1955). Books became more readily available, and prepared the way for the expansion of the education system that occurred during the Northern and Southern Song period (960-1279). At that time, new concerns appeared regarding the use of books. It is during this period that the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) instituted a new curriculum for the schools and published his *Reading Method* (*Dúshūfǎ*) (De Bary, 1989). De Bary described the work this way (p.217):

> In its simplest form, this [work] consisted of maxims recommending reverent seriousness and a fixed resolve in the pursuit of learning: a graded sequence and gradual progress in study; intensive reading of text and commentary accompanied by 'refined reflection'; reading with an open mind without reading one's own preconceptions into the text; taking what one reads to heart and making it part of one's own experience; making an all-out effort and keeping strict control.

Zhu Xi emphasized both the development of moral qualities and of methodological skills in reading. When based on a positive and serious determination, learning unfolded and

---

[5] The corpus of classics grew over time with the inclusion of different commentaries of the original Classics (minus the *Book of Music*).

deepened. Qualities such as diligence, honesty, and open-mindedness, in addition to method and concentration, ensured a gradual deepening of the understanding of text. Contrary to what Liu Xie advocated a thousand years earlier, Zhu Xi did not recommend reading widely. This may be explained by the fact that in Zhu Xi's time, scholarly works and their commentaries abounded and that it had become necessary to read selectively. Zhu Xi was also concerned with the shallowness that might arise from reading too extensively. He advocated "intensive reading", as opposed to "extensive reading," i.e., deliberate and accurate reading with constant review of the materials for deeper understanding. He suggested graded learning, from simpler to more difficult, with more emphasis on quality and mastery of reading rather than on quantity of reading. His view and approach to reading had a deep influence and provided a framework for the reading and studying of texts that is still present in Chinese schools today (see Ping, 1994).

Namekawa (1977) identified four reading methods which originated with the Song scholars, the most influential of them being Zhu Xi. These methods are: silent reading, depth of reading, recitation, and practical reading. The two first methods are aspects of what was described as "intensive reading".

Silent reading was not at all silent, the quietness, residing in the mind of the reader and its physical environment. It consisted of a slight voiced reading with attention to each word "to make the most correct interpretation" (Zhu Xi cited in Namekawa, 1977, p.482). Silent reading was performed slowly, seriously, objectively, with the clothing and posture appropriate to maintaining concentration.

Depth of reading was also an approach in which concentration during reading was of prime importance. It was characterised by intensive reading, and by copying entire books by hand. Copying allowed the reader to study each word and to reflect on the content.

Recitation and oral reading allowed the reader to interact more closely with the thought of the writer and internalise his words. Zhu Xi said: "One can make what is written in a book

64

his own when his mind easily accepts what he voices,... Attaining a certain level, one can possess wise men's knowledge by reading their books" (cited by Namekawa, 1977, p.485). Recitation also allowed reading to be shared, a practice from which an illiterate audience could benefit and that could be enjoyed also by the scholars among themselves.

We have seen that practical reading entailed putting into practice what one had read, an idea promulgated by most Confucian thinkers since Confucius himself. As Namekawa put it, "reading is a way of life rather than a simple technique" (p.487). By integrating reading with one's own experience, self-improvement became possible.

Zhu Xi also wrote commentaries on the *Four Books* and on some of the *Five Classics*[6], which were adopted as the official curriculum in preparation for the examinations. From then until the abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905, interpretations of these works would have to conform to his commentaries (Fong, 1985). Ironically, Zhu Xi recommended that interpretations be "both grounded on evidence and confirmed by what seems right in one's own mind" (Chan, 1989, p.208).

Zhu Xi's curriculum was later followed by the one of Cheng Duanli (1271-1345). The latter drew most of his curriculum content from Zhu Xi, with less emphasis on the inquiring nature of the study process, and more on memorisation and learning of forms and models of writing. His approach more readily served teachers who were mainly preoccupied with preparing students rapidly for the examinations. Because of this, his approach became predominant in the academies until the fifteenth century and reinforced the already existing tendency of rote learning (De Bary, 1989).

In the fifteenth century, the philosopher Wang Yangming (1472-1529) restated the role of reading in widening the intellect of the pupils. Like Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming insisted on

---

[6]The Four Books comprised the Great *Learning*, the *Analects*, the *Book of Mencius*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. The Five Classics are the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of History*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (De Bary, 1989).

the mastery of a small number of texts, and objected to the abusive use of memorization that was not paired with careful understanding. Wang Yangming, however, took reading comprehension a step further, into a realm of definite Buddhist influence (Chan, 1963, p.213):

> You need only to understand the meaning of the words. Why should you need to remember the words? Even understanding the meaning of the words is to fall down to the level of subsidiary things. The important thing is to realize clearly the original substance of one's own mind. If one merely remembers, he will not understand. And if he merely understands what he reads, he will not clearly realize his own original substance.

Surprisingly, aspects of Wang Yangming's advocated method of reading were not devoid of repetition, and somewhat contrasted with the above quote. Similar in many ways to Zhu Xi's reading method, Wang's consisted of a gradual progress of the learning of characters, accompanied by intellectual pondering and expressive recitation, the outcome of which was self-transformation (Chan, 1963, p.185):

> In reading, the value does not lie in the amount but in learning the material well. Reckoning the pupils' natural endowments, if one can handle two hundred words, teach him only one hundred so that he always has surplus energy and strength and then he will not suffer or feel tired but will have the beauty of being at ease with himself. While reciting the pupils must be concentrated in mind and united in purpose. As they recite with their mouths, let them ponder with their minds. Every word and every phrase should be investigated and gone over again and again. The voice and rhythm should go up and down and their thoughts should be relaxed and empty. In time they will be in harmony with propriety and righteousness and their intelligence will gradually unfold.

Reading, studying, and learning were, therefore, means of achieving self-transformation for the Confucian and Neo-Confucian scholars. All three activities were aspects of a single process leading toward moral development. These terms were often used interchangeably, particularly in the pre-Qin dynasty period (before 221 B.C.), where principles of reading were blended with political and educational theories. Moreover, as Gernet (1972) indicated, the scholars' interest in texts was limited to the moral value of their content. Developing a proper disposition for reading took precedence over practical skills and cognitive strategies, although the latter were not completely ignored.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at how these views of literacy were—or

were not, as the case may be — applied in practice. We will centre more specifically, on forms of instruction that were dispensed in schools during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the period of the ancient regime that is closest to us and for which more records are available.

Beginning Reading Instruction

Educational quality and practice varied at different periods of history, in different parts of the country and according to the financial conditions in which the schools were set up. Despite these variations, the different accounts of literacy instruction during the Qing dynasty draw very similar pictures of the situation, although their appreciation of this instruction varied.

The most complete historical description of initial reading instruction available in English is the work of Evelyn Rawski (1979) and Leung (1994) on literacy during the Qing period, and in the records left by foreigners living in China in the nineteenth century.

The Broader Context: Elementary Schooling

According to Rawski (1979), during the Qing dynasty, only very poor peasant families could not afford to send their children for year-round education. However, short-term courses in reading existed for those who did not intend to pass the examinations. The rate of literacy under the imperial examination system is generally estimated at 20% of the whole population. Rawski, however, on the basis of anecdotal evidence from that period, considered that this number was probably closer to 30 to 45%, of which no more than 10% were women. Her definition of literacy, however, includes those who probably knew only a few hundred characters; people who would be considered semi-literate today.

From the various records left of that period, Rawski found that different types of elementary schooling were available to different social classes of the population. Among the main types were privately financed schools, clan schools, and charitable and community

schools. Generally, children of the wealthy, of officials, and of those who held a degree, were schooled at home. Between the ages of two and five, the child was taught to recognize as many as 2000 characters and to write some of them. If the mother was literate, she often assumed the task. After this, a tutor was hired to begin a more formal secondary education. Sometimes, teachers run their own school at home or in the room of a Confucian temple. Families of more modest and average incomes, could generally afford this type of education for one of their sons (mainly boys were sent to school). Beside the tuition fees and statutory cash and food gifts to the teacher, parents also provided the table and the stool for the pupil. A class could contain one or two children or up to forty (generally eight to ten) and was held year round for children between six to seventeen years old. A school day began at dawn and lasted until dusk. It included regular ceremonies to the memory of Confucius and sometimes Zhu Xi. The mornings began with a review of the previous lesson followed by the introduction of the new lesson, a period of recitation, and lunch. After the afternoon nap, children practiced writing, listened to the teacher lecturing on moral education, and reviewed their readings once more. Each child was provided with a lesson book every month, in which the teacher wrote the characters or the lines of texts to be read, recited, and reviewed, and other lines designed for practicing writing (Rawski, 1979).

The clan school operated in much the same way as the teacher-run schools, but their access was limited to the members of the lineage, generally those too poor to afford any education at all. The clan supported the school, often with the revenues of corporate property, and gave stipends and scholarships to the pupils on the basis of merit. Bright students were encouraged to continue their studies while slower ones, after the age of ten, were sent to work (Rawski, 1979).

Charitable and community schools (yìxué shèxué) were free elementary schools set up in rural areas and in frontier regions where non-Han populations lived. These types of schools existed before the Qing dynasty but their existence was at the mercy of successive

changes in authority. Consequently, they appeared and disappeared throughout different periods of the later dynasties. Generally, it was the central authority that directed local officials to set up these schools but it rarely provided them with the necessary funds, except in the case of frontier regions schools. The latter were supported by the Qing emperors who saw in them a strategic device to assimilate other populations into the mainstream culture of the empire (Rawski. 1979).

Zheng (1994) points out that public schooling during the Song dynasty (960-1279), with the exception of the schools in the imperial capital. was mainly funded through individual contributions. In order to assess the importance various rulers attached to education in concrete rather than rhetorical terms, Zheng (1994) looked at the education expenditures of the Song rulers and concluded (p.212):

> Traditional Chinese education mainly disseminated Confucian ethics and had no direct economic benefits. Therefore, most rulers who professed Confucianism valued education in words but slighted it in deeds.

Besides periodic dispatching of edicts to encourage local officials to promote education throughout the empire. few emperors provided these officials with the necessary financial means to carry on their task. The main sources of revenue besides individual contributions for the maintenance of schools, came from land and building endowments. Some schools, especially at the prefectural level. created an income by printing books for sale. Until the end of the Song dynasty, schools were also sometimes given educational intendances, which were land and houses 'without a rightful heir' (Zheng, 1994).

To preserve its political supremacy, the imperial government is said to have kept strict control over matters of curriculum, as well as over the teaching and administrative staff of the public schools. Moreover, the financing of these schools was administered by local government officials. Private donations for schools were given to these officials, not directly to the schools, and were occasionally diverted for other purposes. Zheng (1994) cites local officials of the Song period, praising citizens who donated enough money for the construction

of a school: "Now the government lacks strength to recover the damaged [education] and therefore should rely on social-minded people" (p.195). This statement resembles statements of top officials in present day China, that excuse the lack of funding of the public educational system by the central government and encourage people to donate personally.

In fact, it is on those "social-minded people", particularly on the Confucianist faith of some officials, that the existence and survival of public schools depends.

Beginning Reading and Writing Instruction

Reading and writing, we have seen, were tools in the primordial preoccupation with understanding and cultivating the self through the study of the Classics and the rituals. Ethical values such as filial piety, loyalty, honesty, and the respect of elders and teachers, were given special attention in educating the young. The curriculum also emphasized classroom behaviour and "ethical principles expressed in ritual observances and written texts" (Rawski, 1979, p.45). The morning class began with bowing before Confucius' tablets (Confucius being revered as the first teacher of China), then to the teacher himself. The little boy coming to school for the first time was taught proper behaviour and posture such as how to sit and be quiet (Rawski, 1979). Lectures were also a means to provide moral education and clarify the texts for the students. Rawski described the lecturing practice of one school (p.44):

> A teacher should sit at a table where students could gather around to look and listen:
> children like illustrated books and while delighting in the pictures the moral of the story
> slips easily into the ear and the mind.

Teaching Methods

Methods were essentially devised to teach the reading of the classics, but before children could engage in their reading, they had to be taught to recognize a certain number of characters. The first stage of reading instruction consisted, therefore, of teaching the child to recognize and memorise up to two thousand characters, before they would be introduced to texts with a more important content (Rawski, 1979). Rawski mentioned that ten to several

tens of characters could be introduced each day, at which rate, a child could "learn 2,000 characters within the first year of school" (p.47). It appears though, that children could generally learn them at their own pace (Leung, 1994).

Whole class instruction did not exist during that period. Since children of differing ages could be enrolled in a teacher's class at any time of the year, the teacher instructed each child individually. Two popular approaches were often used together to teach character recognition to the beginning reader. Both these approaches to beginning literacy were prior to the Qing period, and remained in certain parts of the countryside until the foundation of the People's Republic of China. One involved the use of elementary textbooks. The *Trimetrical Classic (San Zi Jing)*, the *Thousand Character Classic (Qian Zi Wen)*, and the *Hundred Surnames (Bai Jia Xing)*, all used prior to the Qing dynasty, were among the most popular and influential textbooks for beginning reading instruction[7]. The second approach, adopted for the first time during the Tang dynasty (618-907), involved the usage of characters individually written on wooden squares or paper, and that were often inscribed with the *Thousand Character Classic*. The child was taught to recognize an average of ten characters daily. Once memorised, characters were tied together with a string and reviewed regularly. Generally, one to two thousand characters were taught this way before the child would start reading a text (Leung, 1994; Rawski, 1979).

When taught using textbooks, the child was to listen carefully to the teacher reading over a line or two, while he was following in his textbook. He then repeated the line after the teacher, taking care to pronounce correctly each character. This process was repeated several times, until the child mastered his line and be given another one. Whole textbooks were memorised this way. Every day, the teacher would ask the student to recite his lesson, "his

---

[7] Recently published edition of these textbooks in simplified characters and annotated, were available in regular bookstores during my stay in China in 1996. See for example the edition of the *Trimetrical Classic* by Su (1994) and the collection of four classical beginning readers (the *Trimetrical Classic*, the *Thousand Character Classic*, the *Hundred Surnames*, and the *Pupils Regulations* edited by Tian, 1995).

71

back to the teacher—to make sure that he does not see the book—and recites, or 'backs,' it at railway speed" (Smith, 1899, p.81).   This was a means to teach children to recognize and attach a sound to each character and to monitor their pronunciation.

Although school regulations emphasized comprehension and explanation of the texts, the practice in some classrooms seemed to have been otherwise. According to Rawski (1979), "emphasis on reading comprehension was the dominant theme in the schools" (p.51). She pointed out that most regulations enjoined teachers to take special care that the correct meaning of texts be understood, and to provide clarification and further explanations when in doubt. However, the Reverend Arthur Smith visiting a village school in 1899, gave the following report (p.81):

> The attention of the scholar i⁻ fixed exclusively upon two things,—the repetition of the characters in the same order as they occur in the book, and the repetition of them at the highest attainable rate of speed. Sense and expression are not merely ignored, for the words represent ideas which have never once dawned upon the Chinese pupil's mind. His sole thought is to make a recitation. If he is really master of the passage which he recites, he falls at once into a loud hum, like that of a peg-top or a buzz, like that of a circular saw, and to extract either from the buzz or from the hum any sound as of human speech—no matter how familiar the auditor may be with the passage recited—is extremely difficult and frequently impossible.

Arthur Smith spent over twenty five years living in China in the second half of the nineteenth century. His description of village schools literacy instruction contrasts with the teaching principles advocated by many Chinese scholars and those found in the school regulations. It is possible that these principles were more closely followed in other schools, especially in those which the teacher supervised a small number of students. Yet, his description may still be representative of the poor conditions in which some rural schools were left.

An interesting parallel is to be made between Smith's observations of reading classrooms and an assertion of Namekawa (1977), director of the Japan Reading Association, that "the underlying current of the Oriental reading attitude is the mental discipline and the belief that no deep reading and thinking by concentration is possible in a noisy atmosphere" (p.483). This

reading method, originally advocated by Zhu Xi in the Song dynasty, may have been practiced in Japan and among adult readers in China, but it appears not to have been true of the elementary classroom of the old empire. Smith (1899) during one of his visits to the village school, made the following observation (p.80-81):

> A line or two is assigned to each scholar, and after the pronunciation of the characters has been ascertained, his 'study' consists in bellowing the words in as high a key as possible. Every Chinese regards this shouting as an indispensable part of the child's education. If he is not shouting how can the teacher be sure that he is studying? and as studying and shouting are the same thing, when he is shouting there is nothing more to be desired.

It must be pointed out though, that Smith, as a missionary in China, had his own agenda in criticising the traditional Chinese instruction that he termed "intellectual infanticide" (p.100). According to him, nothing was to be gained from this instruction but two things: obedience and the ability to concentrate on one's reading despite neighbouring loud noise (p.93). His plan was of "regenerating" village life in China by setting up Christian schools which would convert the chanting of the Classics into the humming of the gospel, or in Smith's words, "awaken the child's hibernating imagination, enormously widen his horizon, develop and cultivate his judgment, teach him the history of mankind, and not of one branch only" (p.343). Smith's "history of mankind" was most probably the "biblical history" of mankind, in which the Chinese and other civilisations of the world were certainly underrepresented.

Elman and Woodside (1994) explain that the loud reciting or chanting associated with reading sprang from the conviction of scholars that "the vital spirit of ancient literature they admired could not be recaptured unless that literature was loudly chanted or hummed, rather than just silently read" (p.5). It also allowed teachers to correct students' pronunciation and make sure that they attended to their task.

Namekawa (1977) explains further that "effective vocalization is expected to make reading more profound" in what he calls the "oriental way of reading" (p.486). A new text had to be read over and over again, preferably a hundred times, and old texts constantly

reviewed. The teacher kept track of the reviews by noting the date when each text was learned for the first time and at each successive review. A child's intelligence was assessed by the number of texts memorized, and the speed at which he could commit them to memory (Leung, 1994).

Writing Instruction

Reading and writing were taught separately at the beginning, and the texts used to practice writing differed from those used in reading. It took much longer for a child to learn to write than to learn to recognize characters. For the writing practice, the young child was equipped with the tools of the scholar, referred to as "the four precious articles": the ink slab, the ink cake, the brush, and the paper (Smith, 1899, p.76). The first few lessons concentrated on teaching the child to grind ink and to properly hold the brush. The characters chosen for practice were generally those with few strokes. Rawski (1979) described the beginning steps to writing instruction (p.45-46):

> The holding of a brush was demonstrated by the teacher, who would grasp the child's hand and go through the motions of writing. Children first inked over large characters written in red, then traced over them, a pedagogical method that went back to the Sung period. It was at this stage that stroke order was taught.... In the next stage of writing, written models were copied often on 'squared paper', so that the proper proportions of character elements within a given character could be learned.

Rawski's description closely resembles the one used in Chinese schools today when brush writing is first introduced (usually in the second or third grade), except that by then, children already know how to write many characters which they have practised writing with an ordinary pen. In the past, teachers often pasted the best written characters on the walls of the classroom to encourage students to perfect their calligraphy. Smith (1899) noted that "success in some of the examinations is made to depend as much upon caligraphy [sic] as upon style" (p.87).

Writing was practiced daily, and depending on the student's progress, the number of characters to practice could reach one hundred a day (Rawski, 1979). The teacher would point

out the well and badly written characters to the child (Leung, 1994).

Textbooks

Different textbooks for beginning reading existed during the Qing, but the most influential of them in ancient China, were those called the "Sān, Bǎi, Qiān" (Three, Hundred, Thousand), i.e., the *Trimetrical Classic*, the *Hundred Surnames*, and the *Thousand Characters*. Their popularity was probably due to the fact that they were short, and organised so as to be easy to memorise (Tian, 1995).

These books were used, first of all, to teach character recognition and their content was rarely emphasized. Moreover, the *Hundred Surnames* was simply a list of 560 most common surnames of the empire, arranged by groups of four characters. According to Smith (1899), it was common for people introducing each other, to give all four characters in the group because many surnames had the same sound. ·

The *Thousand Character Classic* was the most ancient of the three (it was written during the Southern Dynasty), and contained close to a thousand different characters. Its content dealt with "basic information interspersed with Confucian lessons on the universe and its components, China's past, its great men, and moral precepts for proper conduct" (Rawski, 1979, p.137). Smith (1899) pointed out that the characters of this manual were sometimes used instead of numbers "to designate the seats in the examination halls" (p.84); familiarity with the text was, therefore, a useful tool in orienting oneself to one's seat during these most tense circumstances.

The *Trimetrical Classic* was the most popular of the three. Its text was arranged in groups of three characters which gave it a rhythmic effect, and was easy to remember. In a little more than 1100 characters, it provided children with moral education and basic cultural knowledge, in a very succinct style. It covered a wide array of subjects pertaining to history, historical works, historical characters and moral exemplars, basics of Chinese cosmology, and

a summary of the classical books. It emphasised the importance of education on the development of human beings in passages such as, "Since gems unwrought can never be useful, untaught persons will never know the proprieties"; "If men neglect to learn, they are inferior to insects"; "He who learns in youth, and acts when of mature age, extends his influence to the prince, benefits the people, makes his name renowned, renders illustrious his parents, reflects glory upon his ancestors and enriches his posterity" (trans. of Smith, 1899, p.82-84).

In 1994, Su Lei edited a new illustrated version of the *Trimetrical Classic*, with annotations, punctuation and in simplified characters, to use as extra curricular reading material. Zhong Hui, who annotated the text, stated in the preface that his goal was to deepen children's knowledge of their historical and cultural heritage and, through historical models, inspire them to study diligently in order to fully participate in the realization of the four modernizations.

Other Neo-Confucian primers existed for basic literacy such as the *Elementary learning (Xiǎo xué)* and the *Classic on Filial piety (Xiào Jīng)*, published by Zhu Xi in 1187. These books enjoyed a certain popularity during the Song and even during the Qing when they were the required first readers in state primary schools. However, their content and form were often considered too complicated for young beginning readers and too easy for those more advanced, and may not have been as popular as the other three primers (Leung, 1994).

Using historical figures to exemplify Confucian values, was and still is, characteristic of Chinese education. Filial piety was a theme dear to Confucian ethics and appeared frequently in the readers and in stories told to young children. Among those popular stories were the twenty-four examples of filial piety. Dawson (1978, p.149) gave the following description of the stories:

> These recounted the self-sacrifice of such heroes as Wu Meng, who let himself be eaten by mosquitoes in order to divert them from his parents, and Lao Lai-tzu, who in adult life still dressed as a child, and played with his toys to make his parents happy.

76

The basic training in reading accomplished, the child having mastered the initial textbooks, he went on to the second level of learning where he was generally taught to read the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics* and to write compositions in preparation for the examinations. The Neo-Confucian considered the *Four Books* to be the most important of the classical texts. Zhu Xi said that "if these texts were understood, any book could be read, any principle could be investigated, any affair could be managed" (cited in Gardner, 1986, p.5). It appears though, that the method for teaching them offered very little variation from the study pattern at the initial stage:

> Book after book is stored away in the abdomen (in which the intellectual faculties are supposed to be situated), and if the pupil is furnished with the clew of half a sentence, he can unravel from memory, as required, yards, rods, furlongs or mile of learning. (Smith, 1899, p. 85)

Since the content of these books was very difficult, many schools would continue using texts in easier language and which taught moral principles, such as the above mentioned *Elementary Learning* and the *Classic of Filial Piety*. At the advanced level, a greater variety of material were introduced in the curriculum of some schools such as reference works like history books, and encyclopedias, which often included illustrated glossaries of Chinese characters called *Zá zi* (Rawski, 1979). With the rise of printing during the Song dynasty, literary genres had diversified and books were more readily available for a wider public. However, this meant that women and children, being considered emotionally immature, had to be kept away from bad external influences that could come, for instance, from reading popular novels (Leung, 1994). Books could elevate the mind, but could also corrupt it. This partly explained why so few girls were schooled. Since there was also no opportunity for a woman to be granted an official position of any kind and that the girl would eventually be married into another family, it was hard to justify the expense of female education. However, because women could play a significant role in the education of their young children, girls born in wealthy families were sometimes provided with basic literacy skills and taught from special

textbooks (see Mann in Elman & Woodside, 1994).

Generally speaking, receiving an education at that time was an experience in sternness. No play was allowed in or outside the classroom for the young scholar. The only physical exercise the child received was during the periodical sweeping and cleaning of the classroom and the performance of the rituals. Kulp (1925) attributed this sternness to the belief that "difficulties developed persistence and character and so should not be made easy" (p.224).

Teacher's Role

Of the teacher, the *Book of the Rites* said:

> When a superior man knows the causes which make instruction successful, and those which make it of no effect, he can become a teacher of others. Thus in his teaching, he leads and does not drag; he strengthens and does not discourage; he opens the way but does not conduct to the end (without the learner's own effort). Leading and not dragging produces harmony. Strengthening and not discouraging makes attainment easy. Opening the way and not conducting to the end makes (the learner) thoughtful. He who produces such harmony, easy attainment, and thoughtfulness may be pronounced a skilful teacher.... The good singer makes men (able) to continue his notes, and (so) the good teacher makes them able to carry out his ideas. His words are brief, but far-reaching; unpretentious, but deep; with few illustrations, but instructive. In this way he may be said to perpetuate his ideas. (trans. Legge, 1966. vol. 28, p.87)

Although this passage showed the teacher as one who is firm but supportive, it seemed that during the Qing, they were expected to be extremely severe and liberal in dispensing corporal punishment, and that their leading did include a lot of "dragging". Smith (1899) illustrated the relationship between the pupil and the teacher with the metaphor of a boy "compelled to run barefooted and blindfolded in a dense fog, chased for vast distances by a man cracking over his head a long ox-whip" (p.86).

The school teacher was chosen for his moral rectitude and also his knowledge of the Classical texts and rituals. The teacher was the first model a child received, and so to lead the children towards becoming a wise man, he had to be wise himself. Xun Zi said of learning:

In learning, nothing is more beneficial than to keep close to those who are learned, and of the roads to learning none is quicker than to love such men. Second only to this is to exalt ritual. If you are both unable to love such men and incapable of exalting ritual, then you will only be learning a mass of jumbled facts, blindly following the Book of Songs and the Book of History, and nothing more. (cited in Dawson, 1978, p.88)

The respect for the teacher, part of the Confucian ethics, was expressed by the daily rituals of bowing before the tablet of Confucius and then before the teacher and by the customary gifts to the teacher (Rawski, 1979). However, it appeared to some critics, that in this area also, there were gaps between the verbal and concrete appeal of the teacher.

Contrary to Rawski who seemed to believe that teachers enjoyed the respect of the community which compensated for their poor incomes, Leung (1994) stated that the teacher "did not enjoy much respect socially (except in the case of teachers of second level education of the Classics section)". Leung quoted an artist of the early Qing period who recalls his days as a school teacher using terms such as "half full, half starving", "insignificant outsider", "a voluntary prisoner" and ended by saying, "Fortunately, one has climbed up the social ladder; The shame of those years could be wiped away in one brush." (Cheng Pan-ch'iao chi, cited by Leung, 1994, p.392). For Leung, the modest wages of the school teacher, were also a clear indication of his lower status.

The teachers were often recruited from among the pool of candidates successful in passing the county exams but who failed at the prefectural level. It is thought that there were a surplus of them, and that many spent their life in poverty. Those who taught in government funded schools were paid in cash, grain (in the earlier part of the Qing), or taels of silver. Sometimes teachers were also given a small plot of land to cultivate. The academic rank and wages of urban teachers were higher, but life in the cities was also more expensive. The teachers sent to teach among non-Han populations were also given higher wages (Rawski, 1979).

Concluding Remarks

Although the ideal of education was to produce virtuous men to work as public servants, the reality was different. Parents who were sending their children to school, or the clan who was granting them an education, were often essentially concerned with upward mobility. Leung (1994) pointed out that the pupils "were constantly reminded that they should work hard in school in order one day to glorify the clan" (p.390). The old system often contributed to the production of men imbued with self-importance, the most meritorious not always being those who achieved office. In a novel of the Qing dynasty entitled *The Scholars*, many government officials are portrayed as weak individuals indulging in the pleasure of fame, rank, and fortune, and more concerned with protecting their possessions than practising righteousness.

However, literacy was not completely limited to Confucian schooling. It is difficult to assess how widespread private teaching was. Various groups within the society may have had different incentives for teaching their children to read and write. Buddhist and Daoist groups comprised literate individuals eager to transmit the knowledge contained in their canons to their disciples. Some occupations outside the governmental sphere required basic literacy. Rawski (1979) mentioned that popular literature was widespread, and that movable libraries toured towns and villages, selling and renting books at relatively low costs. She added that for the sons of the peasants, who could not attend or afford whole year education, short-term courses were offered at reduced cost and dispensed more practical education through the use of character glossaries (*Zá zì*). It is possible, given the surplus of teachers, some of whom Smith (1899) saw roaming around the country, that such initiative would rise from the masses.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a new educational system began to take shape, under increasing foreign influence. Chinese reformists called for a radical change in education. Intellectuals became more and more aware of the barrier of mass illiteracy in the building of a new industrializing nation. Normal schools made their appearance and dispensed

training to teachers destined to teach a new curriculum, with new methods, and new language manuals accompanied with teacher's guides (Rawski, 1979).

However, changes in higher education took precedence over elementary education and traditional Confucian education continued to be dispensed in some regions of the country, until the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

During the reform of the Chinese language in the 1950s, Zhou (Chou, 1958, p.9-10), responding to those protesting against the simplification of characters, quoted an article by Li Chu-chen, a minister of Light Industry, who recalled the gloomy days of his reading instruction :

> Every time the question of the reform of Chinese characters is brought up, somebody raises an objection, or even stubbornly opposes it for this or that reason. Some say that the characters are not difficult. I will say that such a person is like one who, as soon as his wounds are healed, forgets the pain he suffered. He forgets what he suffered when he first learned the *Three-Character Classics* and the *One-Thousand Characters* . If he will but recall his bitter experience in learning characters, and consider the interests of the children and the illiterates by placing himself in their place, he will not dissent or object so strongly.

Although it differs greatly from the descriptions of classrooms presented above, aspects of today's Chinese education offer an interesting continuity with some of the best attributes of the education in the past, often bringing in Confucian educational ideals. If Confucian education was highly criticized and despised as a representation of feudal hegemony at several points throughout the twentieth century, today's China is rediscovering its educational past. Series of books regarding the old society are finding their way back onto bookshelves. Prefacing his new edition of the *Trimetrical Classic* and other beginning reading textbooks of the imperial era, Tian (1995, p.3) said:

> We must absorb what is good and reject what is bad and critically inherit this precious historical legacy to give impetus to a powerful contribution to the building of a socialist society with an advanced culture and ideology. [translation is mine]

In this chapter, we have seen that reading was conceived of as a process involving the mind, the eye, and the mouth united in an action of careful inquiry, communion with, and

pondering of the inherent thought of the text. This practice, joined to the daily observation of the events of one's life and the execution of the rituals, sharpened the individual's awareness of the original nature that tied him to the rest of the world, particularly to humankind. This view evolved from the belief that rulers should be highly virtuous if the world was to be kept in order. The goal of education was to form such men on whom the rest of the society could model their behaviour. Unfortunately, reality did not always live up to these ideals and education developed into a very competitive social game in which families sought their way to fame. Under these circumstances and because the texts presented to children were most of the time well beyond their cognitive development, memorization and endless recitation of texts took precedence over a serious study of their content in many classrooms.

In the next two chapters, we will see how some of these views and practices have been kept or transformed in today's beginning reading classrooms.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF READING INSTRUCTION

Although radical changes have taken place in China's educational system in the twentieth century. we can still see in the primary school language curriculum, to some degree, a continuity between past and present views and attitudes towards reading instruction. Both innovative and more conventional teaching practices are found in the classrooms, some, as we will see. are reminiscent of Confucian pedagogy.. China is also much more open to outside influences with its opening to the world and revived focus on developing scientific and technological fields to modernise the country. I have encountered in my reading of studies on reading or primary education. several references to foreign research (see for example Zeng & Han, 1992a, 1992b for foreign research on reading; Li, Han, & Zhang, 1994, and section 23 of Zhang et al., 1994 for review of studies on foreign education).

In this chapter, I examine the views of reading instruction held by. today's Chinese educators and guiding principles behind beginning reading instruction, as expressed in the teachers' manuals that accompany the new series of language textbooks issued by the State Education Commission in the early 1990s. These textbooks are designed for the Nine Year Compulsory Education System and are used in most regions of China. I have also examined the textbooks themselves, particularly the first two volumes, which are the ones used in grade one. One other major source of reference was found in a recent work, *Encyclopedia of Primary Education*, published by the Henan Education Publishing House in 1995. This book reviews most aspects and issues concerning the primary language curriculum. I have also looked at a series of videos on language home tutoring for grades one to three. These videos are designed for the new series of textbooks I mentioned above. (A list of the written and audio-visual materials consulted is given in appendix 1)

To further my understanding of these materials and to see if theory was generally representative of the practice. I interviewed two grade one Chinese teachers and one grade three language teacher who had taught all the primary grades. I interviewed as well, three school principals, two vice-principals and two parents (see appendix 1). For reasons that I explained in the introduction to this thesis. I was not able to completely establish a relationship of trust with school authorities to pursue extended ethnographic fieldwork. The field-based data are, therefore, limited. However, the fieldwork still provided me with an immediate contact with the environment of the Chinese reading classrooms and generally proved consistent with the description in the written sources I have consulted.

To first situate the reader as to the general context of reading instruction. I begin with a brief description of the global curriculum of Chinese primary schools. I then move on to the views and principles of reading instruction, a description of the language textbooks, and end with a few remarks on the problems and changes in the reading curriculum.

The Wider Context

As we have seen in chapter two, since 1986, China is trying to implement a nine year compulsory education system that is taking shape, at present, only in some of the major cities and the coastal provinces. The nine year compulsory education is divided into two systems: the "Six-Three" system and the "Five-Four" system. The "Six-Three" system consists of six years of primary school and three years of junior high school and is the most common in the major cities and some parts of the countryside. The "Five-Four" system includes five years of primary schools and four of junior high school and is intended mostly for some rural areas and autonomous regions, particularly those with a high drop-out rate at the primary level. In spite of the fact that China has a Nine Year Compulsory Education Law, entrance to junior high school is still limited and students must attend entrance examinations. In some schools, entrance is very competitive, particularly entrance to key schools, institutions known for their

presumably better educational standards, and better trained staff. Since placement in better schools helps one's future opportunities on the job market, this tends to create a pressure on children from very early grades, as well as on teachers, parents, and school authorities. Not unlike the imperial examination system of the past, entrance examinations reinforce the instructional tendency towards mastery of textbook content. The growing importance and the better support given by the government to key schools has also caused the reemergence of the old issue of elitism (Pepper, 1991).

The State Education Commission (SEC) Departments of Primary and Secondary Education are the authorities responsible for the design of the curriculum teaching requirements and outlines. Because the elementary curriculum and the textbooks are designed by the central government, there is a strong continuity between the educational materials and the educational ideals and objectives set forth by the SEC. There are national standards for practices consistent across China. Teachers interviewed often referred to the government educational outline when discussing their teaching. Teacher's manuals are generally very prescriptive, explaining step by step how to structure each lesson of the textbooks and "the" meaning to assign to each text and illustration. Teachers, however, as was brought up during interviews, do not always have access to updated versions of textbooks and teachers' manuals, and do not always make a thorough use of the latter. Two teachers indicated that they followed the teaching requirements at the beginning of the teachers' manuals they had access to, and that all teachers were required to refer to the educational outline produced by the government. These materials were often studied during the weekly teacher training meetings, together with teaching methods and theories and knowledge about literature (Interview 96.05.10). Only one out of the three teachers interviewed followed, to the letter, the proposed lesson plan in the teachers' manuals. A teacher with over ten years of experience commented that "as to how to teach, we adapt our teaching to the students' particularities; the teacher must not be too rigid" (Interview 96.05.12). Moreover, teachers and schools do not all interpret the

teaching outline in the same manner, and some classrooms seem to remain more conventional than others in their interpretation of the educational reforms. However, as researchers such as Sheridan (1992a), the team of American scholars (Mei,1985), and Wu (1987) have pointed out, there seem to be an overall homogeneity in approaches across classrooms.

The basic required subjects at the primary level are Chinese language, mathematics, physical education, music, art, moral and ideological education, labour, and natural sciences (in the first five grades). Contrary to the practice of elementary schools in Canada, each subject in China is taught by a different teacher. The primary school schedule is similar to the one in our high schools. Class periods last forty minutes each, and are followed by a ten minute break during which children can run around the school yard. School generally runs from eight o'clock in the morning till eleven thirty. Because the traditional afternoon nap time is still widely observed by the Chinese population, school starts again only at two o'clock in the afternoon and class time lasts until four. After that, children must participate to the Young Pioneers' activities. This is a national youth organization to which all children at school belong. It aims at involving youngsters in propagating and carrying out the cause of socialism set forth by the CCP. Activities are as diverse as games, discussions on a theme, singing contests, literary and scientific activities, creative workshops, military exercises, and patriotic activities, to name only a few (Zhang et al., 1994).

Below is the curriculum followed by one of the urban schools visited. Schools have a certain latitude in choosing some of the subjects for higher grades. The data were provided by the school authorities (Interview 96.04.09). Although the number of forty-minute periods of class per week was officially decreased by three periods per week in June 1994 (People's Education Press [PEP], 1995a, Vol. 1), some schools still operate on the basis of the old curriculum. In the readjusted curriculum the language class passed from ten to nine periods a week in grade one and two, but as we can see in the table below, the number of language class periods in the school visited still were held at ten per week.

Primary School Curriculum for the Six Year System*

Subject	Number of periods per week for each grade					
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Chinese Language	10	10	9	9	7	7
Mathematics	4	5	5	5	6	6
Natural Sciences	1	1	1	1	1	
Physical Education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Music	2	2	2	2	2	2
Art	2	2	2	2	1	1
Labour work (such as cleaning)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Moral and Ideological Education	1	1	1	1	1	1
History						1
Geography					1	
Composition					2	2
Total of periods per week per subject	23	24	23	23	24	23
Activities						
Team activities	1	1	1	1	1	1
Physical exercises, and science and language activities	4	4	4	4	4	4
Total	28	29	28	28	29	28

*The curriculum can slightly vary among different schools and different regions. Certain schools, for example, have one hour of English every week, starting in grade three or four, and social studies in grade four, five, and six.

The grade one curriculum is constituted of the eight prescribed subjects mentioned earlier plus five periods a week of group activities led in more informal settings than the regular classroom. The Chinese term to designate these activities is *kèwài huódòng*, and is sometimes translated as "extracurricular activities". However, these activities form an integral part of the curriculum and their attendance by all children is mandatory. In fact, they are sometimes referred to as *huódòng kè*, "activity class". Oriented towards practice and work in small groups, these activities are generally based on the content seen in the regular classes to which they offer an alternative learning experience in a more relaxed settings (activities are often held in the school yard, or in a special room to this effect). For example, the language teacher, every week, prepares the "language activity class" in which children tell or retell stories to each other using pictures or their own drawings. The teacher may also read them a

story, stopping at a moment of crisis in the narrative. The children must then create and dramatize an ending for the tale. They also learn proverbs and songs. Gao (1996) considers these activities of utmost importance to "stimulate students' interest and imagination", "develop perceptual knowledge of text", and to allow students to put their knowledge into practice in a relaxed and joyful environment (p.21).

Chinese language teachers have the heaviest workload. They are the hometeacher, which means that besides teaching their classes and holding language activities, they are also responsible for the global academic progress of their students in all the subjects. For this reason, a parent confided to me, they are held in high esteem by most parents (Interview 95.11.02).

Elementary education is divided into three denominations: the lower grades (one and two), the middle grades (3 and 4) and the higher grades (5 and 6). These broadly correspond to different stages of the expected learning development of children, dividing them into three categories of learners: beginners, intermediate, and advanced. Each stage is paired to a certain focus of instruction that I present below.

Views of Reading Instruction

When asked what was the most important aspect of reading instruction, the principal of a public school, a dynamic middle-aged woman explained: "There are two parts. One is the linguistic part: how to use words. The second one is teaching children how to think. This is the ideological part. We call it wéndào jiàoyù (文道教育); wén stands for 'literary knowledge' and dào is the dào of dàodé, moral" (Interview 96.03.28). Wéndào jiàoyù literally means "literary and moral education".

When hearing this, I wondered how present day reading instruction differed at all from the principles put forward by the Confucian tradition. In fact, it still shares many of the same educational goals, but interpreted from within a Chinese socialist framework and the current

political trend towards scientific and technological development. We have seen that education was traditionally perceived as the teaching of morality. Today's language curriculum is also oriented towards morality, but it is also concerned with providing the children with a good command of both their spoken and written language, as well as imparting to them basic knowledge of science and the arts. Consequently, the curriculum content offers much more variety than in the past; the language textbooks contain a great deal of informational as well as literary texts; and instruction is livelier and much more adapted to the cognitive level and the interests of young children.

The school principal's explanation that both literary and moral knowledge are the two main aspects of reading instruction, is reflected in the introduction of the teachers' manuals. The following is an excerpt of the section entitled "Guiding ideology" (PEP, 1995a, Vol. 1, p.1 —translation is mine).

1. Developing the pupils' language and thinking skills begins with laying out a basic foundation in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

2. Attention must be paid to ideological and political education. The elementary school language class plays an important role in building a civilization with a socialist spirit, and in fostering a new generation. This teaching material, while laid out to provide basic language training by means of lively pictures and writings, also trains the students to love the country, the people, physical labour, science, and socialism. It also pays careful attention to the fostering of socialist moral qualities and good habits of behaviour, in order to cultivate socialist citizens with ideals, morals, culture, and discipline from the time of the initial laying out of the basic foundation.

3. Attention must be paid to basic language training. This material takes full advantage of the usefulness of Hanyu Pinyin in helping character recognition, reading, and the study of Putonghua. Following the language development, the material contains carefully planned and laid out character recognition and writing exercises, and listen-speak-read-write exercises. Particular attention is paid to fully integrate all of these aspects to obtain a complete language development, as well as to prepare for the more creative environment of the middle and higher grades.

As can be seen, it is expected that children be taught not only the language, but also values and behaviour proper to their participation in Chinese socialist society, as opposed to a Confucian society. The national Chinese curriculum requires that all four aspects of the

language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) be taught in an integrated fashion in the language class. This integration is considered beneficial to the global linguistic and cognitive development of the child because all aspects of language learning are interrelated and mutually promote each other (PEP, 1995a, Vol.1). Moral values, rules of conduct and political education are often conducted through a certain kind of reading: fables and biographical tales for moral message, nursery rhymes for keeping rules in mind, or upfront political slogans such as "I am Chinese, I love the five star red flag" for patriotic feelings (see appendix 4). However, in contrast with earlier readers analyzed in the past by foreign researchers (Doolin & Ridley, 1968; Kwong, 1985; Martin, 1975; Sheridan, 1992a; Sproul, 1976; Unger, 1977), the recent series of textbooks is much less centred on political slogans. Instead of being represented vigilantly and painstakingly grappling with the words of Mao or fighting rich thieves (see Kwong, 1985), children are seen playing and observing the world around them. Kwong (1985) observed a new trend in the reading primers of the late 1970s characterised by a new emphasis on academic achievement. Comparing these with series used in the early 1970s, she remarked (p.207):

> In the early 1970s, the leaders' priorities were to keep China a socialist state and to forestall capitalists' and revisionists' subversions. To do so, texts devoted their efforts exclusively to inculcating in the young the right political attitudes and outlook even to the extent of almost excluding the pedagogical function of a language text. The young were to be content to be workers and peasants working collectively for their country's welfare. In the late 1970s... the young had to be imbued with a strong sense of international competition, confidence in their own national character, and a solid base of knowledge. The pages of the new language texts reflected the leaders' expectations and prepared the young psychologically and academically to meet these challenges.

In her words, workers of the past are likely to upgrade to the status of technicians and engineers in the new readers, and peasants to the one of agronomist. A child illustrated this beautifully during a visit I made to a public school, when at the teacher's question "If we want to develop ourselves, what do we have to do?", he answered: "Become a good scientist and earn a lot of money" (see appendix 8).

The overall objective of reading instruction for the elementary years is "to foster

students' ability to read and to develop good reading habits" (Zhang et al., 1994, p.223). The ability to read is considered to manifest itself in two ways: the "awareness of reading" (阅读的自觉性) and the "autonomy of reading" (阅读的独立性). The first is characterised· by the understanding of both smaller and broader elements of texts, i.e., the understanding of both words and larger units of texts (sentences and paragraphs), as well as the understanding of the gist of the text, and also the ability to analyze its content. The second aspect, "autonomy of reading", refers to the ability to read on one's own, "without the guidance of the teacher" (Zhang et al., 1994, p.223).

As for the fostering of good reading habits, it is accomplished through gradually guiding students towards consulting reference materials, and towards reflecting on what they are reading, inquiring into difficult problems, and questioning doubtful points (Zhang et al., 1994).

The Gradual Unfolding of Reading Instruction

Reading instruction is also characterised by the gradual progression of the teaching focus from smaller to bigger elements of the language. The education system strictly decides upon the sequence of learning which children must master. The textbooks are designed according to the following principles (PEP, 1995a, Vol.1, p. 1-2) :

- from the shallower to the deeper (由浅入深)

- from the easier to the more complex (由易到难)

- from perceptual to rational (由感性到理性)

- from analytical to synthetical (由分析到综合)

At first glance, these principles seem prone to favour an approach that isolates units of the language at the moment of their introduction; this is not the case however. Texts are introduced from the beginning of character instruction. This situation is made possible by

devoting the first month or so of language instruction to the learning of Pinyin. Characters, words, and sentences are always introduced with the help of a text in Pinyin. The approach to beginning reading integrates both bottom up and top down aspects of text processing and is, therefore, interactive in nature. When they are introduced for the first time, Chinese characters are not directly incorporated in the text in the reading primer, but they are during instruction. They appear twice and separately below the Pinyin text, once in square boxes for writing instruction and also above with their Pinyin pronunciation (see appendix 5). In the classrooms observed, however, the teacher would write the new characters immediately below their Pinyin counterpart in the text she had transcribed on the blackboard. When children have learned enough characters to form sentences, texts begin to appear in both scripts, followed by a list of the new words, and the new characters in their square boxes as in the following example (PEP, 1995b, Vol.1, p.65):

nóng cūn zhèng zài dà biàn yàng
农 村 正 在 大 变 样,
nóng mín zì jǐ bàn gōng chǎng
农 民 自 己 办 工 厂。
zhòng dì de huì zuò gōng
种 地 的 会 做 工,
zuò gōng de yě huì zhòng dì
做 工 的 也 会 种 地,
xīn nóng cūn lǐ chū xīn rén
新 农 村 里 出 新 人。

农村 工厂 农民

自己 做工 也

⌐－－农
农 工 厂 民 自 己 也

[The countryside presently changes greatly,
the peasants run factories by themselves.
Those who cultivate the earth know how to do factory work,
those who do factory work also know how to cultivate the earth,
new people are emerging from the countryside.]

Following the broader objective of elementary reading instruction to "foster students' ability to read and to develop good reading habits", the teaching of beginning reading centres more specifically on four areas: 1) the study of words and sentences; 2) the training in oral reading; 3) the development of initial observational skills; and 4) the cultivation of independent study habits (PEP, 1995a, Vol.1; Zhang et al., 1994). Each is discussed separately below.

The Study of Words and Sentences

The first focus of instruction is on the study of words and sentences. The teachers' manual stresses that words must be put in sentences and in relation to the rest of the text in order to be correctly understood. The learning of words progresses together with the study of characters, although many more words than characters are being introduced through the help of Pinyin. As we have seen in chapter two, a character can act as a word or as part of a word. When learning characters, the teacher usually asks the students to make words orally, using the new characters. When new words are introduced, the teacher asks the students to use them to make a complete sentence orally, introducing them in this way to the concept of "sentence" without resorting to abstract explanations or use of technical terms (Zhang et al., 1994). When reading stories, children are also directed in searching for "key" words and "key" sentences, i.e., those that play a fundamental role in expressing the content of the text. This search is often done with the help of the colour illustrations of the lesson in the book.

Character acquisition is a fundamental aspect of learning to read. We have seen in chapter two that basic literacy was achieved through the mastery of a large number of frequently used characters (over 2000). For this reason, reading research in China has focused on designing effective methods to accelerate and consolidate character acquisition. Pinyin was one of them. Two other methods are currently used: the contextual approach and

the concentrated character recognition approach. The first consists of teaching new characters with the help of Pinyin in a meaningful context. This is the more current method and it is used in all the lessons of grade one and in the majority of texts in later grades. The second method, the concentrated character recognition approach, focuses on teaching, together, groups of characters which are related either by meaning, by sound, or by shape. It is similar to word charts used in our classrooms to teach homonyms, antonyms, and words which approximate in spelling (Stahl, Pagnucco, & Suttles, 1996). An example of a lesson using the concentrated character-recognition method is given in appendix 6. It introduces a series of characters which appear as a component in other characters. These newly formed characters also appear within a word given in parenthesis. This method is used mostly in the second and third grades once children have encountered over five hundred characters. At this point, children are more likely to mix up similar looking characters. This approach trains them to discriminate characters among themselves. It is aimed at accelerating the learning of characters and their mastery through comparison and analysis of their constituents (Central Institute of Education Science, Teaching Methodology Department, 1983-84; Sheridan, 1992a; Zhang, 1985).

In middle and higher grades, teaching continues to unfold into bigger units, sentences being studied in the context of a paragraph, and paragraphs in the context of the entire text. Over the six years of elementary schooling these principles translate themselves by an emphasis on speaking and the mastery of words and sentences in the lower grades; more emphasis on writing and the mastery of paragraphs in the middle grades; and on the analysis of the text as a whole, the study of rhetoric, and the ability to write short compositions in the higher grades.

The Training in Oral Reading

Another important focus of beginning reading instruction is on developing children's ability to read aloud. When interviewing Chinese teachers about their practice, I was

intrigued, at first, by their insistence still today, on the importance of oral reading. In fact, teachers said that silent reading was only introduced at the end of grade two, and even sometimes at the beginning of the third grade. Several reasons were given to explain the importance of oral reading, some of which were linked to the nature of the writing system, and others to the enforcement of the learning of the official dialect of Mandarin. But interestingly, I began to understand that reading aloud was a means to teach and to assess text comprehension. Young children, they said, had to learn to read with expression, with feelings, and therefore develop their sensibility to texts and ability to elucidate the meaning of the author. This reminded me of Liu Xie's search of the literary mind behind the carving of dragons (see chapter three). Today's teachers' manuals are very explicit as to which emotion to associate to which passage of the text, eliminating, in this way, other possible interpretations. They also provide an explanation of how the intention behind this emotion contributes to the global meaning of the text. Hudson-Ross (1990), an American teacher who spent a year in China in the eighties, described a scene she witnessed in a third grade language class with a teacher that Hudson-Ross, at first, referred to as "the dour one" in her fieldnotes, because of the teacher's sternness and the blandness of her teaching style, together with the drabness of her common blue or grey garb in rough material she wore to teach her classes. One day, however, the American researcher witnessed the following scene (Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990):

> Mrs. Zhou moved slowly into character as she retold a story the children had read, then she put her book aside, held her face tenderly and lowered her voice. Her knee bent to the floor and, first crying, then exclaiming in utter woe, she moaned, "poor, poor old Baba." Even without an interpreter I understood the sadness of the family whose grandfather had suffered. The 48 children and I were entranced, and "the dour one" began to sparkle in my estimation.

This dramatization is without any doubt a powerful means of conveying the meaning of a text and is probably worth many detailed explanations. It is used as a pedagogical tool to teach text comprehension by affective means. Text comprehension develops with the process of

empathizing, of involving oneself both emotionally and cognitively with the content of what is read. Zhang et al. (1994) consider reading aloud to be most important "in reaching the highest requirements at primary school: to understand the expressive process of a work" (p.224). They consider that reading aloud, not only helps text comprehension, but also helps the language development in general. Moreover, it " molds emotions". Since this development is gradual, beginning readers must first learn to read aloud fluently (in the first semester of grade one) and then read with expression (Interview 96.05.10).

I must remind the reader at this point that a large proportion of the population speaks a dialect other than Mandarin but that the same textbooks are used regardless of the children's dialectical background. All children must learn Mandarin upon entrance to school with the exception of children of some national minorities who speak a language other than Chinese and have their own script. For them, Mandarin instruction begins usually in grade three (Mae, 1985). In this context, oral reading plays a fundamental role in helping children learn the Common Language as well as in reinforcing the reading of Pinyin and the reading of characters; children are taught to read characters and to speak Mandarin simultaneously.

Reading aloud is common across the elementary curriculum, not only in the language class, but in most subjects (such as history and geography, for example). This practice helps reinforce character recognition when Pinyin gradually disappears from the textbooks (at the beginning of grade three). Without Pinyin, unless children are able to look up new characters in the dictionary, they cannot know how to pronounce new characters. This is why reading aloud has played and still plays an important role in learning to read Chinese. It also allows the teacher to evaluate students' progress in character recognition. In the West, the researchers Williams and Capizzi-Snipper (1990) consider that error correction by teachers, often associated with the process of reading aloud, hinders students' comprehension because it interrupts the readers' flow and attention. This decreases their reading speed, and causes them to focus on words rather than meaning. In the Chinese classroom, however, individual

reading aloud seldom occurs at the first reading of a text. Passages are read several times by the teacher or in choral reading before individual students are asked to read. As Sheridan has suggested (1992b), it is possible that oral reading is overused, as a matter of tradition. This to the detriment of silent reading. With the use of Pinyin, silent reading could probably be introduced earlier. Chinese teachers, however, are adamant that young children need first to master both the written and oral language through reading aloud. A teacher explains: "At seven years old, children can't remember what they read when they read silently. They don't know how to read silently. When they read aloud, they can put their eyes and their mouth to the text, pay more attention to the text, and this way remember what they read" (Interview 96.05.10). This teacher views reading aloud as an enhancer of both concentration and comprehension in young children.

Developing Initial Observational Skills

The colour edition of the new series of textbooks has beautiful illustrations which translate quite literally the content of each lesson. Teachers are enjoined to start a lesson by first looking at the content of the picture with the students to develop their sense of observation and thinking skills. It is a form of pre-reading activity that helps the students understand the content of the text and is very helpful for non-natives of the Putonghua dialect. After reading groups of sentences, students return to observe the picture. Zhang et al. (1994) outlined the following procedure (p.224):

> When teaching "Look at the picture and study the text", teachers must know how to lead the students to find the sentences which express the meaning of the pictures. After studying another section, they must return observing the picture following the children's understanding of the text. This way, teachers can help students study the manner in which writers observe things. [translation is mine]

Although it is not completely clear how this operation leads to the study of "the manner in which writers observe things", by illustrating the content of the text, pictures help students in their search of the key sentences that lead them to understand the main content of the text.

We can infer from the last statement of Zhang et al., that pictures are a visual representation of an author's view of the world that students must capture. Teachers are enjoined to "understand the meaning of the pictures" before they teach the students (PEP, 1995a, Vol.1, p. 5). This "meaning" is to be found in the teacher's manuals, with detailed directives on how to teach each textbook lesson. The first volume of the grade one textbook begins with a section entitled "Entering school education" and consists of four lessons entirely made of illustrations. These lessons set the tone for the entire series of textbooks (two volumes per grade, for all the elementary grades) and teach children "how to read pictures". This section also instructs the entering pupils on their new role as students, the classroom rules, and the study plan (appendix 7 shows the picture of the first lesson and provides a translation of the teaching requirements and guidelines to the lesson). Besides developing children's ability to observe details carefully, pictures are also used to teach elements of the language, such as vocabulary and sentence structure, or for telling or retelling stories. They are also used to conduct ideological and moral education, to spur students' emotions, and to motivate them to love school, their classmates, their teachers, and their country.

The Cultivation of Independent Study Habits

In her work on beginning literacy, Clay (1991) declared that "it is the aim of most reading and writing programmes to bring children through the beginning reading programme to a stage of independence in reading and writing" (p. 63). Chinese society does not differ in the aim of their literacy programme. Moreover, the realization of the current goal set forth by the CCP to modernize China, lays on the initiative of its citizens and in their ability to study on their own. In fact, it is possible to earn a university degree in China through self-study, if the candidate can pass the required examinations. Also, for those who cannot attend regular schools and universities, distance and part-time education are encouraged. Therefore, an important goal of basic reading instruction is to equip children with the skills and the

motivation that will allow them to further their knowledge on their own. At first glance, however, the Chinese classroom does not appear to be an environment prone to spur children's initiatives: it is very much controlled by the teacher and children are rarely seen involved in activities of their own. The large number of students per class (40 to 60 in the three classes visited), is a definite contributing factor to the form of classroom management required.

One big step the State Education Commission has undertaken to promote more autonomy of the young Chinese readers, is to reinforce Pinyin education and to make a more extensive use of it in the textbooks and other children's publications. With texts published in both scripts, young children can read on their own and teach themselves characters. It allows them, not only to progress independently in their readings, but also develop both linguistic and cognitive skills. Before Pinyin or other forms of phonetic transcription of the characters were introduced, a critical number of about 500 characters had to be known before the child could learn meaningful texts. We have seen that during the dynastic era, this number was even higher (one to two thousand) because of the complexity of the texts. Character instruction did not keep with the pace of the cognitive development of children. With the new series of textbooks, as soon as Pinyin instruction is completed, children can start reading texts in Pinyin and be introduced to a few Chinese characters (five to seven) every lesson. They can also keep a journal in Pinyin, substituting the Pinyin gradually for characters as they learn them. DeFrancis (1984) reported a study made in 1962 in the city of Harbin on first graders' diaries. After only ten weeks of schooling, a pupil considered "near the bottom of the class" produced the following entry (the quote is followed by a translation of DeFrancis that tries to convey the errors of the original):

11 月 19 日 míng 天 yòu kǎo shì 了我要 zhēng quě dǎ yì bǎn fēn 老师 zhǒng 说我写的字不 hǎo 我 yí dìng yào huéi dào 家 lǐng liàn hǎo 字 wán.

11 month 19 day [this is the correct way to say the date in Chinese] tomorrow having another test I must trie to get a hunderd the teacher allways says the characters I write are no good I have to go back hom and practice the characters until I have learned them the

end. (cited in DeFrancis, 1984, p.283)[8]

Zhang et al. (1994) consider that the following objectives determine the kind of autonomy that should be achieved by beginning readers in the first two grades (p.223 — trans. is mine):

- can read the sound of new characters accurately with the help of Pinyin;

- know how to search in the dictionary; can guess the meaning of new characters and words from within the context of a sentence;

- can read aloud correctly and fluently the text of the lessons and in the last semester of grade two, are able to read the text silently;

- can understand the text and its main content and can answer the questions following each text;

- in the last semester of the lower grades, can practice dividing the text into paragraphs.

Because of budget constraints, children are not generally exposed to much reading materials at school besides their textbooks in each of the subjects . None of the three schools I visited had a library or a variety of books in the classrooms. The People's Education Press published a story book intended for self-study, to accompany the regular language textbook. None of the three teachers interviewed, however, had heard of it. In one school though, the students had a similar book called the *Reading Book* with a collection of stories that students could read at home on their own.   In another school, the *Reading Book* was available only from the third grade and up. Starting in the second semester of grade one, however, each of the textbooks contained a few lessons for students to read on their own or in small groups during language activities. Generally though, it is very much determined by the family whether or not the child will be exposed to readings other than the school textbooks.

---

8 The errors are as follows: *zhengque* should be *zhengqu;* *yi ban* should be *yibai;* *zhong* should be *zong;* *huei dao* should be *huidao;* and *ling* should be *li.*

Children's literature is widely available in regular bookstores. Other bookstores specializing in children's literature, also abound in the cities. Parents with lower means can also borrow children's books from public libraries. Moreover, as Clay (1991) observed, independence in reading and writing "does not begin with the teacher merely exposing the child to an environment rich in books and writing materials" (p.63). Independence in reading progresses gradually and the teacher's input and support is important at the beginning stage. Because of the number of students under the supervision of one teacher, the whole class moves at once from one reading to another. When individual support is judged necessary, it is provided after class by the teacher, an assistant, or peers. However, as pointed out by researchers such as Stevenson, Lee & Chen (1994), Chinese teachers are more inclined to attribute the difficulty of some children to read to a lack of diligence rather than to slower cognitive abilities. For this reason, slower children are encouraged to be more diligent in their studies.

Intensive Reading

The views that reading instruction must gradually progress from a focus on smaller to bigger units of the language and that learning to read unfolds as a result of the cumulation of knowledge about characters, words, sentences, and paragraphs, are in many ways, reminiscent of the philosopher Zhu Xi's views of reading, seen in the preceding chapter, and as expressed in his intensive reading method.

The educational approach to reading today, still centres on the acquisition of words, phrases, and style by means of a careful analysis of words within sentences, sentences within paragraphs, and paragraphs within the overall text. Moreover, pupils are asked to develop feelings of empathy or antipathy for characters in stories, an effect often achieved through dramatized reading. As I mentioned earlier, this approach also echoes the ancient scholar Liu Xie's recommendation of reading behind the words to seize the author's feeling. Understanding is not viewed as an essentially cognitive process, but also as an affective one.

Ames (1989) who analyzed the Confucian use of the concept of *zhi* (知), often translated by "to know" or "knowledge", found that this notion was characterised among other things, by aesthetic, affective, and cognitive attributes rather than being a purely cognitive notion as in the tradition of Western philosophy. He demonstrated this by showing how mental imagery such as metaphoric language, use of parallelism, and appeal to model characters of the past, were preferred modes of expressing one's understanding of the world. There is no attempt to separate the cognitive from the affective: "The cognitive and the affective are integrally and inextricably interwoven: one "feels" one's thoughts" (p. 238). Thoughts and emotions come from the *xin* (心), the mind/heart. This may explain why "reading aloud with expression" is considered an important means of assessing students comprehension and why it allows the young reader to better interact with the content of the text.

Intensive reading is still a practice common to all levels of the system of education and is practiced in both Chinese language and foreign language classes (see Ping, 1994).

Reading Comprehension

Linked to the idea that understanding is not an essentially cognitive activity is the one that reading comprehension need not be carried on at a very high rational level at the lower grades. It should rather develop perceptual knowledge; hence the emphasis on expressive reading. At the beginning stage, children are required mostly to repeatedly read the text aloud. Gradually, children are introduced to low voiced reading and, finally, to silent reading. At that point, they are enjoined to reflect carefully as they read (Zhang et al., 1994). This also was an aspect of Zhu Xi's intensive reading method.

A customary period of comprehension questions usually follows after each lesson has been read several times. The wide majority of questions presented in the textbooks are of literal nature and the answers can usually be recited directly from the text, although the teachers' manuals stress that children should be encouraged to use their own words. In the

two textbooks used in grade one, only three questions require that children look into their own knowledge and experience of the world. This observation was also reported by Guthrie (1985) and Anderson (1985). Guthrie considered that the nature of the questions asked by the Chinese language teacher were not thought provoking because they did not required personal interpretation. I have also witnessed this situation during my visits and interpreted the nature of the questions to be linked to the training for the search of "key" words and sentences. I once asked Chinese university students to write a one page summary of a text they had read in the French language class; one of the students handed me a piece of writing that was a skilful "collage" of all the key sentences in the text she had read. However, when the text content allows it, teachers at elementary school are often advised to lead a conversation that links the text content to the regional situation of the children. It is also required that children explore their immediate environment and talk about their personal experience. This is a good opportunity for them to learn from each other. For example, in a text that discusses the changes announcing the arrival of autumn, children are asked to discuss the signs of autumn they have observed in their environment. This brings them to look at their environment, express themselves, and gain knowledge of the world they live in (PEP, 1995a, Vol.1, p.159).

A certain view of comprehension, termed the *conventionalist* view of reading comprehension in America, argues that "a text can mean just about anything a reader wants it to and that the potential meaning of any text is therefore essentially limitless" (Williams and Capizzi-Snipper, 1990, p.21). Williams and Capizzi-Snipper, however, point out that constraints exist and among the most powerful ones are "social constraints along with syntactic and pragmatic ones" (p.21) that rarely allow multiple interpretations. There is a "socialization of comprehension" which monitors the text processing of members of specific communities. This socialization of comprehension is very strong in China. Traditionally, texts have been inscribed with a series of commentaries which controlled their meaning, and

often, the meaning of commentaries written in previous centuries. In this context, meaning and interpretation are socially monitored, and not an individual product. To some extent, meaning is still viewed as such. This is why the foreign language teacher in China is often barraged by the question "What is the meaning, teacher?" when it comes to Western literature, films, or art. The notion that anyone has a say regarding the interpretation of a text, or that a work be produced to merely represent an experience, is frowned upon by the majority of Chinese students. This reaction arises from the fact that most of the literature found in Chinese textbooks, at all levels of the system of education, is still moralistic in content and, therefore, a promoter of social harmony. Teacher's manuals, as we have seen earlier, are very prescriptive with regards to the interpretation that is to be ascribed to each textbook lesson. This is true for both the text and picture content.

Modelling

A common pedagogical strategy used to explain a concept, present a problematic situation, or promote a virtuous behaviour, is to illustrate it through a model, an example. As with the dramatization of a text, this form of illustration has the ability to appeal both to the senses (by triggering people's emotions) and the reason. This strategy, we have seen, has long been part of the traditional Confucian pedagogy.

The primary school textbooks are filled with examples of virtuous behaviours, and moralizing tales. In the recent history of China, when serious problems were affecting the population, political figures, given as exemplars to the children, filled the primary textbooks. These role models prescribed the attitude that presumably ensured the reestablishment of order in society. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), for example, the figure of Mao and his writings predominated the textbooks, closely followed by that of Lin Biao as his faithful student (Kwong, 1985; Unger, 1977). Kwong (1985) reported an extract of the lesson "Learn from the bright model of vice-commander Lin's faithfulness to Chairman Mao"

in a grade three reader (p.199):

> ...most conversant with Chairman Mao's works. He applies Chairman Mao's teachings in the most versatile manner. He has the greatest appreciation of the Chairman's thinking. He raises highest the red flag of Chairman Mao's thoughts. He is our greatest model.

This lesson, however, soon became problematic when Lin Biao fell from grace, and that his image was no longer usable. Texts had to be quickly revised.

> In volumes 4 and 5, Lin was the Vice-Chairman and Mao's greatest student. However, in volume 6 published in 1976, Lin was criticised together with Confucius for putting blind faith in fate, and advocating defeatist attitudes. The children might not know that Lin died in an unsuccessful coup, but they certainly knew that he was no longer their "bright role model". (Kwong, 1985, p.199)

In contrast, political figures are not very often represented in the new series of language textbooks, and much less often, "living" political figures (none appear in the five first textbooks of the new series). Mao Zedong appears once in a grade one story and twice in grade two. He is portrayed as a good hearted and simple leader, close to the people's needs (PEP, 1995b, Vol.1-2). The late premiere Zhou Enlai is presented in much the same manner, as a hard working and good-hearted leader who takes the time for simple gesture. He is shown thanking a worker sweeping the streets of Tian An Men Square, for his hard work, in the name of the people (PEP, 1995b, Vol.2). Role models in the current textbooks, in line with the prevalent policies, are praised for their love of knowledge, diligence at studying, for their hard work, their initiatives, and their kindness of heart. There are often anecdotes or short biographies of great figures of the past, such as Darwin, Sima Guang (scholar and historian of the Song), Lenin, Li Dazhao (intellectual and leader of the CCP at the turn of the century), Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yatsen), and Da Vinci, among others (PEP, 1995b, Vol.1-4).

Besides moral modelling, whose main purpose is to conduct ideological and moral education, linguistic skills modelling is also often used to teach writing, especially in the higher grades. Students are provided with a "model" sentence, a paragraph or a passage, that they must emulate in their own compositions (Zhai, Xun, Lu, & Ku, 1983). According to studies conducted in America, there is no evidence that modelling improves writing (see

Williams and Capizzi-Snipper, 1990). Frequent reading instead, seemed to be a determinant factor.
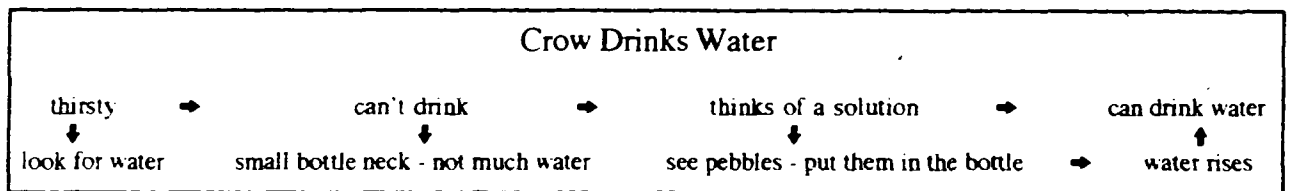
<u>Memorization</u>

Memorization is still an integral part of the Chinese classroom but much less so than during the imperial era when, we have seen it, every single line of a text was memorized. Teacher's manuals today warn against abusive use of memorization that is of a mechanical nature, but recommends the memorization of short rhyming texts, poems, and passages of texts containing important information and structure (PEP, 1995a). At the first grade, children are required to memorize 14 text lessons and two paragraphs of two other texts out of a total number of 58 texts; 12 of them are poems or nursery rhymes.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, memorization was not always perceived as leaving out understanding. On the contrary, it was aimed at enhancing it. How can memorization enhance reading comprehension? An examination of the teaching that leads to memorizing presented in the grade one language home tutoring video (Jiangxi, 1994), offers a response to this question. Two students are asked to memorize a story made of four short paragraphs. The story is one of Aesop's Fables about a thirsty crow looking for water. It finds a bottle with water in it, but the level of water is too low and the bottle neck too small for it to be able to drink. Searching for a solution, it looks around and sees pebbles on the ground. One after the other, it will put the pebble in the bottle until the water level is high enough for it to drink.

To begin the lesson, the instructor asks the students to first examine the content of the textbook lesson, to look at the pictures and question themselves on the following: Who is this lesson about? How many paragraphs and pictures are there? Which paragraph goes with which picture? After that, the instructor conducts the reading aloud practice interspersed with questions about the content and the structure (number of paragraphs and sentences) of the text. For every paragraph, she writes key words in a chart form that, in the end, retell the sequence

of the story within and outside of each paragraph. The result looks like this:

Crow Drinks Water			
thirsty ➡	can't drink ➡	thinks of a solution ➡	can drink water
⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
look for water	small bottle neck - not much water	see pebbles - put them in the bottle ➡	water rises

The teacher then reviews each part of the story following the diagram, asking the two children for confirmation, and questioning them further. After that, she asks the boy (the teacher is instructing only two students: a boy and a girl) to retell the story with the help of the chart. Praising him for his good performance, she explains that this chart method helps retelling and reviewing the textbook lessons by showing what each paragraph says. From this chart, she says, one can easily memorize the text. After further practise in retelling the story using the chart, the students are asked to tell the story to the audience, without looking at the chart. They do not follow every single word of the text, but the important elements and terms used in the story are present. The teacher stops them when she finds that an important detail has been omitted and asks children how they got from one part to the story to the other part, obliging them to reflect further on the story. For example, the little girl says that the crow thought of a solution. The teacher stops her and asks her how the crow thought of a solution; did it come to the crow just like that? The girl remembers that the crow first saw pebbles on the ground and then found a solution to its problem. Satisfied, the teacher lets the girl continue the story. She stops her again to ask the manner in which the crow puts the pebbles in the bottle, a detail which tells about how patiently and how hard the crow works. Once both children have retold the story, they are redirected to their textbooks and asked to check if they have missed anything important.

This use of memorization obliges children to pay attention to the structure and content of a text, and to the manner in which certain moods are created. For these reasons, it furthers children's understanding of what they are reading.

Songs and nursery rhymes are frequently advised and integrated into classroom instruction for several reasons: to help children memorize a rule, motivate them to be good students, develop patriotic feelings, or provide behaviourial direction (PEP, 1995a). As far as I could see, they were always performed with great enthusiasm in the classroom. They were also generally complemented with a series of gestures that allowed children to get up from their chair and dispel a little bit of their great physical energy. A memorized song or story known and shared by a whole group, brings forth strong feelings of social and cultural belonging.

The Language Textbooks

Textbooks for primary and secondary schools are designed in Beijing by the People's Education Press (PEP) and the Curriculum Teaching Materials Research Institute (these organizations share the same staff), following the guidelines of the State Education Commission. Paper matrices are then sent to the provincial publishing houses for printing. Although a few variants exist, the same textbooks are used throughout the country. Before being adopted at the national level, textbooks are submitted for trial during one semester in specified "experimental" schools which provide the PEP with feedback. Textbooks used for the five-year and six-year systems differ slightly to suit the timeline of both programs, and translations of these textbooks are given to minority groups whose native tongue differs from Chinese (Searle et al., 1988). According to the State Statistical Bureau, there were more than 122 million pupils enrolled at the primary level in 1992 (Zhang, 1994). Because of the phenomenal number of textbooks printed every semester at all levels of the education system and the cost of their distribution, updated versions of the textbooks sometimes take a few years before reaching areas far from the capital (Searle et al., 1988).

The advantage of having national textbooks is that it provides national educational support and standards, necessary for those teachers who have received no or minimal training,

especially in rural areas. The disadvantage is that these textbooks cannot suit the various local needs. To resolve this, the SEC encourages adoption of additional materials that "reflect local conditions and meet local needs" (Searle et al., 1988, p.13). The three schools visited, did not have such additional materials.

Improved Textbooks

Judging from the situation during my stay in China, the PEP has been partly successful in carrying out its plan of providing the primary students with improved textbooks in the 1990s. It is difficult, however, to assess the availability of those new textbooks throughout the country. In the city I was in, there was a shortage of new textbooks and teacher's manuals. Older versions of textbooks were still being printed in 1993 which indicates that the new versions were still not available in some areas.

The new textbooks are of much greater quality than those prepared in the late 1970s. They have been made much tougher and attractive. Colour has been added to those of the early grade classes in Chinese, science and mathematics. The colour illustrations of the language textbooks "speak" for the texts and give the book a much more attractive look than its precursor. They are also larger in size, the paper is heavier, the print is bigger at the lower grades, and the layout is much less crowded than before. Efforts have also been made to improve their content, to introduce more effective pedagogy and to "increase the variety of texts available to meet the needs of different localities and students of differing capabilities" (Searle et al., 1988, p.10). The main complaints with regards to the older textbooks were that they were of poor quality, and their content out-of-date for the new focus on science and technology. It is also mentioned that they were printed on light-weight paper similar to newsprint; most of them were black and white with line drawings; and because of their size (13x18cm), the print was rather small for young beginning readers.

Although their cost is still relatively low, it has more than doubled compared to the

previous edition. The new version of a textbook that sold for 4.55 yuan (around 75 cents) in 1994, cost 1.56 yuan in its older version in 1993. This is a considerable increase that may be a burden for some parents, given that textbooks must be purchased twice a year in most subjects.

Besides changes in format, the most important modification of the new edition is the much more extensive use that is made of Pinyin (PEP, 1987, 1988, 1995b)s. Venezky (1985) reported that by the end of grade one "only 10% of the characters in a reading selection have Pinyin pronunciations written above them" (p.58). This is not the case with the new series, where Pinyin accompanies the text until the middle of the first semester of grade three (lesson 16 in volume 5). From then on, the method alternates between lessons where only new characters appear in Pinyin and lessons where the text is again entirely accompanied with Pinyin. This is a step forward in strengthening Pinyin instruction and allowing more autonomy to children. It may also profit them later in their work (for computer input, for example, or in speaking better Mandarin).

I summarize below important changes made to the reading primers:

- Longer use of Pinyin in the early grades (see above).

- The number of characters introduced in the lower grades have been greatly reduced. Children are now expected to master 2500 by the end of primary school as opposed to 3000. Their learning is also more spread out over the six years than before, lightening the task of the youngest readers.

- Characters are introduced in a meaningful context rather than in isolation.

- The format is much more attractive and more clearly laid out (the black and white is smaller but less expensive to buy).

- Less emphasis is put on political and moral issues and more on developing observation and knowledge of nature, society, geography, etc.

- Less memorization is required. The teachers' manuals recommend that only poems,

rhyming couplets, short stories or passages of short stories be memorized.

Thematic Content of Textbooks

We have already discussed the political bearing in the content of the textbooks. Filial piety, a theme dear to Confucians, has been replaced by loyalty to the Communist Party and social dedication. Self-sacrifice is still present among the model heroes presented to the children, but contrary to such heroes of the past as Wu Meng who "let himself be eaten by mosquitoes in order to divert them from his parents", present day heroes are more readily inclined to sacrifice themselves for the collectivity. Young Lei Feng[9] is seen carrying his schoolmates on his back across a flooded bridge (PEP, 1995b, Vol. 1, p.110-111), and Wang Erxiao dies conducting the Japanese enemy towards the ambush troops (PEP 1995b, Vol. 2, p.79-80). The absence of filial piety is notable if we compare with the 1989 readers designed by the Foreign Language Press in Beijing to teach overseas Chinese children to read in Chinese. The contrast is flagrant: in the two first volumes of the latter, children are presented playing and doing various activities with their parents. Parents are mentioned in 11 lessons out of 40. In the first two textbooks used in the P.R.C., parents appear twice in the 28 lessons of the first volume. In the second volume, the father is vaguely mentioned in a conversation between a mother lion and her lazy cub (see appendix 8). In comparison to the father figure which is basically absent from the readers, the mother appears several times in the figurative form of animals (mother swallow, mother goat, mother lion, and mother cat) to instruct her young about different aspects of life and society (the industrialization of the countryside, knowledge about plants, to become independent at making a living, and to be diligent in doing a task). In contrast, reading primers for overseas Chinese show the family

---

[9] Lei Feng was a young soldier of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) whose diary was found posthumously and in which he wrote about his devotion to the Party and Mao and his attempt to assist others daily with small deeds. Lei Feng is the number one role model of students who have to follow his example and do good deeds. Every year, there is a campaign "Learn from Lei Feng" where everyone, young and adults get out in the streets, and do manual labour for the community.

together in different circumstances: on New Year's day, at the mother's birthday, at the swimming, and at home. A father is shown teaching his son to swim and later, helping him with his homework (Sinolingua, 1992, vol.1-2). In the textbooks used within China, however, the father appears only once, reading the newspaper while his daughter is serving him tea. Parents and children are never seen entertaining themselves together in the first grade textbooks used in the P.R.C.

Texts abound where the pupils are led to draw comparisons and analogies between things of the world and observe the movements and transformation of Nature. These, not only help develop the child's sense of observation, but also are characteristics of a long time agrarian society which developed its understanding of the world by observing the patterns and relationships of things and events of the world (for example, the changes in the activities of humans brought by the change of seasons—see Granet, 1968). It gives a very poetic tone to some of the stories. One story, for example, shows four brushless, paperless young artists: a foal, a puppy dog, a chick, and a duckling. They are drawing respectively, moon crescents, flowers, bamboo leaves, and maple leaves, simply by walking in the snow (PEP, 1995b, p.100). Themes of nature are prevalent in the grade one textbooks. Stories are often fables, using speaking animals and plants to teach both about nature and morals at once. Sheridan (1992a) noted that "stories are... chosen to help develop observational ability, dialectical thinking, study habits and patriotism" (p.26). This is still the case today. They are also chosen to develop interest in discovering nature among the millions of children of the countryside, and among those children in the cities witnessing its fast disappearance.

Problems in the Reading Curriculum

In 1985, Jiang and Li of the Central Institute for Educational Research in Beijing identified three problems with the reading curriculum. Firstly, they mentioned that the students' textbooks, particularly at more advanced levels, did not comprise enough reading

passages, and their content was not rich enough. Secondly, textbooks lacked clear explanations on the teaching purposes and requirements, and that they were not systematic at matching pupils' cognitive development. Thirdly, they stated that few teachers were "aware of instructional strategies other than direct teaching" and that many of them tended "to provide too many illustrations and explanations, depriving their students of the chance to foster their competence at independent reading" (p.766). Of all three problems, the last one remains the most problematic in the 1990s.

Children would certainly gain in having more opportunity to ask questions of the teacher in the class or of their peers. It might also be worthwhile for them to have group discussions about the content of their lessons from the time they begin their schooling. The most experienced of the three language teachers interviewed, told me that such discussions now occur in the classroom at the middle grades (Interview 96.05.12). Moreover, some of the short-comings of the regular reading instruction are taken care of through language "activity classes", the role of which should not be underestimated. Reading instruction is not "limited" to the language classroom. Much reading takes place also in the other subjects.

Concluding Remarks

The new tendency in reading instruction in China is towards more contextualization of small units of the language (characters, words and sentences) at the moment of their introduction. Efforts are made to improve teaching materials, and methods are pursued to create a lively learning environment for a "happy education" (愉快教学), a theme of the new education reforms.

If we judge by Clay's (1991) statement that besides a number of repetitions "emotional content of a text, clear images, evocation of empathy, rhythm of speech and rhythm of body movement which facilitate the construction of a verbal-motor image, and play on words" (p.62-63) are conditions favourable to memorization, we can conclude that the Chinese

classroom is strongly propitious to the memorizing of stories and acquisition of literary forms since it makes use of all these devices. Clay (1991) also says that "experimental evidence suggests that the memory is more than a copying device. It uses what it already knows to reconstruct the material that it is supposed to remember" and that in this way "by six or seven years the child, with improved efficiency, is able to : analyze the material to be remembered, group it, establish logical connections, and systematize representations of the surrounding environment" (p.63). This may explain partly why Chinese first graders scored higher at reading at their grade level than American first graders in the 1986 study of Lee, Stigler, and Stevenson (see chapter two).

Motivation is also another important factor of success. Children are encouraged both inside and outside the classroom to give much attention to their study, to work hard, and to feel proud of being a student. Diligence in studying, is certainly still the watchword in Chinese education, and a significant source of success. Jiang and Li said in 1985 (p.765):

> One has to work hard to master any of the languages on our planet, even one's mother tongue, but the barriers can properly be conquered and without too much difficulty if one is diligent enough.

Moreover, motivation is reinforced by the fact that there is a strong social cohesion regarding the moral and behavioural directives to give to children.

To summarize, we have seen that reading instruction in China today is perceived as a gradual process characterised by the accumulation of elements of the language in always larger units, introduced from the start from within a meaningful context. At the beginning stage (the lower grades), this process mostly centres on the study of words and sentences. Oral reading dominates the beginning language classroom as a means to both developing a correct Mandarin pronunciation of Chinese characters and to develop expressive skills that will enhance text understanding. Pedagogical use is also made of illustrations to help in reading comprehension and to develop initial observational skills in children. The overall goal of reading instruction is to progressively bring children to become autonomous.

We have seen also that major differences in content and approach distinguish today's reading instruction from the traditional Confucian education of the imperial era but that many aspects, nevertheless, have remained a part of the theory and the practice. A more detailed description of the practice will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION IN THREE URBAN CHINESE SCHOOLS

The following discussion. like the previous chapter, is based on my observations of three urban Chinese classrooms, and my conversations with the Chinese language teachers, principals, and parents. It centres, more specifically, on the dynamics of the beginning reading classroom and is aimed at being more descriptive of the practice. In the first section, I look at aspects of classroom management and at the nature of the teacher-student relàtionship. The second section is a narrative description of a first grade class held on October 26, 1995, at , a primary school annexed to a university. The school year had begun seven weeks before, and children could read short Pinyin texts. They had also begun to learn Chinese characters. In all, they had studied 24 simple characters and were being introduced to six new ones. To give the reader an idea of the progression of instruction within a year, appendix 8 gives a description of a class held later, at the end of March. What I have witnessed and have been told is generally consistent with the past reports made by other researchers working in different urban areas of China (Sheridan, 1990, 1992a-b; Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990; Mei, 1985).

It must be pointed out again, however, that this study and those mentioned above, do not provide first-hand data of the situation of primary language instruction in rural areas, where learning conditions are reported to be much less favourable (Yang, 1990; Chang & Shang, 1990). This study was limited to the urban environment and is, therefore, not necessarily representative of "the other China", i.e., the China of the 70 per cent rural inhabitants.

The three teachers interviewed all agreed that today's Chinese language classrooms are much more active and student-centred than in the past. From a North American point of view,

however, the classrooms remain very traditional in appearance, and is centred on the teacher and the textbook. This impression is enhanced by the spatial arrangement of the class (the teacher standing on her podium with rows of desks facing her), by the mode of instruction (whole-class instruction), and by the fact that children must conform to strict rules of conduct. Remarkably though, the grade one language classrooms I visited were indeed active, and the majority of the students seemed very eager to participate in the exercises put forward by the teacher, or to answer her questions (all three teachers were women). Moreover, the sustained attention of the children was exceptional for seven year olds. The three forty minute-classes observed were very structured, and dynamically but gently staged by the teachers from their podium. The lesson unfolded as if both teacher and students had built their relationship on a series of well-known rituals that both sides had agreed to respect. Among these rituals were choral reading, reading aloud by individual students, series of comprehension questions by the teacher, and practice in writing characters.

I have not observed any work in small groups during the language class at the first grade. A teacher explained that small group work did not occur in the classroom before grade three, at which point students were sometimes encouraged to study the textbook lesson in groups of four and write down questions on the lesson content for their peers (Interview 96.05.12). However, as I have mentioned in the preceding chapter, outside the classroom and as part of the curriculum, small group activities and less structured instruction did occur in the form of "out-of class language activities", an aspect of the curriculum that escaped the attention of the American reading group (Mei, 1985), and was not mentioned by Sheridan (1992a, 1992b). The structuring of the classroom appeared favourable to the fostering of an in-class behaviour characterised by attention, seriousness, concentration, diligence, and discipline. In contrast, out-of-class activities encouraged peer learning, exchange of impressions, creativity, movement, and practical use of classroom knowledge, all in an atmosphere of play.

117

The Choreography of Learning

While English and French pupils work at associating sounds with spellings, Chinese first graders are pairing sounds to movements. Beginner classrooms in the P.R.C. are filled with Chinese character dancers. All together they trace characters in the air with big gestures, following the right stroke order and rhythmically chanting the stroke names. This linguistic choreography reminded me of the many traditional Chinese art forms (opera, calligraphy, painting, martial arts) which consist of a series of set movements to be performed in the right order and with the right intensity. The series of movements executed in the *Tai Ji* martial art (*T'ai tchi tchuan*), for example, evoke aspects of the natural world and of human activities. Like a Chinese character, the movement in *Tai Ji* conveys a mental image such as "White stork spreads wings" or "Fair lady works shuttles". These not only help the practitioner to remember the sequence of movements, but also render the gesture concrete with meaning and reinforce its interpretation. Chinese opera also consists of a series of ruled movements, which the initiated audience recognises and rewards with applause when well performed. Calligraphy is the art of movements. Through the control of the brush, the artist can convey the inner property of things such as the strength and stability of a mountain, the lightness of a drop of water, or the torment of one's soul. Creativity emerges from the mastery of the form. A stroke, an eye movement, or a military goose step well executed, all are objects of social respect. One wonders about the influence that the writing system may have had on these traditional arts.

Songs and rhymes associated with simple choreographies (series of movements of the arms and the heads) are significant pedagogical tools in the Chinese classroom. Important elements of the language, behavioural rules, or moral principles are generally reinforced through the learning of a song. In the first lesson of the textbook, for example, the teachers were advised to teach the song presented below, accompanied with gestures, "to consolidate the effect of teaching" (see appendix 7): "The sun shines in the empty sky, the little birds sing

chirp, chirp. I am a first grade primary school student, and every day I come to school on time" (PEP, 1995a, p.3).

Songs are a means of internalising rules, and in some cases, as in the above song, to associate a positive feeling or image with the compliance to these rules. Moreover, children generally enjoy songs and nursery rhymes. It also allows the teacher to integrate kinesthetics to the classroom and follows the principle that children's instruction best proceeds from perceptual to more rational means of teaching.

At the beginning of the year when children learn the sounds of Pinyin, each letter is introduced with a song or a rhyme and an illustration that helps children remember the shape, the sound, and the meaning of the sound at different tones. For example, when introducing the vowels "a, o, e", children are taught the following song (PEP, 1995a, Vol. 1, p.15):

Round cheeks, ram's tail, she opens wide her mouth a a a
The sun comes out all red, the rooster sings o o o
In the clear pond a goose, its reflection in the water makes e.

In the textbook, we find beside the letter "a", a picture of a little girl opening wide her mouth for the doctor or the dentist. The side view of her head with a pony tail forms the shape of the letter "ɑ". Beside the letter "o", a rooster is drawn singing with its eye as round as an "o". The rooster crows in Mandarin is "wō-wō-wō-wō", which is an onomatopeic reinforcement of the "o" sound. The third picture shows a white goose on the water looking at its reflection in the water, like the letter "e". In Chinese, the word goose is pronounced "é" \

To help children remember the four tones of Mandarin, the different tones of each letter are taught in the meaningful context of a word or an interjection. For example, "ā " is introduced with the sentence "āyí hǎo!" (Hi, auntie!), "ā " being the first sound of the word for "auntie". At the second tone, "á" is an interjection that can express a request for precision as in the following expression taught to the child: "á! What are you saying?" (啊！你说什么？). At the third tone, "ǎ " may express surprise and the example provided

119

is: "ǎ ? Really?" (啊? 是这样?). Finally, at the fourth tone, "à" is an interjection that may express realization as in "à, I understand now" (啊, 我明白了！) (PEP, 1995a, Vol. 1, p.15; PEP, 1995b, Vol. 1, p.6).

Classroom Management

Children are generally seven years old when they start school. Because they are first explained the proper rules of conduct that they must follow at school and are told the reason behind each task, the Chinese classroom offers a relatively low stress environment for children entering school. Moreover, most of them attended one or more years of preschool, which helped ease the transition between their home and the school. Socialization generally starts at the preschool level and by the time children enter the first grade, they are generally aware of the kind of social behaviour that is expected from them in school. In an ethnographic research on preschool education, Wu (1987) reported that his Chinese preschool informants viewed "the role of the preschool as teaching children to behave properly and instilling in them an appreciation for the values of self-control, discipline, social harmony, and responsibility" (p.93). He pointed out that the term to refer to control and regimentation by the teachers was *guǎn* , meaning literally "to govern". *Guǎn*, however, is generally a positive term in Chinese and is often used in the sense of "to care for" and "to love" (Wu, 1987).

In fact, the three teachers observed were firm but gentle with their students, like a caring parent. They smiled during instruction and always spoke with respect to the children. They often praised the students' response during the question period with expressions such as "good", "very good", and "correct", a practice frown upon by Zhu (1996) for it limits the freedom of expression of children. When a child answered incorrectly, the teacher repeated the question once more or simply asked the student to sit down and ask the question again to another pupil. Sometimes, when a child answered eloquently, the teacher asked the class to applaud him or her. Children executed this applause uniformly, with two or three rhythmic

120

claps (the number depended on the school) and a movement of the head from side to side that had obviously been rehearsed in the past.

In the three classes observed, teachers controlled all instructional activities of the students. The dynamic structure of the lesson allowed these teachers to manage their class tightly but in a friendly and animated atmosphere. Hardly any time was spent reminding students of their task. They seemed to have internalized both the behavioral rules and procedures of the classroom and to have respected them. They were taught, at their entry to school, how to sit straight in their chair, how to hold their book upright on their desk, how to stand to answer a question, how to raise their hand, how to carefully listen to their peers when they spoke, and even how to briefly applaud. They also learned that the time for study and the time for play were clearly demarcated and announced by the teachers. When the bell rang to inform of the end of the class period, no one moved. Students patiently waited until the teacher finished the lesson and informed them that the class was dismissed. Athey (1985) noticed that during the ten-minute break that followed each period, very little behaviour control was done. One could see children running around the school yard and involved in different games with their friends, a loud noise rising from the school ground.

In class, children seemed to be completely in tune with the teacher's directives. The latter kept the class alive by moving from one exercise to the other with animation. Children appeared to follow quite well, attentive to the cues announcing changes of exercise. The teacher also alternated between individual and class participation. This way, those who did not get a chance to speak or to read individually were drawn in during whole class or small group choral reading.

No time was wasted scolding this or that child. Because behaviour rules were clearly established and respected, teachers were free to deliver the content of the lesson without constantly having to discipline the students. This is a real concern in classes containing 40 to 60 students. Generally, a look or a gentle touch on a shoulder seemed to be enough to remind

a child of the task or awoke him/her from a moment of inattention. In the worst case, the teacher compared the behaviour of a child at fault with the one of a peer, asking the group to identify the model behaviour. This is a disciplinary technique called "compare and appraise" (Wu, 1987). I have witnessed the use of it in motivating children to carefully apply themselves to a task. During a practice in tracing Chinese characters, the teacher who had noticed that a little boy was talking to his neighbour, said to the class: "Let's see who writes best". She then walked straight to the two boys to supervise and comment on their work. After giving them a few instructions, the teacher then compared their work with the one of a little girl applying herself at writing. The two boys were enjoined to follow her assiduity at the task.

Students generally did not ask questions of the teacher during class time. They waited until the class was over. Dong (in Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990) explains that "questions are viewed as affronts to teachers: if they cannot answer correctly, they will lose face and all respect from their students" (p.123). She attributes this attitude partly to the traditional view of the teachers as an authority, and also to the fact that many teachers still suffer from the events that took place during the Cultural Revolution. Some of them were humiliated by their students, and instructed by them on what to do, how to teach and how to behave with students. However, attempts seem to be made to change this situation. Volume four of the language textbook includes the following story, entitled, "When you don't understand, you should ask":

> When Sun Zhongshan was young, he studied in a private school.... He would recite a passage a few times and quickly had it memorized. However, he could not at all understand the meaning of what he was reading. He wondered about the use of memorizing this way with one's mind in a haze. He bravely got up and asked: "Teacher, what is the meaning of the passage you just asked me to memorize? Please explain it to me!".... The teacher raised his ruler, put it inside his hand, told Sun Zhongshan to sit down and said: "I originally thought that when you would grow up, you would naturally understand the content of the book. But since you want to know it now, I will explain it to you!"....Later, a schoolmate asked Sun Zhongshan: "Weren't you afraid of getting beaten by asking a question to the teacher?" Sun Zhongshan smiled and said: "When learning, if one does not understand, one should ask. If done in order to clarify the content, it's worth the beating." (Extract of the grade two language

textbook, 1995b, Vol. 4, p.103-106—translation is mine)

This story uses a well-known and respected political figure, the doctor Sun Yatsen (Sun Zhongshan according to the Mandarin pronunciation), to illustrate a situation in which it is profitable to go against an established rule of conduct. It invites students to make understanding a priority in their study and to take initiative in monitoring their own study by asking questions when they don't understand (and assume the consequences...). The teachers' manual emphasizes that the students must understand that asking questions to further one's understanding is characteristic of diligent study. Teachers who will teach this lesson to the students will obviously be compelled to adopt a positive attitude towards students asking questions during class time; a lesson that may be hard to swallow by some. During my visits, I have seen no children ask questions during class. Nor did I see any of the teachers encouraging students to ask questions or checking on their comprehension by asking "Do you understand?", or simply "Do you have any questions?" In the past, the American reading research team recorded only one instance of a teacher asking the class if they had any questions. They were told afterwards that this was a special feature of that teacher's class. The school was a key experimental school (Athey, 1985).

Evaluation of individual students' progress, mastery of characters, and understanding of lessons is generally met through dictation of new words, quizzes, and the review lessons in the textbook. Following a government policy, there is, in theory, no homework for the lower grades. This policy was probably put in place to counteract an abusive amount of homework, which in the past, was imposed on young children to ensure their future success at junior high school entrance examinations (Davin, 1991). The reason that was given to me was that children needed time to play (Interview 96.03.28). However, children were generally asked to review their lesson at home by reading the text aloud and to practice writing the new characters of the lesson. Two teachers also mentioned that students were required to keep a journal in both Pinyin and characters such as the extract seen, in the previous chapter, of a first

grader diary. Children were also asked to write on a topic related to the textbook lesson they had studied in class. A parent told me that his daughter was required to write about one page of her journal every week (in a small book with squared sheets to help balance the shape of characters). The teacher corrected the mistakes, evaluated the content, and graded the composition out of five points. For a job well done, she stamped a little star in the margin (Interview 96.04.05).

Teaching as a Performance

Paine (1990) used the metaphor of the "virtuoso" to describe the conceptual basis of Chinese teaching. She described the virtuoso as one who has mastered the technical aspect of the work (here knowledge) and is able to transcend it. During her two-year study at Normal Colleges, she observed the training dispensed to future secondary school teachers and also visited elementary classrooms. She reported a surprising similarity in teaching style throughout the different levels of schooling. "The focus in teaching", she said, "was on performance, the goal to produce a virtuoso performance" (p.50). Because they did not have much say in the design of the curriculum and the materials of instruction, teachers were expected to bring "a lyrical quality to the work" (p.63). During their training, they even staged mock classes with peers and teachers as their students. Paine noted that the feedback given to those mock classes afterwards by the teacher, generally centred around overall presentation issues such as timing, quality of the visual materials, and body movements (Paine, 1990). This was likely to be the case, since the teaching content, materials, and plans were already predetermined by the national textbooks.

I was also struck by the performance quality of teachers leading their class, as if they had rehearsed it beforehand. All three first grade teachers I observed in their classroom were extremely energetic and expressive. One of them was a young woman in her twenties with a high-pitch voice who seemed to have been trained in opera and drama. She was very theatrical

when reading the text, her voice going up and down in a very clear Mandarin. These three teachers were very organised and I could detect no pause in which they seem to wonder "what am I going to give them next". One activity quickly followed another. The class really gave the impression of a performance in which both the students and the teacher knew their role well and played in concert with very little incidents (on one occasion a little girl dozed off). Each class was then followed by a ten minute break for the students and a free period for the teacher.

Because Chinese elementary teachers teach only one subject, they have much more time than their Western counterparts to prepare their classes and other activities. The work schedule ranges anywhere from one to ten periods of teaching per week, attendance at meetings, and participation in extracurricular activities. The language teacher, though, has the biggest work load, with 9 to 10 class periods per week to prepare, the design of activity classes, the correction of students work, and the supervision of the students' overall academic progress. They are also responsible for meeting with the parents.

I once commented on how attentive the children were in the classrooms. The principal of one of the schools explained: "Our system is the old system. The teacher is the master of the class and the students are the disciples, or if you prefer, the teacher is the stage director and the students, the actors" (Interview 96.03.28). In both cases, the teacher plays the leading role. They clearly are considered the authority of the class, the bearer of knowledge, and the one who controls all the activities.

The good teacher is, therefore, one who is knowledgeable about her/his subject and possesses the ability to effectively transmit it to students. Consequently, much emphasis is put on carefully preparing lessons and mastering the content of textbooks. However, efforts are made to change this situation. Zhu Jingben (1996), for example, tries to shift teachers' focus from their teaching plan and the text, to the students' particular abilities and power of initiative. In an article entitled "Reading instruction: What should we focus on?", he argues

that the fostering of self-learning and the development of independent thinking skills should be the central focus of reading instruction. Zhu protests against the present state of the practise in the classrooms which places the students at the service of the teacher's plan rather than the opposite. He suggests that reading instruction be transformed into a process of "seeking, achieving, and creating, accomplished on the basis of the students' own initiative. What Zhu proposes can be summarized in three points: 1) to provide more chances to the students to read and think independently; 2) to foster an active participation of all the students in the classroom; and 3) to take advantage of differences in students' understanding of vocabulary and text to involve the whole class in a pondering process over their meaning. He suggests that teachers make use of individual students' strength and weaknesses to benefit the whole class and promote thinking. This idea is summarized in the passage below (p.4):

> A stone stirs up a thousand waves; teachers must be good at using "difference" to stir up students' waves of thoughts, arouse their desire to participate, push them to reflect independently, take part in discussion, open up controversy, and mutually inspire each other. This will strengthen their understanding of words, sentences, paragraphs and texts, and increase their listening, speaking, reading, and writing ability. This exercise is not an exchange between two people (the teacher and one student) like a single soldier coaching, but a collective training. (translation is mine)

This approach resembles the current trend in Western elementary programs that is aimed at individualizing teaching to respond to the particular needs of children. However, Zhu's suggestions offer an interesting reconciliation of individualized and collective instruction. While he invites teachers to take advantage of independent reading activities to carefully observe each student's study circumstances, he also promotes a collective training based on individual student's contribution. Clay (1991) estimates that a good teacher is one who provides support to individual children, one who possesses the quality "of being able to use the unique background of each pupil so that in time he comes to share common experiences with his learning group" (p.67). "It is not some ripening process which will eventually prepare the child" she says, "but opportunities to learn through expert-novice interaction" (p.68). Zhu's proposed approach makes the most out of this "expert-novice interaction" by

allowing the whole group to benefit from the guidance of the teacher. Unfortunately, this approach seems not to be part of many classrooms, as of yet.

Before teachers can lead students towards independent thinking, they would need to be given more freedom of thinking themselves. They are extremely limited in the range of decisions they can make regarding the curriculum and their classroom. They are also an important agency of the transmission and consolidation of the CCP's ideology and ethics and are expected to be role models for the pupils. During their training at the normal school (elementary school teachers receive a three year secondary-level normal school training equivalent to senior high school), student teachers are followed by a counsellor (*fǔdǎoyuán*) who is responsible "for nurturing the qualities thought important for teaching —discipline, enthusiasm, initiative, concern for others, selflessness, commitment". The counsellor also is charged to report on students' character to the schools where the latter are sent for their practicum (Paine, 1990, p.56).

Once hired in a school, new teachers receive one semester of training to learn about teaching methods. This is done mostly through observing experienced teachers' classes. After that, all teachers meet once a week to study educational theory and knowledge about their field (Interview 96.05.10). Cooperation among teachers is strongly encouraged by the system and helps compensate for the lack of training of some teachers. Because of a shortage of teachers, it was estimated that in the eighties, close to forty percent of elementary teachers (especially those in rural areas), had received no formal training, some of them being hired upon their graduation from junior high school (Paine, 1990). The last official estimate for 1990 was of twenty percent (Zhang et al., 1994). If a school has more than one group of students for the same grade and subject, teachers prepare their lessons together, and follow the same pace of instruction (Sheridan, 1990).

Anderson (1985) reported that the head Chinese instructor at a normal school in Beijing told them that "the major language goals for teachers-in-training are correct diction,

vocabulary, and grammar" (p.73). This apparent superficial focus of teachers' training is linked to national political goals in a country that counts several dialects. Heavy stress is put on training teachers in speaking Mandarin and in developing a thorough knowledge of their subject. Following the reforms and regulations put in place in 1986 with the Compulsory Education Act, only 21 percent of the normal school curriculum is made up of psychology and pedagogical studies (Zhang et al., 1994). The table below shows the courses requirements at schools which prepare elementary teachers.

Normal school curriculum for the three-year training

Types of Courses	Number of periods	Percentage
Ideology and politics	190	6%
Basic knowledge (Chinese. mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography)	1530	45%
Education (Psychology, elementary school education and curriculum with 10 weeks of practicum)	740	21%
Arts (music, fine arts) and physical education	570	17%
Labour skills	150	4%
Electives	250-450	7-15%

Source: Zhang et al. (1994). *Xiaoxué jiàoyù baikequánshu* [Encyclopedia of primary education], p.132. Zhengzhou: Henan Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

The general objectives presented in the June 1986 "Regulations for the three-year system secondary normal school teaching outline" by the SEC pertain to imbuing future teachers with knowledge and positive feelings about both the Communist Party's ideology and their future profession as elementary teachers. At the political level, the regulations state that normal schools must foster:

- students' adherence to the Four Fundamental Principles [the socialist road, the people's democratic dictatorship, Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, and the leadership of the CCP];

- students' initiative in helping meet the needs of the development of the socialist modernization construction;

- students' warm love of their socialist country, of the CCP, and of their work as elementary teachers;
- · basic arguments of Marxism;
- social and teacher ethics;
- determination in seeking to create a new socialist spirit.

At the educational level, the stated objectives of teachers' training are to bring students to master essential knowledge and skills necessary to their future work as elementary teachers; to understand the basic elementary school education theories; to possess skills of aesthetic appreciation; to possess initial knowledge and skills of productive labour; to encourage in them good and hygienic habits; to be healthy (Zhang et al., 1994, p.131).

The above goals offer little variety from those that guide the content of the language teachers' manuals at the elementary level seen previously (see chapter 4). This shows that the manner in which future teachers are prepared is the one they are expected to later apply to their own teaching. This is also true for teaching methods which are taught through demonstration. The students learn by following their teacher's model (Paine, 1990). In this way, an elementary teacher training in China still has much in common with the ageless approach to teaching based on a master-disciple relationship.

A First Grade Language Lesson

The language class I was invited to attend was scheduled to start at eight o'clock in the morning. It was fall and the classroom, which opened up directly to the exterior (all classrooms are generally build that way), was cold. The room was made of bricks and concrete, and deep cracks ran down the walls. Children were bundled up in thick colourful padded jackets. I counted 39 children and one empty desk. The room had three rows of doubled wooden desks facing the blackboard and the teacher's desk. Above the blackboard, big characters displayed the famous saying of Mao Zedong that is found in most classrooms of

China: "Study well and progress daily" (好好学习天天向上). On the right side of the board, there was a radical index of Chinese characters and on the left side, a stroke index. The side walls had colour posters of children involved in different activities. One showed two girls practising martial arts. There were no drawings by the pupils or any other creation on the classroom walls.

Chairs had been placed in the back of the class for the principal, the two Chinese English teachers who were accompanying me, and myself. We entered through the front door, after briefly meeting with the teacher outside. The children were already seated and raised their heads to look at the visitors. I did not hear anyone exclaiming "foreigner!" (a word that follows Caucasians in most regions of China where they rarely meet foreigners), but there was a murmur. It stopped as soon as the teacher walked into the classroom. She was a middle-aged woman, imposing, in her black suit and big dark square glasses. The class rose and said in unison: "Good morning teacher!". After responding to the students' greetings, the teacher told the students that they had to show the visitors how intelligent, well-behaved, and attentive they were.

The teacher followed a procedure that, I discovered later, was the standard for all language classes I would visit or read about in the teachers' manuals: brief introduction of the lesson and its instructional goal, prediction questions on the new text by looking at the illustrations in the textbook, teaching of new words and characters, reading aloud practise, reading aloud by sections (sentences or paragraphs) followed by an analysis of each section and comprehension questions, and finally writing exercise. Teachers at a different school told me that two or three class periods were generally spent on each textbook lesson. One class focused more on learning the new words and characters and on practicing writing them. The following class centred on reading aloud fluently and with expression, and on text comprehension through explanations and questions by the teacher.

The teacher told the class that they were to study the sixth lesson of the section entitled

"Look at the picture, read the Pinyin and recognize the characters". As she spoke, she pointed at the title already written in yellow chalk on the top left corner of the blackboard in both Pinyin and characters. Children opened their books and held them vertically on their desk, sitting with their back straight. The teacher first led them to look at the picture in their book. It showed two boys on a slide, and another one below running up the stairs to the top of the slide (see appendix 9). She asked: "Who is above?" The class answered in chorus: "Xiao Liang is above". This indicated to me that they had already read the text either in a previous class or were supposed to prepare it at home. The teacher wrote on the board "Xiao Liang is above" in very clear Pinyin with well rounded letters. She continued in her loud and clear Mandarin: "Who is below?" Hands raised. She called on a student who stood up to answer: "Da Ming is below". "Correct. Please sit down", she replied and wrote it on the board below the previous sentence. She continued this way until the whole text was transcribed. Every time she asked a question, many hands rose and students seemed eager to answer. If a student took too long to answer, she asked him or her to sit down and called on another one. Sometimes, she asked a student to read a word or a sentence she had already written on the board. After seven weeks of learning Pinyin, students read it quite well. This may have been due to the fact that they were already familiar with the lesson.

Children had previously learned 24 Chinese characters and were about to learn three more in this lesson. At this stage, they were learning to recognize whole characters, to name their strokes, and to write them in the right order and direction. The earliest introduced Chinese characters, in the textbook, are pictographs of simple construction, such as sun, moon, field, and person (日、月、田、人).

After the whole text was written on the board, the teacher wrote the three new Chinese characters below their Pinyin pronunciation in the text transcribed on the blackboard. She questioned students about the new characters of the lesson (上 中 下 ; up, middle, down): "Which of the three characters is 'shàng'?". A student pointed at the third one. "Correct", she

said and wrote the character once more, this time naming each stroke as she did it. Students were then asked to stand up and to trace the character in the air naming each stroke, one hand on their left hip and the other executing big strokes with great enthusiasm, head moving in the same direction as the strokes. The teacher followed the same procedure for the two other characters. She also asked the students to form words or phrases orally, using each character. At least two thirds of the class volunteered to try. They then practiced pronouncing the three characters correctly, with the right tone, before they went on reading the whole text aloud in unison.

This over, the teacher told the students to rest a little bit. All thirty nine children put their heads on their folded arms in a kind of opera motion, and rested on their desks for about five seconds. They then rose again to go on working. During this time, the teacher had moved her desk to the side of the podium so that children could clearly see the bottom of the board. She had three big pictures of the children who appeared in the text. She drew an oblique line to represent the slide and asked: "Where is Xiao Liang?" A student was chosen to come to the board and put the picture of Xiao Liang at the right place on the slide. The teacher asked another student to show the class where Xiao Liang was going. A girl designated for the task came to the front and moved Xiao Liang's picture down the slide saying: "He's going down".

All this time students did not appear bored but looked rather attentive and eager to participate. After half an hour though, I could see that they were getting restless in their chairs. When the teacher noticed this, she asked the class monitor to conduct exercises. A little girl quickly got up, came to the front, and with the attitude of a maestro, counted to three to begin the activity. The whole class had stood up and at the monitor's indication, started reciting a nursery rhyme with big gestures and much expression in their voices.

The teacher then proceeded to the writing exercises. At the bottom right of the board, there was a squared partition in yellow chalk that the teacher used to show the students how to

write characters neatly, with the right proportion and shape. After the demonstration, students copied the new characters in their exercise books several times. While children were writing, the teacher saw two boys who had engaged in a conversation. She asked the class: "Who writes the best?" and then went into the direction of the two boys to supervise their work. She moved around the class, commented, praised or gave advice to the pupils.

The class was soon to end, and after a few minutes more of work, the teacher called upon the students to read aloud the new characters written on the board, and to read the whole lesson once more. When the bell rang, no one moved. The teacher announced that the class was dismissed and asked that they say goodbye to the visitors. The pupils stood up, turned towards us and executed this in unison. The class had lasted 40 minutes.

Summary

From a North American point of view, the approach to instruction in a Chinese classroom is traditional. It is centred on the teacher and the text, and whole-class instruction is almost the exclusive mode of teaching. Although traditional, it is not, however, austere. Grade one language class evolved rhythmically from one activity to another with both the teacher and the students tuned in with each other. Attention and discipline on the part of the students is also remarkable. Since the content of the class is already determined by the national textbooks, teachers focus on their performance in the classroom. They show much enthusiasm during class and are firm but gentle in the way they relate to the children. They are also generally very expressive.

Efforts are made to involve all students in the class by having them volunteer to answer questions, or by having them read aloud individually or in groups. All learning modalities are also present in the beginning reading classroom (visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile), and songs are extensively used to help children remember important aspects of lessons, rules of moral conduct, and to make the class livelier.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I initially examined the nature of the Chinese writing system and literacy in the Confucian tradition. I then looked at contemporary views of reading pedagogy and described characteristics of the Chinese language classroom. In this final chapter, I want to offer some further reflection on the changes and continuity between the past and present views of reading instruction and provide suggestions to foreign language teachers working with Chinese students.

We have seen that the large number of characters necessary to acquire basic literacy in Chinese led to a tradition of reading where the language proficiency was associated with the mastery of a large numbers of words/characters (classical Chinese, as mentioned, was mostly monosyllabic). Today still, literacy is defined in quantitative terms, by the number of characters mastered by an individual. Because of this important feature of the Chinese writing system, reading experiments held in mainland China, have mostly centred around issues of character recognition (Zhang et al., 1994; Mei, 1985). The results of these studies brought the national adoption of teaching methods for speeding up and consolidating character-recognition at the beginning level. The methods mentioned in this study were the Pinyin method, and the contextual and concentrated character recognition methods. Chinese character acquisition requires careful observation of the structure of characters and a sustained effort at memorizing how to name and how to write them. This effort is even greater for children of other dialects than Mandarin, who must learn to read according to the standard pronunciation.

Compared to traditional methods which relied solely on memorization and the recitation of lists of characters or rhyming couplets, today's methods of teaching Chinese characters contribute to increase children's autonomy in reading by allowing them to read texts in Pinyin

on their own, teach themselves characters, and reduce the amount of memorization required. In the past, children relied entirely on their teacher or a literate adult to learn how to pronounce each character of a text. Guessing the meaning of characters was possible only after a child had mastered enough characters to understand the general content of a text. However, since texts were limited to the Confucian classics and, therefore, very difficult for a child to understand, reading was closely equivalent to mechanical memorizing for the young pupil. Understanding was expected to come later, and often by accident. Although many Chinese Confucian scholars emphasized the importance of combining understanding with the process of reading/memorizing, it was commonly held that once internalized, the content of texts could later be understood as students' experience of the world increased.

Today, teachers are enjoined to use memorization sparingly with regards to textbook lessons (PEP, 1995a). At the grade one level, lessons which are poems, short texts that contain important grammatical structures, or passages important for their informational or moralistic content are generally those to be memorized. We have demonstrated in chapter four — through the story of the thirsty crow — that the process of memorizing in class helped children develop a sense of text structure. That is to say that it not only helps them to understand concepts such as "sentence" and "paragraph", but also to develop a certain familiarity with figures of speech such as "parallelism" (parallel sentences), very frequent in Chinese, especially in traditional poetry. The teacher's manual advises the teachers to precede the memorization instruction with a further observation of the lesson's picture, and further oral reading. They are also to record with the students how many sentences form each paragraph, how many paragraphs constitute the entire text, and what the content of each of those paragraphs is (PEP, 1995a). Memorization is, therefore, an integral component of an intensive approach to reading.

Chinese conceptions of learning have recently been examined by Marton, Dall'Alba and Kun (1996), who conducted their study among twenty teachers from the P.R.C. The

goal of the authors was to resolve the apparent paradox between memorizing and understanding in order to explain how Asian students of Confucian cultural heritage could demonstrate high achievement by relying so heavily on memorization while studying. They found that the majority of the Chinese teachers viewed memorization as of two natures: mechanical memorization and memorization with understanding. In the latter case, understanding was perceived as occurring before and/or during the process of memorizing, both enhancing each other, i.e., that what was understood was considered easier to memorize and what was being memorized helped further understanding. "In the process of repetition", a teacher explains, "it is not a simple repetition. Because each time I repeat, I would have some new idea of understanding, that is to say I can understand better" (cited in Marton, Dall'Alba and Kun, 1996, p.81).

If some Chinese teachers make use of a learning strategy combining memorizing and understanding, it does not necessarily mean, however, that students make use of the same strategy. According to Watkins (1996b), this strategy occurs mainly in mature students and rarely before senior high school. At this point, the study load increases, obliging students to be more selective in what they choose to memorize. Watkins interviewed 44 Hong Kong high school students on their approach to learning and identified four stages of development in the learning strategies used by these students to achieve good academic results. Although based on the findings of a relatively small sample, Watkins' conclusions are interesting. According to him, the first stage of learning is characterized by reliance on the teacher and rote learning of everything. He identifies this stage with primary and junior high school level. In the second stage, rote learning is still prevalent, but priorities appear as to what is important to memorize. At the third stage, students still expect to achieve through reproduction of memorized material, but realize that they better memorize what they understand. Metacognitive awareness, that began to appear at the previous stage, continues to increase with the students' realization that they cannot rely entirely on their teacher to tell them what to study and how to cope with the

always increasing study and memory load. Finally, and generally associated with the senior high school level or with students who are high achievers, the intention of the students at the fourth stage "is both to understand and achieve, and the strategy is to understand or to combine understanding and memorizing" (Watkins, 1996b, p.113).

The findings of the two previous studies are interesting in that Western educators often see memorizing and understanding as two mutually exclusive cognitive processes (Watkins & Biggs, 1996). This view, for example, was predominant in the report of the American reading study team (Mei, 1985), and was also expressed by Hudson-Ross (Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990). At the beginning of this research, I also thought of memorization as being an essentially mechanistic process. However, after further examination, it appears to me that the Chinese approach to learning seemed to effectively integrate what Marton and Saljo (1976) refer to as "surface/deep" approaches to learning, i.e., involving both mechanistic and more cognitive processes to learning. The first grade reading classrooms observed comprised a lot of repetition, but between intervals of repetition, students were generally engaged in analysis of texts, words, and/or characters. The successive individual and choral readings of a text in one class period, led students step by step through a careful analysis of the text structure and content, and ended in a reading apotheosis: the moral of the story that explains how one should conduct oneself.

Oral reading, we have seen, also helps further understanding by leading the students to "feel" the emotions brought out by the text. In this regard, reading is still viewed as the concerted action of the mind/heart, the eyes, and the mouth. Also, reading aloud is particularly useful at the beginning level, to accurately (i.e., in proper Mandarin) match the sound with the written sign.

Moral training and modelling still play an important role in reading instruction, although the "investigation of things" that the child must perform is not essentially moralistic anymore, but also scientific. The ideal society, which in today's China means a modern and

advanced socialist state, can be achieved by raising children who, on one hand, will think rationally about the world, but who, on the other hand, strictly obey the socialist morality presented to them by the authorities. This, to my Western mind, is an irreconcilable paradox.

In his drive to modernize the country— "Backward leads to defeat!"— the late Deng revived the old military stance taken by the reformers at the turn of the century after China was defeated by the foreign powers (Shen, 1994, p.61): "The key to achieving China's modernization is the development of science and technology, and the foundation to train scientific and technological *ren-cai* [talents] is education. Our schools are the places to train *ren-cai* for socialist construction".

If the ideals of education remain very similar to those of the past, there is no doubt that the Chinese language classroom today offers a very different picture from the one described in chapter three. Contrary to past educational practice, where class size were believed to be relatively small (eight to ten children) and instruction dispensed individually to each child, whole class instruction is the main mode of instruction today and children do not receive much individual attention during class time. However, the quality of this attention does not involve repeated beatings and admonitions. The task of past reading teachers was mainly to assign each pupil a line of text, supervise their recitation and their writing practice, teach them the rites and proper conduct, observe strict discipline, and lecture the class on moral behaviour. Clear rules of conduct still prevail in contemporary classrooms. They are, however, applied in a friendly but firm manner and contribute to a smooth delivery of the content of instruction. Corporal punishment is strictly forbidden by the authorities and seen as utterly improper by the people. Whole-class reading instruction involves repeated choral and individual reading aloud of the textbook lesson, drills on new characters and words, kinaesthetic exercises and songs, comprehension questions by the teacher, and writing practice. Moreover, the new trend found in the literature and audio-visual materials regarding reading instruction (Jiangxi, 1994; PEP, 1995a; Wang, 1996; Zhang et al., 1994; Zhu, 1996 among the principal authors consulted),

.

is aimed at progressively guiding students towards becoming autonomous learners. If this goal is similar to the one proposed by Western reading researchers (Clay, 1991; Harste, 1989), the means to achieve this follow different paths. While our system of education seeks always more individualized teaching, the Chinese approach is aimed towards making better use of collective training.

Beck (1985) asked a 70 year-old principal if her experience as an elementary student in the past differed from the one of children today. The principal readily answered: "It was completely different ....The teacher talked and the students listened. Now it is more student centred and we try to have the students more active....the students were passive --bottle fed-- but not now". Beck was surprised by this answer since she never thought of the classrooms she had observed as student centred (p.46):

> What I observed was certainly not, by American standards, student centred. But it is apparently more so now than 60 years ago. My own values would encourage more movement in that direction, just as my own values would like to see some of the positive achievement -related features of Chinese classrooms incorporated in more American classrooms.

My reaction was similar to Beck's. The classes I had observed were indeed active and the teachers never gave lengthy explanations. Yet, I still would not call the class student-centred; not in the terms that is usually referred to in the West. Students were very rarely engaged in reading activities on their own, and it was clear that answers to the teacher's questions were evaluated as right or wrong from a point of view imposed by the teacher, she being the final judge. The teacher led students to understand difficult points by demonstrating, comparing, or through collective questioning, bringing the students to solve the difficulties as a group. Moreover, the teaching plan was designed as to prevent difficulties that often arise at the reading of a text with, for example, similar-looking or sounding characters, or the difficulty of some grammatical structure.

Literacy learning in China stresses hierarchical patterns within the classrooms and more collaborative ones outside the classroom. Classroom instruction reflects, in many ways,

traditional principles of teaching which educators in many countries are trying to get away from: use of basal readers, whole-class instruction, learning by modelling, and teacher as the authority of knowledge. However, this approach is suited to the financial situation and cultural framework of China. Moreover, the system provides Chinese teachers with the time and the support to prepare effective classroom periods that will captivate the attention of the students. After comparing observations of whole-class instruction in Japanese and Chinese elementary classrooms with child-centred, individualistic approach in American schools, Stevenson and Lee commented (1995, p.167):

> Until we realize that good teaching requires teachers who know the subject matter and have the time to organize their lessons effectively, we will continue to search for palliatives and will fail to acknowledge that the most important ingredient of good education is daily guidance of students by well-prepared teachers, rather than the size of the class or the frequency with which the class is broken down into small groups.

If Chinese teachers come to the classroom better prepared than their Western counterparts, they have yet much less say in the run of their classroom. Knowledge, is as controlled for the teachers as it is for the students. Literacy instruction bears the strong imprint of that control. Williams and Capizzi-Snipper (1990) identified three types of literacy in America which they define in the following way (p.1):

> Functional literacy is often related to basic writing (coding) and reading (decoding) skills that allow people to produce and understand simple texts. Cultural literacy emphasized the need for shared experiences and points of reference to fully comprehend texts. And critical literacy is related to identifying the political component inherent in reading and writing.

Of critical literacy, the authors also add that it involves not only the ability to detect political aspects of texts but also the capacity "to assess the ideology of individual texts" (p.11). The first two categories of literacy are strongly emphasized in the basic literacy program at the elementary school in China, while critical literacy is tolerated and encouraged only when it denounces political views opposite to the ones of the present leaders, and, therefore, supports and reinforces the party's ideological line. This tendency was very strong in earlier textbooks in China and has been greatly reduced in the new edition. However, we

have seen that text interpretation is controlled both by the teacher and by the government, through political work with the teachers, and through the teachers' manuals. The teacher, in many cases, finds explanation and directives for each paragraph of the text, as to how to interpret it. The teacher leads the students to discover what effect the writer is trying to convey to the reader. The teacher has been given the meaning and must bring the students to rediscover it during class.

It is clear that China's pedagogical views and theories are strongly grounded in the prevailing political framework. The ultimate goal of education is to mold and control the mind of the people within this framework. The system does not allow deviation from the dominant ideology. Paradoxically though, the authorities still require that the educated act as social critics and have initiative.

Nevertheless, cohesion in social ethics contributes to smooth management of classroom instruction by the teacher, as well as high achievement motivation on the part of the students. Both the school and the family summon children to study diligently and to obey the rules. Athey (1985, p. 19) remarked:

> The combination of centuries of habituation and child-rearing practices that foster cheerful acceptance, conformity to communal expectations, and an orientation to the needs of others, rather than oneself, has served to produce a society in which, to all appearances, many people are happy, outgoing, and sufficiently contented with their lot to entertain few thoughts of rebellion or the desire to change the system. In any case, as we have previously noted, the price of rebellion is very high. Nor, apparently, is the rebel viewed as a folk hero to quite the same extent as in America.

Foreigners visiting Chinese classrooms are often struck by the attention and discipline shown by the students even at the lowest grade (Mei, 1985; Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990; Wu, 1987). When entering school, young children are initiated to the various behavioural rules that will allow them and the teachers to operate and relate smoothly, in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Diligence is the first study skill developed in Chinese students from grade one onward. This has roots that go as far back as the legendary time of the Sage-Kings of Antiquity. Effort and willingness to learn are placed above individual ability. Lee (1996)

rightly pointed out that Confucius in the *Analects* did not deny individual differences in abilities and intelligence but rather stressed the attainment of knowledge by all (p.29):

> ...differences in intelligence, according to Confucius, do not inhibit one's educability, but the incentive and attitude to learn does. Therefore, although Confucius did not refuse to teach anybody who wanted to learn, he would have refused to teach a person who was not eager to learn.

Lee further demonstrates how the Confucian tradition put forward the ideas of human perfectibility through learning by exhorting effort and cultivating will power. He quotes the following passage of the Doctrine of the Mean (XX 20-21) on developing one's potential to the fullest:

> If another man succeeds by one effort, he will use a hundred efforts. If another man succeeds by ten efforts, he will use a thousand. Let a man proceed in this way, and, though dull, he will surely become intelligent; though weak, he will surely become strong.

The establishment of the will (*lizhi*) involved both the faculty of knowing (*zhi*) and that of ordering (*li*). As we have seen in chapter four, knowing (*zhi*) is both an emotive and rational faculty. Lee (1996) defines *lizhi* as "an emotive driving force of effort, but contains an element of rationality, referring to guiding principle, and the human faculty of knowing" (p.37).

The fact that the first grade one language class observed still concentrates on teaching children proper behaviour and posture and principles of education by which they should abide is also reminiscent of the past. Confucian ethical principles have been translated into socialist principles and ritual observance by a choreography of learning. In 1979, the Ministry of education promulgated "regulations" for primary and secondary school students which consisted of a code of conduct to be observed by students in their daily life, in and out of schools. From within the broad scheme of "training able people to meet the needs of socialist modernization", the guiding ideas of the "Regulations" were as follows:

> Adhere to the principle of "three good's," conduct an education of "five cherish's," and advocate the revolutionary habits of studying diligently, observing discipline, cherishing labor, struggling hard, showing concern for the collective, and willingly

helping others so that students of the primary and secondary schools can have a healthy growth both mentally and physically and are prepared to serve the socialist modernization effort. ("The Ministry of Education," 1980-1981, p.100)

Intensive reading is still a very important approach to reading text. The traditional belief that one should master every single line of a text by reading it over and over again before moving on to another one, is still very strong. However, at higher levels, this approach has been complemented with a broader approach to reading referred to as extensive reading, and which is aimed at understanding the general content of texts. The combination of these two approaches is particularly popular in foreign language reading class (Ping, 1994).

There are obviously limits to using China's Confucian past as the only framework to explain characteristics of the Chinese classroom. China has known other schools of thought; Daoism, Buddhism, and the school of Five Elements, to name only a few. Their contribution to the present day educational system would be interesting to uncover, although difficult to assess, because they have held less authority in the educational system than Confucian ideology has been given.

Moreover, at the turn of the century, China borrowed from Russian, Japanese, and Western models for redesigning its own educational system (Wu, 1987). Western missionaries, for instance, contributed largely in the first establishment of higher education and teacher training institutions (Hayhoe & Bastid, 1987). However, Confucianism played a dominant role over the educational system in China for thousands of years and had a definite impact on society. This is why I have focused on it in this study.

Chinese reading teachers, of course, do not all teach in the exact same manner. Some instructors and some schools may be more progressive than others. Key schools, for example, where national experiments are conducted, have this reputation (Mei, 1985). However, national control over educational materials, curriculum content, and pedagogy, compels teachers to certain instructional approaches. This control is reinforced by the weekly political meetings, teacher training meetings, and the periodic supervision of the classrooms by

the principal or other teachers. Also, the school staff usually include a Communist party secretary. Because of this, a certain uniformity across classrooms is to be expected. In fact, accounts of Chinese classroom observations made, in the past, by other researchers (Hudson-Ross, 1990; Mei, 1985; Paine, 1990; Sheridan, 1990; Wu, 1987; Zhai, Xu, Lu & Ku, 1983), shared strong similarities with what I have observed.

Suggestions for Teaching Foreign Languages to Chinese Students

In the light of the characteristics of the Chinese students' learning background outlined throughout this study, it is my hope that the following suggestions contribute to help teachers to better adapt their methodology to their Chinese students in the foreign/second language classroom, be they teaching at home or overseas. It could help them, not only with their Chinese learners, but also with those from cultures with a Confucian heritage (such as Japan and Korea, for example). Teachers in British Columbia whose classrooms include several Asian students, may find some of the following suggestions useful to them. As for teachers working in China, the goal here is not to remove everything that might be foreign to the student — Chinese students expect their foreign teachers to teach differently from what they are used to — but to ease their transition within the new teaching and learning conceptual framework. This section is also aimed at reducing cultural misunderstandings by opening a dialogue between teacher and students, putting to good use learning strategies already in place, and introducing them to different ones. If the teacher is informed and aware of the learning style of the students, they may be better equipped to provide valuable input to help students resolve their difficulties.

I have noticed when teaching in China, that there was a gap between students' expectations and their zone of comfort with new teaching methods. They generally say that they hope their foreign teachers will teach differently from their Chinese teachers, but they often cannot pin down exactly what they mean by "differently". The answer is often simply

"teach us like you do in foreign countries". When ask to be more specific, they mention conversation rather than lectures. They expect and want less structured lessons with emphasis on "free conversation". However, they are not always comfortable with "conversation" in a classroom and the foreign teachers must be tactful in their approach, making use of what they know of the learning background of their students, their cultural and political framework. They must find ways to make use of this knowledge to stimulate conversation and interest in the content of the lessons.

Reading aloud exercises can be an effective way of teaching Chinese students to read in a foreign language and one that is meaningful to them. These exercises help them to correct their pronunciation and intonation. The teacher can also explore the Chinese idea I have explained earlier, of teaching to read "with expression" so as to understand the content and the structure of a text. A Japanese historian wrote:

> I always copy the part I'm inspired by whenever I happen to read an enlightening book, so that I may keep it with me all the time and read it aloud both in the morning and in the evening. I do not try to memorize it, but I would invariably find greater pleasure of reading if I could read it from memory. And if I could read one passage after another from memory, in the end I should be able to understand what the author wants to say without trying hard at all.

Because they engage the whole class at once, reading aloud exercises also allow group discussions. These discussions are another time at which the teacher can assess the students' understanding of the text. Richardson and Carleton (1996) suggested that alternating read-alouds with silent readings of an entire short novel in their ESL classes had encouraged students' involvement, critical thinking, expression of their emotions, and led them "to a greater appreciation of language" (p.142). Given that a judicious selection of the novel had been made, students could relate their experience to the content of the story, with the result that this approach contributed to facilitate the students adaptation to the new country. The authors summarised their experience with read-alouds in the following manner:

> Using the read-aloud approach is especially suitable because the ESL learner benefits from listening to the English language while reading along. The read-alouds highlight important issues that can generate discussion. The discussion provides practice in

language use as well as understanding about ESL issues. Discussion often is the stimulus for writing (Richardson and Carleton, 1996, p.142).

As we have seen, Chinese students are very familiar with read-alouds. It is a form of teaching that they recognize and that·can profit them on the phonological, rhetorical and communicative levels when used in a skilful manner, without excess, and by integrating other forms of language practice throughout the lesson.

Goh (1996) found that using myths, folk tales and fairy tales in her ESL adult classroom was a very convenient way of introducing students to both linguistic and cultural aspects of the written target language. As she noted, fairy tales are embedded with cultural symbols and have a convenient format for classroom use. They are short and easy to reproduce, and they can be the starter for an array of exercises, be they structural or more oriented towards communicative practice. Fairy tales in both old and modern versions are good ways also to explore changes of values in the target culture, and practice unravelling cultural codes. As we have seen, Chinese students are introduced to symbolism in texts and images from the time they are young and are also used to moralistic tales. They can find great enjoyment in analyzing these texts as a group. It can also stimulate interesting cross-cultural conversations. Many of these tales are known all over the world, but have often acquired cultural characteristics of the country and the period of time in which they were borrowed. During my previous two experiences of teaching in China, I witnessed a strong interest in story telling. Exploiting story telling and story analysis is a good means of introducing the students to modes of learning rather uncommon to them in the classroom, such as small group activities.

It is also important to discuss with the Chinese students Western works which use form rather than stated messages, to depict an experience of life, to convey a feeling or a criticism, or to represent a certain reality, opening the work to many possible interpretations. The use of form to convey meaning, is not foreign to Chinese literature (especially not in their poetry). Yet, the fact that the style of a work could be more important than its content, is much

less common in Chinese tradition than it is in the West, and many Chinese students have not been exposed to it. Students are used to read to get at culturally controlled messages. My students in the P.R.C. were often annoyed when they met with these kinds of work, even in their own culture, considering them "meaningless", or reacting by saying: "I don't think this is a good story, what's the point?" Invariably, the work would be rejected as a waste of their time. Brief but clear explanations of the Western tradition, discussions on possible intentions behind the style of these works, are useful ways of introducing what is viewed, at first hand, as nonsense and bad writing. A useful exercise used by a colleague in China[10] to remedy this problem and to lead the students attention to the usage of the characteristics of alphabetical languages, is the reading aloud of the well-known poem of Lewis Carroll, "Jabberwocky". I reproduce here the first two parts:

Jabberwocky

> 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
>   Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
> All mimsy were the borogroves,
>   And the mome raths outgrabe.
>
> "Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
>   The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
> Beware the Jubjub bird and shun
>   The frumious Bandersnatch!"

This is a good way of demonstrating how apparent nonsense can also be meaningful and how the nature of a language can create a whole range of images through words that have no recognizable meaning. The fact that words which have no meaning can be read just for the joy of their sound, is a very new experience for many of these students.

The memorization and recitation of short poems and famous quotations is another way of making use of learning strategies and habits well-known to the Chinese students, and of allowing them to appreciate and internalize ingenious or skilful use of the language. It is also a way to redirect their inclination to painstakingly memorize entire language textbooks. A

---

[10] I am indebted here to Les Ford for sharing with me this experience.

survey on the teaching of French in China reported that Chinese students and teachers viewed memorization as a necessary means of language learning, though they often complained about the monotony of learning this way (Obadia and Laplace, 1996). By choosing interesting tales, poems. or extracts of plays that they can retell to each other or act out together, memorization —something that I view as an important strategy of foreign language learning— may become less tedious and more profitable. Instead of being a solitary experience, it becomes a tool for communication activities and cultural learning.

"Traditional" teaching and learning methods are not necessarily "bad" methods. It is the task of the teacher to choose what, among the old and the new, is best suited to the learners' circumstances. Taking advantage of learning habits already in place in Chinese students in order to design meaningful lessons and ease the learners' way towards different approaches and views to teaching and learning, can certainly benefit both teachers and students.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND CLASSROOM VISITS AND REFERENCES TO PRIMARY WRITTEN AND AUDIO-VISUAL SOURCES.

FIELDWORK:

-   Interview with the principal, the grade one teacher, and two parents: Primary school annexed to university 1 - October 26, 1995 [fieldnotes].

-   Second interview with the principal and the vice-principal after class observation: Primary school annexed to university 1 - October 26, 1995 [fieldnotes].

-   Interview with the principal, two language teachers, and the secretary: Public school - March 28, 1996 [fieldnotes].

-   Interview with the principal and vice-principal: Primary school annexed to university 2 - April 9, 1996 [fieldnotes].

-   Interview with the teacher: Primary school annexed to university 2 - May 10, 1996 [interview recorded].

-   Interview with a language teacher from the public school: my home - May 12, 1996 [interview recorded].

-   Conversation with a parent about her daughter in grade one: Home of the parent - April 5, 1996 [fieldnotes].

-   Class observation: Primary school annexed to university 1 - October 26, 1995 [fieldnotes].

-   Class observation: Public school - March 28, 1996 [fieldnotes].

-   Class observation: Primary school annexed to university 1 - May 14, 1996 [fieldnotes].

CHINESE PRIMARY WRITTEN SOURCES CONSULTED:

-   People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1987). *Liù nián zhì xiǎoxué kèben - Yǔwén* [Six Year System Primary School Textbook - Chinese language], vol. 4, 7-12 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

-   People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1988). *Wǔnián zhì xiǎoxué kèben - Yǔwén* [Five Year System Primary School Textbook - Chinese language], vol. 8 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

-   People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1995a). *Jiǔnián yìwù jiàoyù liù nián zhì xiǎoxué yǔwén - Jiàoshījiàoxué yòngshū* [Nine Year Compulsory Education, Six Year Primary School System - Teachers' Manual], vol. 1 to 4 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

149

- People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1995b). *Jiu'nián yìwù jiàoyù liù nián zhì xiǎoxué jiàokèshū- Yǔwén* [Nine Year Compulsory Education, Six Year Primary School System Textbook - Chinese language], vol. 1 to 5 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

- Sinolingua (1992). *Zhōngguó Yǔwén* [Chinese Language] (2nd ed.), vol.1-12. Beijing: author.

- Wang Xiuyun (1996). *Zěnyang xuéhǎo xiǎoxué yǔwén* [How to study for the primary school language class]. Beijing: Kexue Chubanshe.

- Zhang Jian et al. (Chief ed.). (1994). *Xiǎoxué jiàoyù bǎikēquánshū* [Encyclopaedia of primary education]. Zhengzhou: Henan Education Publishing House.

AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS:

- People's Education Press (1994). *Jiu'nián yìwù jiàoyù liù- wu'nián zhì xiǎoxué jiàokèshū pèitào lùxiàng jiàocái- Yǔwén* [Nine Year Compulsory Education, Six and Five Year Primary School System Textbook, audio-visual teaching materials - Chinese language], Tape 1 and 2. Beijing: Author.

- Jiangxi 3 S Xin Wenhua Shiye Chuandong Zhongxin. (1994). *Xiǎo xuéshēng jiātíng xuéxí fǔdǎo —Yǔwén* [Primary school students home tutoring—language]. Tape 1 to 6 (Grade one to three). Jiangxi Yinxiang Chubanshe.

汉字笔画名称表

Table of Character Strokes and their Names

笔画 Stroke	名称 Name of Stroke	例字 Example	笔画 Stroke	名称 Name of Stroke	例字 Example
、	点 dot	六	し	竖提 vertical rising	民
一	横 horizontal	十	㇇	横钩 horizontal hook	农
丨	竖 vertical	中	𠃌	横折 horizontal corner	口
丿	撇 left falling	八	㇆	横折钩 horizontal corner hook	月
乀	捺 right falling	人	乛	横撇 horizontal left falling	态
ノ	提 rising	典	㇊	撇折 left falling corner	去
亅	竖钩 vertical hook	小	く	撇点 left falling dot	好
)	弯钩 curved hook	于	乙	横折弯钩 horizontal corner curved hook	九
㇂	斜钩 oblique hook	我	㇗	竖折 vertical corner	山
㇃	卧钩 reclining hook	心	𠃍	竖折折钩 vertical double corner hook	马
㇄	竖弯 curved vertical	四	𠄌	横折折撇 horizontal double corner left falling	逃
㇄	竖弯钩 curved vertical hook	儿			

写字笔顺规则表

Stroke Order and Rules of Character Construction

规　　　　　则 Rule	例字 Example	笔　　　　　顺 Stroke Order
先　横　后　竖 Horizontal before vertical	十	一 十
	下	一 丁 下
先　撇　后　捺 Left falling before right falling	八	丿 八
	天	二 天
从　上　到　下 From top to bottom	三	一 二 三
	尖	小 尖
从　左　到　右 From left to right	地	土 地
	你	亻 你
从　外　到　内 From the outside to the inside	月	刀 月
	向	勹 向
先　里　头　后　封　口 Inside before closing	日	冂 日 日
	国	冂 国 国
先　中　间　后　两　边 Center before the two sides	小	亅 小 小
	水	亅 水 水

wǔ xīng hóng qí shì

wǒ men de guó qí·

guó qí hé tài yáng

yì tóng shēng qǐ.

The five star red flag is our national flag.
Our flag and the sun rise at once.
I am Chinese.
I love the five star red flag.

wǒ shì zhōng guó rén
我 是 中 国 人。

wǒ ài wǔ xīng hóng qí
我 爱 五 星 红 旗。

我　是　爱

中国　五星红旗

日——是星　"——爱　口——国
我 是 爱 国 星

看图读拼音识字 1

yī piàn yī piàn yòu yī piàn,

liǎng piàn sān piàn sì wǔ piàn,

liù piàn qī piàn bā jiǔ piàn,

xiāng shān hóng yè

hóng mǎn tiān.

yī   sān   wǔ   qī   jiǔ

一　三　五　七　九

一　丨　丁　乚　丿　乙

一　三　五　七　九

一　丿　开 五　一 七 丿 九

One leaf after another and one more leaf,
two leaves, three leaves, four, five leaves,
six leaves, seven leaves, eight, nine leaves,
the red leaves of Xiang Shan mountain
fill the sky with red.

[The characters below are the odd numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 9]

35

1 yòng xià miàn de zì, zǔ liǎng gè cí yǔ
用 下 面 的 字, 各 组 两 个 词 语。

讲 ＜
究 ＜
达 ＜
倒 ＜

2 bǎ néng dā pèi de cí yǔ yòng xiàn lián qǐ lái
把 能 搭 配 的 词 语 用 线 连 起 来

倒　　汽车　　一张　　马车
把　　骑马　　一辆　　大米
学　　淹水　　一袋　　地图

讲 究 达 张 汽 袋
冻 绘 烈 然 简 辆 骑 踦 倒

Translation of the exercises:

1. Use the characters below, and make up two words from each.

2. Draw a line between the words which can be associated.

4

jiǔ — jiǎng（讲　究）
dà — dào（达　到）
zhǎng — zhòng（张　望）
qì — chē（汽　车）
dài — dài（代　袋）
dòng — dòng（冻　冷）

huì — huì huà（会 — 绘（画））
liè — liè（列 — 烈）
jiǎn — jiǎn（简 — 问）
liǎng — chē（两 — 辆（车））
qí — mǎ（骑 — 骑（马））
dào — shuǐ（倒 — 倒（水））

APPENDIX 7: FIRST LESSON OF THE GRADE ONE TEXTBOOK

Teaching requirements:

- When teaching this lesson, make students feel very proud and happy to have become a primary school student and to live in our socialist country.
- Let them know that the task of a student is to study, and so to accomplish their task they must be filled with confidence regarding school life, they must be willing to come to school, they must like studying, and must want to become a good student.

Content and teaching guidelines:

- The meaning of the picture in the first lesson "I am a primary school student", is the little friends of each ethnic groups of our country such as Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, Tibetan, Miao, Uygur, Kazkh, Korean, and so on, are carrying their schoolbag, they are wearing new clothes of all kinds and are walking towards school, towards the future. The back scenery shows the Great Wall which symbolises the greatness of our country. In the air, the doves of peace are flying, symbolizing little children growing in happiness in the surroundings of our country. They are all the future of our country. In class, first ask students to carefully look at the picture, afterwards connect it to reality and tell them why they must go to school. Ask them what their impressions are about having become a primary school student, so that they understand from the beginning that starting school is for building the future of the country and to defend it.

- When guiding students to look and talk about the picture, teachers can first lead students to observe near and far details, asking them what is drawn on the picture, and also to make a special effort to observe the characters. Then teachers can conduct a speaking practice, [by asking] for example: Which aspects tell you that they all are primary school students? Why aren't their clothes not all the same? Can you tell which ethnic groups each little friend belongs to? Where are they going holding hands? How do they feel and how do you know?

- While observing the pictures, get the students to understand the following: From now on, they are not common children but primary school students. Every day, they will go to school their school bag on their back. At school, there are lots of classmates and that everyone is united in brotherly affection, and that together they will receive the help and education of their teachers, learn all kinds of knowledge, and grow up to be a useful citizen of our country. Throughout this lesson, make students feel very proud and happy to have become primary school students.

- To tie the content of the lesson to reality, you can ask: How do you feel the first time you come to school? Do you like coming to school? Why? Do you know what one must do to become a good student?

- To consolidate the effect of teaching, the teacher can also teach a song that children can recite accompanied of gestures such as: The sun shines in the empty sky, the little birds sing chirp, chirp. I am a first grade primary school student, and every day I come to school on time.

Source: People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1995a). *Jiu nian yiwu jiaoyu liu nian zhi xiaoxue yuwen - Jiaoshi jiaoxue yongshu* [Nine Year Compulsory Education, Six Year Primary School System - Teachers' Manual], vol. 1 to 4 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

APPENDIX 8: CLASS OBSERVATION - MARCH 28, 1996

PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE CITY.

The principal of the school is a member of the provincial primary school research committee on language. She has written an article on the relationship between home education and good interpersonal relationships. A woman in her fifties, she seems quite self-assured and outspoken. She has a set phrase for every occasion. My interpreter, whose wife is a teacher in this school, describes her as "powerful" and it seems that some teachers are unhappy with her because she tends to control everything.

We go into her office and she apologizes for its state. The wife of my interpreter goes to the stove and starts sweeping the coal bricks and coal dust around the coal burner. The principal calls me an "expert", and gives me the book containing her article. I meet with the young woman teacher whose class I'm going to observe. She must be in her twenties and is dressed very simply compared to the more formal outfit I've noticed on older teachers. We move out of the principal's office into the interior yard to go to the classroom. The school is surrounded by the traditional wall and consists of a three-storey building forming a "u" shape each side opening on the interior yard. I inquire about the posters of people glued to the walls, on the ground floor of the school: they are 'heroes' offered for emulation, whose lifetime provides an example for children. The most popular of them in the new China is certainly Lei Feng, the good liberation army soldier known for his good deeds and dedication in helping others. He is the leading model for students of all levels, but also for the socialist citizen in general. Among the other posters, there are the historian Si MaQian, Cai Lun (to whom the invention of paper is attributed), Beethoven and others.

The classroom offers a real contrast with the classrooms I visited in other schools which were much more modest and old. This classroom is very big and seems to have a system for heating with fans on the ceiling for hot summer days. In the front of the class, there is the teacher's podium, with the blackboard behind. Facing the teacher's desk, eight rows of student desks are arranged in groups of four. On the left corner, there are installations for videos. I am sitting on the side of the classroom between the two doors with the interpreter, his wife, the principal, and the secretary. The room is large and in the back, there is an amphitheatre. The class is newly painted in yellow and white. It is very clean. There are no decoration of any kind on the classroom walls.

Altogether, I count 60 students in the classroom. It is the biggest class I have seen so far. The others had around 40 students each.

The class I will observe is a reading comprehension and speaking class, the first part of lesson 13. Two class periods will be spent on this lesson. In the next class, there will be writing exercises.

When we come in, the children are singing in chorus, making identical gestures. The class starts at 8:00 when the bell rings.

The teacher says: "Class starts"
Class (stands up): "Hi teacher"
T.: "What is the lesson today?"
Class (in chorus): "13: Two little lions"
T: "Right. We will now study lesson 13."

The teacher reads the whole lesson once, with a lot of expression in her voice. Students hold their book upright on their desk just like in the picture of their textbook. Sometimes, one student will fold the cover page underneath. All seem attentive.

After reading, the teacher asks students to close their books. She glues a big picture (same picture as the one in the textbook) on the blackboard.

The teacher asks students general questions about the text.

T.: "Look at the picture. Which one is Mama Lion?" (She asks different students to come to the front to identify the characters of the story. A little girl points at the wrong lion.)

T.: "Is it the lazy lion? Who is it?"

(The little girl hesitates and says something which is inaudible)

T.: "No, this is the hardworking lion, isn't it? Right." (She tells her to go back to her desk.)

T.: "Which one do you think is lazy lion?" (Students raise their hand like for a military salutation, fingers pointing at their head. Apparently, this prevents them from waving their arms in the air. One student is chosen to come to the front to identify the lazy lion.)

T. "Very good", she encourages him.

T: "Now open your book" (She asks one student at a time to read aloud the beginning of the lesson. Then the whole class reads aloud in chorus. The teacher asks questions on the part they've just read.)

There is always a little bit of noise coming from the chairs (students are moving in their seats) and I wonder how the teacher can hear what the students are saying. Aside from that, they are amazingly disciplined and I haven't seen even one talking to another one during class. The teacher does not seem to have to do discipline.

The teacher asks questions in order to get students to use the new words in their answers. She writes the key words, phrases and expressions on the board. By the end of the class, it looks like this:

1 3 两只小狮子 (in white chalk)
[13: Two little lions]

一只   滚扑撕咬   另一只
[one + measure word for lion]   [to roll, to rush, to tear, to bite]   [another one]

懒 洋洋   什么也不干 →   1。不吃苦
[lazy] [complacent]   [does nothing]   [doesn't endure hardships]

2。靠父母
[depends on his parents]

靠自己
[relies on himself]

学本领   真正的狮子 (in red chalk)
[learns skills]   [real lion]

158

The chart highlights the comparison between the two lions, and at the same time, the structure of the text. The moral of the story, "to become a real lion", is written in red.

The teacher is a very expressive young woman. She looks like she received drama training.

She asks individual students to read aloud a section of the text, then the class reads aloud the whole text again.

The teacher asks questions about the text then about expressions. In response to an answer well-expressed from a little boy, she praises him: "Well said". She asks the class to applaud. They applaud with two rhythmic claps. The principal sitting beside me comments: "This boy is very clever". (She'll tell me later that his father is a pilot). Students seem to be very eager to answer the teacher's questions. There are always at least 30% of the students who raised their hand to answer every time, but it is difficult to assess. Last class visited was smaller and it seems that it had more hands up.

T : "Are we going to read what lazy little lion said?"
Class together reads aloud what little lion said.

The writing on the board is much smaller and hard to read than the last class I visited last fall (at the end of October), and I am surprised students can read them. No Pinyin is written on the board; only characters. From a distance, the words look bunched up together and the teacher uses a red chalk to highlight the words "real lion". No instruction on stroke order is given in this class: it will be taken care of in the next part of lesson 13 (next class). This class focuses on comprehension questions, read aloud exercises, and moral education.

The teacher reads aloud the whole text with the students once more. Then they close their book. The teacher reviews the main points of the text, then asks:

T : "Which little lion do you like best and why?"
She asks individual students who all unanimously like hardworking lion better.
T: " Did the lazy lion make a mistake?"

My interpreter, who is sitting beside me, explains at that moment that with the law of the one-child, students must rely on themselves alone because when their parents are old, the child must take care of them. He adds that Chinese often compare their parents with the king of the jungle just like in the story and that the story aims at telling students how to behave and what to think or how to think.

The bell rings. End of the class. The students have not moved. The teacher concludes:
T: "You must rely on yourself and develop your own skills. If we want to develop ourselves, what do we have to do?"
S1: "Become a good scientist and earn a lot of money" (laughter among the adults).
S2: "Have culture, and ...(inaudible)"
...

T: "All right. The class is dismissed. Let's say goodbye to the teachers."
Class in chorus: "Goodbye teachers."

Translation of the textbook lesson and of the following exercises

13   Two Small Lions

Mama Lion gave birth to two small lions.
One small lion, all day, practices rolling, rushing forward, tearing, biting; he works very
hard. The other one, lazily and complacently, basks in the sun and does nothing.
A small tree asks the lazy lion: "Why don't you practise your skills?"
He raises his head and slowly says mumbling: "I really don't want to work that hard!"
The small tree says: "How will you survive later then?"
The lazy lion says: "My dad and my mom are the kings of the forest. I can live very well by
relying on their talents and status!"
Mama lion heard these words and says to the lazy lion: "Son, on whom will you depend
when we will be old and of no use? You also must painstakingly practise your skills. Only
when you master life skills, can you become a real lion!"

1. Look at the Pinyin and read the text aloud. Why doesn't lazy lion practise his skills? How
does he say it? Is it right?

2. Listen and write the words below. Then practise speaking using the words with a dot.

after   to live   how
must   talent   real

3. Read aloud the sentences below and explain the meaning of the words with a dot.

(1) The little tree asks the lazy lion: " Why don't you practise your skills?"
(2) Lazy lion says: "I really don't want to work that hard!"
(3) Mama lion says: "Only when you master life skills, can you become a real lion!"

4. Divide the roles and read the text aloud.

Speak
Do you like working? What kinds of house chores can you do? Choose one and tell the
others.

13 两只小狮子

狮子妈妈生下了两只小狮子。

一只狮子整天练习滚、扑、撕、咬，非常刻苦。另一只却懒洋洋地晒太阳，什么也不干。

一棵小树问懒狮子："你怎么不练功啊？"

他抬起头来，慢吞吞地说："我才不去练那么苦呢！"

小树说："那你以后怎样生活呢？"

懒狮子说："我和妈妈会他他们的本领和地位。我是林中的大王，凭着他会生活得很好！"

这话被狮子妈妈听到了，他对懒狮子说："孩子，将来我们老了，不用功了，你靠谁呢？你也应该靠自己学会生活的本领，才能成为真正的狮子！"

1　看 拼 音 读 课 文。懒 狮 子 为 什 么 不
练 功？他 是 怎 么 说 的？对 不 对？

2　听 写 下 面 的 词 语。再 用 带 点 的 词
练 习 说 话。

以后　　　生活　　　怎么

应该　　　本领　　　真正

3　读 下 面 的 句 子，说 说 带 点 的 词 语
的 意 思。

(1) 小树问懒狮子："你怎么不练功啊？"

(2) 懒狮子说："我才不去吃那苦头呢！"

(3) 狮子妈妈说："自己学会生活的本领，才
能成为真正的狮子！"

4　分 角 色 朗 读 课 文。

| 棵 | 才 | 以 | 活 | 本 | 领 | 话 | 对 | 老 | 应 | 该 |

说 话

你 爱 劳 动 吗？你 会 做 哪 些 家 务
事？选 一 件 讲 给 大 家 听。

43

6

xiǎo liàng zài shàng miàn,

dà míng zài xià miàn,

wǒ zài zhōng jiān.

wǒ xià qù le,

dà míng shàng lái le,

xiǎo liàng zài nǎ lǐ?

Xiao Liang is above.
Da Ming is below.
I am in the middle.
I am going down.
Da Ming is going up.
Where is Xiao Liang?

Chinese characters (from left to right):

above(also going up)
middle
below (also going down)
big
small
grammatical particle

shàng	zhōng	xià	dà	xiǎo	le
上	中	下	大	小	了

上	中	下	大	小	了

11

List of References

Adams, Marilyn J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print* . Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Alleton, Viviane. (1970). *L'écriture chinoise* [Chinese Writing] (rev. ed.). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Alptekin, Cem. (1988). Chinese formal schemata in ESL composition. *British Journal of Language Teaching*, 26(2), 112-116.

Ames, Roger T. (1989). Meaning as imaging: prolegomena to a Confucian epistemology. In E. Deutsch (Ed.), *Culture and Modernity: East-West philosophic perspecctives* (pp.227-244). University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu.

Anderson, Richard C. (!985). Impressions of comprehension instruction in China. In J. Mei (Ed.), *Reading in China: Report of the U.S. Reading Study Team to the People's Republic of China* (pp.68-76) (Research/Technical Report No. 143). New York: National Committee on United States-China Relations. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 054).

Athey, Irene. (1985). Chinese attitudes towards education. Mei, June. (Ed.), *Reading in China: Report of the U.S. Reading Study Team to the People's Republic of China* (pp.7-22) (Research/Technical Report No. 143). New York: National Committee on United States-China Relations. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 054).

Beck, Isabel L. (1985). Structure and freedom in some Chinese classes. Mei, June. (Ed.), *Reading in China: Report of the U.S. Reading Study Team to the People's Republic of China* (pp.36-47) (Research/Technical Report No. 143). New York: National Committee on United States-China Relations. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 054).

Bernstein, T. P. (1977). *Up to the mountains and down to the villages: The transfer of youth from urban to rural China* . New Haven: Yale.

Butler, Susan R. (1976). Reading problems of Chinese children. In L. Tarnapol & M. Tarnapol (Eds.), *Reading disabilities, an international perspective* (pp115-130). Baltimore: University Park Press.

Carter Thomas F. & Goodrich, L.C. (1955). *The invention of printing in China and its spread westward*. New York: Ronald Press.

Central Institute of Education Science, Teaching Methodology Department (1983-84). Concentrated caracter recognition method at Chuangzhou Buoailu Primary School. *Chinese Education*, 16(4), 31-38.

Chai, Ch'u, Chai, & Winberg. (eds.-trans.) (1965). *The sacred Books of Confucius and other Confucian Classics*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc.

Chan Wing-tsit. (trans.) (1963). *Instructions for practical living and other Neo-Confucian writings by Wang Yang-Ming*. New York: Columbia University Press.

164

Chan Wing-tsit. (1989). *Chu Hsi. New studies*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Chang Lan & Shang Zhi. (1990). How shall our country bring about modernization when there are several hundred million illiterate people in the countryside? *Chinese Education*, 23(2), 45-51.

Chao Yuen Ren. (1968). *Language and symbolic systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chen Hsuan-Chih. (1992). Reading comprehension in Chinese: Implications from character reading times. In H.C. Chen & Ovid J.L. Tzeng (Eds.) *Language processing in Chinese* (pp. 175-205). North-Holland: Elsevier Science Publishers.

Chen Hsuan-Chih, & Chen May-Jane. (1988). Directional scanning in Chinese reading. In I.M. Liu, H.C. Chen & M.J. Chen (Eds.) *Cognitive aspects of the Chinese language* (Vol.1, pp. 15-26). Hong Kong: Asian Research Service.

Chen Hsuan-Chih, & Tzeng, Ovid J.L. (1992). *Language processing in Chinese*. North-Holland: Elsevier Science Publishers.

Chou En-lai (1958). Current tasks of reforming the written language. In *Reform of the Chinese written language* (pp.7-29) [Transcription of the speech delivered at a meeting sponsored by the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference January 10, 1958]. Peking: Foreign Languages Press.

Clay, Marie M. (1989). Concepts about print in English and other languages. *The Reading Teacher*, 42(4), 268-276.

Clay, Marie M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Auckland: Heinemann Education.

Cleverley, John. (1991). "On the evidence before me..."—Putting the case for rural educational reform in China. *Comparative Education*, 27(1), 53-60.

Cousquer, Eliane. (1990). Langue scientifique et langue chinoise [Scientific language and Chinese language]. In A.A. Obadia (Ed.), *Premier colloque international de l'enseignement du français en Chine: communications choisies* (pp.91-104). Burnaby, B.C.: Les Presses de l'Université Simon Fraser.

Cui Ning. (1996, Jan. 22). Unqualified head teachers must go back to school. *China Daily*, p.2.

Cui Ning. (1996, April 20). Plan increases school attendance. *China Daily*, p.2.

Cui Ning. (1996, May 8). State launches education drive. *China Daily*, p.1.

Dai Baoyun, & Lu Jiping. (1985). Reading reform in Chinese primary schools. *Prospects*, 15(1), 103-110.

Davin, Delia. (1991). The early childhood education of the only child generation in urban China. In I. Epstein (Ed.), *Chinese education—Problems, policies, and prospects* (pp. 42-65). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Dawson, Raymond. (1978). *The Chinese experience*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

DeBary, Wm Theodore. (1989). Zhu Hsi's aims as an educator. In W.T. DeBary & J.W. Chaffee, *Neo-Confucian education: The formative stage* (pp.186-218). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

DeBary, Wm Theodore. (1991). *The trouble with Confucianism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

DeFrancis, John. (1984). *The Chinese language — Fact and fantasy*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

DeFrancis, John. (1989). *Visible speech — The diverse oneness of writing systems*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Dien, Albert E. (1960). Yen Chih-T'ui (531-591+): A buddho-Confucian. In A.F. Wright & D. Twitchett (eds.), *Confucian personalities* (pp. 43-64). Stanford: Stanford Studie in the Civilizations of Eastern Asia.

Doolin, Dennis, & Ridley, Charles P. (1968). *The genesis of a model citizen in communist China: Translation and analysis of selected Chinese communist elementary school readers*. (Final report no. 7-1137). Standford, CA: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 022 780).

Dumont, René. (1984). *Finis les lendemains qui chantent...2 : La Chine décollectivise* [End of the singing tomorrows...2: The decollectivisation of China]. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

Dzau, Y.F. (1990). *English in China*. Hong Kong: API Press Ltd.

Elman, Benjamin, A., & Woodside, Alexander (eds.) (1994). *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*. Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press.

Emerson, Robert, Fretz, Rachel, & Shaw, Linda. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Erickson, D., Mattingly, I.G, & Turvey, M.T. (1972). Phonetic activity in reading — An experiment with Kanji. *Journal of Acoustical Society of America, 52, 132.*

Everett, Roger. (1990). A theoretically based evaluation of intensive reading. In Y.F Dzau (Ed.), *English in China* (pp.175-181). Hong Kong: API Press Ltd.

Fong Yeou-Lan. (1985). *Précis d'histoire de la philosophie chinoise* (2nd ed., also published by MacMillan Co. in 1948 under the title, *History of Chinese Philosophy*). Paris: Payot-Le Mail.

Gao Zhenyun. (1996). Yǔwén huódòngkè de rènshi yú shíjiàn [Knowledge and practice of the language activity class]. *Xiǎoxué Yǔwén Jiàoxué* [Primary School Language Instruction], 11, 21-22.

Gardner, Daniel K. (1986). *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh—Neo-Confucian reflection on the Confucian canon.* Cambridge, MA: Council East Asian Studies Harvard University Press.

Gernet, Jacques. (1972). *Le monde chinois* (rev. ed.) (English transl. by J.R. foster available under the title, *A history of Chinese civilization* , Cambridge University Press, 1982). Paris: Armand Colin.

Giasson, Jocelyne. (1990). *La compréhension en lecture* [Reading comprehension]. Boucherville, Qc: Gaëtan Morin Editeur.

Giasson, Jocelyne, & Thériault, Jacqueline. (1983). *Apprentissage et enseignement de la lecture* [Learning and Teaching of Reading]. Montréal: Editions Ville-Marie.

Gleitman, L.R., & Rozin, P. (1977). The structure and acquisition of reading 1: Relations between orthographies and the structure of language. In A.S. Reber & D.L. Scarborough (Eds.), *Toward a psychology of reading* (pp. 1-53). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.

Goh, Lina (1996). *Using myths, folktales and fairy tales in the ESL classroom.* Unpublished M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.

Granet, Marcel. (1968). *La pensée chinoise* [Chinese thought] (1st ed. La Renaissance du Livre, 1934). Paris: Editions Albin Michel.

Guthrie, John T. (1985). Reading activities of children and adults. In J. Mei (Ed.), *Reading in China: Report of the U.S. Reading Study Team to the People's Republic of China* (pp.95-106) (Research/Technical Report No. 143). New York: National Committee on United States-China Relations. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 054).

Hanyu Da Zidian Bianji Weiyuanhui (comp.)(1989). *Hànyǔ dàzìdiǎn* [Unabridged dictionary of Chinese characters], vol. 7. Wuhan: Hubei Cishu Chubanshe.

Harste, Jerome C. (1989). *New policy guidelines for reading: Connecting research and practice.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Hatta Takeshi, & Hirose Takehiko. (1995). Reading disabilities in Japan: Implications from the study of hemisphere functioning. In I. Taylor & D.R. Olson (Eds.), *Scripts and Literacy—Reading and learning to read alphabets, syllabaries and characters* (pp.231-246). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Hayhoe, Ruth, & Bastid, Marianne. (1987). *China's education and the industrialized world—Studies in cultural transfer.* London: M.E. Sharpe.

Hladczuk, John, & William Eller. (1992). *International handbook of reading education.* Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Hladczuk, John, William, Eller, & Hladczuk, Sharon. (1989). *Literacy/Illiteracy in the world: A bibliography.* New York: Greenwood Press.

Hu Reiwen, Mao Honxiang, & Jiang Minghe. (1992-93). Issues in Educational finance in our country. *Chinese Education & Society,* 25(4), 54-71.

Hudson-Ross, Sally, & Dong Yuren. (1990). Literacy learning as a reflection of language and culture: Chinese elementary school education. *The Reading Teacher*. 44(2), 110-123.

Hung. D.L., & Tzeng, O.J.L. (1981). Orthographic variation and visual information processing. *Psychological Bulletin*, 90, 377-414.

Illiteracy. (1996, March 11). *China Daily*. p.4.

Jiáng Shanye, & Li Bo. (1985). A glimpse at reading instruction in China. *The Reading Teacher*, 38(8), 762-766.

Jiangxi 3 S Xin Wenhua Shiye Chuandong Zhongxin. (1994). *Xiǎo xuéshēng jiātīng xuéxí fǔdǎo — Yǔwén 1* [Primary school students home tutoring — language 1]. Jiangxi Yinxiang Chubanshe.

Ju Daushen, & Jackson, Nancy Ewald. (1995). Graphic and phonological processing in Chinese character identification. *Journal of Reading Behaviour*, 27(3), 299-313.

Juel, C. (1988). Learning to read and write: A longitudinal study of 54 children from first through fourth grades. *Journal of Child Psychology*, 80, 437-447.

Jullien, François. (1989). *Procès ou création* [Process of creation]. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

Kavanagh, J.F., and Mattingly, I.G. (Eds.) (1972). *Language by ear and by eye: The relationships between speech and reading*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Kolers, Paul A. (1970). Three stages in reading. In H. Levin and J. P. Williams (Eds.), *Basic studies on reading*. New York: Basic Books.

Kulp, Daniel H.II. (1925). *Country life in South China — The sociology of familism, vol. 1: Phenix Village, Kwantung, China*. New York: Paragon Book Gallery, Ltd.

Kun Shao. (1990). *Developing effective methodology for teaching EFL reading comprehension in China*. Unpublished M.Ed. project, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC.

Kwong, Julia. (1985). Changing political culture and changing curriculum: An analysis of language textbooks in the People's Republic of China, *Comparative Education*, 21(2), 197-208.

Lam, Agnes S.L., Perfetti Charles A., & Bell Laura. (1991). Automatic phonetic transfer in bidialectical reading. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 12, 299-311.

Lau, D.C. (trans.) (1992). *Confucius — The Analects* [3rd. ed.]. Hong Kong: the Chinese University Press.

Lee Shin-ying, Stigler, James W., & Stevenson, Harold W. (1986). Beginning reading in Chinese and English. In B. Foorman & A. Siegel (Eds.), *Acquisition of reading skills: Cultural constraints and cognitive universals* (pp. 123-150). Hillsdale, NJ:

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lee Shin-ying, Uttal, J.H., & Chen Chuansheng. (1995). Writing systems and acquisition of reading in American, Chinese, and Japanese first-graders. In I. Taylor & D.R. Olson (Eds.), *Scripts and Literacy — Reading and learning to read alphabets, syllabaries and characters* (pp.247-263). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Lee Wing On. (1996). The cultural context for Chinese learners: Conceptions of learning in the Confucian tradition. In D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs (eds.) *The Chinese learner: cultural, psychological and contextual influences* (pp.25-41). Hong Kong & Melbourne: Comparative Education Research Centre & The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd.

Legge, James. (trans.) (1966). The Great Learning. *The sacred books of China: The texts of Confucianism* [First edited in 1879-85 by Clarendon, Oxford]. Delhi: M. Banarsidars.

Leong, C.K. (1978). Learning to read in English and Chinese: Some psycholinguistic and cognitive considerations. In D. Feitelson (Ed.).*Cross-cultural perspectives on reading and reading research* (pp.157-173). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Leung, Angela K. C. (1994). Elementary education in the Lower Yantze region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Benjamin A. Elman & A. Woodside (eds.), *Education and society in Late Imperial China — 1600-1900* (pp.381-416). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Li, Charles N. & Thompson, Sandra A. (1984). *Mandarin Chinese — A functional reference grammar.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Li Dejin, & Cheng Meizhen. (1988). *A practical Chinese grammar for foreigners.* Beijing: Sinolingua.

Li Sheng fang, Han Zhongshan, & Zhang Shuhua. (1994). *Zhōngwài jiàoyùjiā xuǎnjiè* [Introduction to Chinese and foreign educators]. Zhengzhou: Henan Chubanshe.

Lin, Huey Ya. (1988). A Confucian theory of Human development. In R. Murray Thomas (ed.), *Oriental theories of human development.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Liu Jiwu. (1992). China's literacy education today. *International Journal of Lifellong Education,* 11(4), 335-339.

Liu, Stella S.F. (1978). Decoding and comprehension in reading Chinese. In D. Feitelson (Ed.).*Cross-cultural perspectives on reading and reading research* (pp.144-156). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Ma Chenguang. (1996, May 31). NPC starts probe of education funding. *China Daily,* p.1.

Mae Chu-Chang. (1985). Issues in literacy for a bilingual population: The case of China. In J. Mei (Ed.). *Reading in China: Report of the U.S. Reading Study Team to the People's Republic of China* (Research/Technical Report No. 143) (pp.77-85). New York: National Committee on United States-China Relations. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 054).

Makita, Kiyoshi. (1968). The rarity of reading disability in Japanese children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 38, 599-614.

Makita, Kiyoshi. (1974). Reading disability and the writing system. In J.E. Merritt (Ed.). *New horizons in reading*. Newark, Del.: IRA Press.

Malmquist, Eve (comp.). (1982). *Handbook on comparative reading: An annotated bibliography and some viewpoints on university courses in comparative reading*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Margouliès, Georges. (1957). *La Langue et l'écriture chinoises* [Chinese language and writing]. Paris: Payot.

Martin, Roberta. (1975). The socialization of children in China and Taiwan: An analysis of elementary school textbooks. *China Quaterly*, 62, 242-262. Also reprinted under the same title in P. Altbach, R. Arnove, & G. Kelly (Eds.), *Comparative Education* (pp.137-156). New York: MacMillan, 1982.

Marton, Ference, Dall'Alba, Gloria, & Kun Tse Lai. (1996). Memorizing and understanding: The key to the paradox? In D. Watkins & J. Biggs (Eds.), *The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological, and contextual influences* (pp. 69-83). Hong Kong & Melbourne: Comparative Education Research Centre & The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd.

Marton, Ference & Saljo R. (1976). On qualitative differences in learning - 1: Outcome and process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46, 4-11.

Mei, June. (Ed.). (1985). *Reading in China: Report of the U.S. Reading Study Team to the People's Republic of China* (Research/Technical Report No. 143). New York: National Committee on United States-China Relations. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 054).

Meyer, Charles. (1990). Intensive reading: Some practical strategies. In Y.F. Dzau (Ed.), *English in China* (pp.164-181). Hong Kong: API Press Ltd.

Miao Xiaochun. (1992). China (trans. by J. Wang). In J. Hladczuk & E. William (Eds.), *International handbook of reading education* (pp.77-91). Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press.

The Ministry of Education promulgates regulations for primary and secondary students (trial draft). (1980-1981). *Chinese Education*, 13(3-4), 99-103.

Mote, Frederick. (1971). *Intellectual Foundation of China*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Muthwa-Kuehn, Thokozile B. (1996). *A post-apartheid framework — Preparing teachers of English as a second language for South Africa historically Black secondary schools*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.

Namekawa, Michio. (1977). Reading in the Oriental way of thinking. *Journal of Reading*, 20(6), 482-489.

Obadia, André A. & Laplace, Linda. (1996). Opinions des professeurs et des étudiants sur l'enseignement du français en Chine [Opinions of teachers and students on the teaching of French in China]. *Dialogues et cultures*, 40, 21-31.

Paine, Lynn . (1990). The teacher as virtuoso: A Chinese model for teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 92(1), 49-81.

Parker, Franklin, & Parker, Betty June. (1986). *Education in the People's Republic of China, past and present—An annotated bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1987). *Liù nián zhì xiǎoxué kèběn - Yǔwén* [Six Year System Primary School Textbook - Chinese language], vol. 4, 7-12 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1988). *Wǔnián zhì xiǎoxué kèběn - Yǔwén* [Five Year System Primary School Textbook - Chinese language], vol. 8 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1995a). *Jiǔnián yìwù jiàoyù liù nián zhì xiǎoxué yǔwén - Jiàoshī jiàoxué yòngshū* [Nine Year Compulsory Education, Six Year Primary School System - Teachers' Manual], vol. 1 to 4 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

People's Education Press Primary Language Bureau (1995b). *Jiǔnián yìwù jiàoyù liù nián zhì xiǎoxué jiàokèshū - Yǔwén* [Nine Year Compulsory Education, Six Year Primary School System Textbook - Chinese language], vol. 1 to 5 (2nd edition). Beijing: Author.

Pepper, Susan. (1991). Post-Mao reforms in Chinese education: Can the ghosts of the past be laid to rest? In I. Epstein (Ed.), *Chinese education: Problems, policies, and prospects* (pp.1-41). New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Perfetti, C.A., Beck, I., Bell, L., & Hughes, C. (1987). Phonemic knowledge and learning to read are reciprocal: A longitudinal study of first grade children. *Herrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 33, 283-319.

Peterson, Glen. (1994). Recent trends in literacy studies and their application to China. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 28(2), 138-152.

Ping Hanci. (1994). *Perspectives on Chinese EFL students' reading performance* . Unpublished M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC.

Pope, Lillie. (1982). Reading instruction in modern China. *The Reading Teacher* , 35(6), 688-694.

Qin Ying (ed.) (1992). *The Four Books —The Chinese-English bilingual series of Chinese Classics*. Changsha: Hunan Chubanshe.

Rasnak, Mary Ann et al. (1989). *Comparative reading: An annotated bibliography* (College Reading and Learning Assistance Technical Report no.88-05). Georgia State

University, Northern Illinois University, and University of Georgia College Reading/Study Skills Programs.

Rawski, Evelyn S. (1979). *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Reder, Stephen. (1990, March). Practice engagement theory: A sociocultural approach to literacy across languages and cultures. Author's manuscript, paper presented at the Third Gutenberg Conference on Literacy Across Languages and Cultures, Ithaca, NY.

Richardson, Judy S., & Carleton, Lee. (1996). A read-aloud for students of English as a Second Language. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 40(2), 140-143.

Rosen, Stanley. (1982). *Red guard factionalism and the cultural revolution in Guangzhou*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview.

Rozin, P., Poritsky, S., & Sotsky, R. (1971). American children with reading problems can easily learn to read English represented in Chinese characters. *Science*, 171, 1264-1267.

Sampson, Gloria P. (1990). Teaching English literacy using Chinese strategies. *TESL Talk*, 20(1), 126-138.

Samuels, S.J., La Berge, D.& Bremer, C.D. (1978). Units of word recognition: Evidence for developmental changes. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 17, 715-720.

Searle, Barbara W., Mertaugh, Michael, Read, Anthony, & Cohen, Philip. (1988). *Improving the quality of textbooks in China* (World Bank Discussion Paper no.30). Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Shanghai, Zhejiang, Beijing, and Tianjin joint writing group for the design of educational materials. (1985). Six-year elementary school language program: Character, word, sentence, article; Listen, speak, read, write. *Chinese Education*, 18(2), 86-99.

Shen Anping. (1994). Teacher education and national development in China. *Journal of Education*, 176(2), 57-71.

Sheridan, Marcia E. (1983). Reading disabilities: Can we blame the written language? *Journal of Reading Disabilities*, 16(2), 81-86.

Sheridan, Marcia E. (1985). The continuing debate on Chinese characters: A response to Zeng Xingchu. *Chinese Education*, 18(2), 3-20.

Sheridan, Marcia E. (1990). Primary Chinese language instruction in the People's Republic of China. *Reading Psychology: An International Quarterly*, 11, 141-150.

Sheridan, Marcia E. (1992a). *An analysis of Chinese primary reading and writing textbooks in the People's Republic of China* (Research/Technical Report no. 143). Indiana: Indiana University at South Bend. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 347 514).

Sheridan, Marcia E. (1992b). A comparison of reading methods in the People's Republic of China and the United States. *Research in Education, 48, 65-75.*

Shi Lihong (1996, April 18). Literacy efforts still require tenacity. *China Daily,* p.4.

Shih Yu-chung. (trans.) (1983). *The literary mind and the carving of dragons: A study of thought and pattern in Chinese literature* [Bilingual edition]. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Shu Hua, Anderson, Richard C., & Zhang Houcan. (1995). Incidental learning of word meanings while reading: A Chinese and American cross-cultural study. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*(1), 76-95.

Shwedel, Allan M. (1983). Must we use phonology to read? What Chinese can tell us. *Journal of Reading, 26*(8), 707-713.

Sinolingua. (1992). *Zhōngguó Yǔwén* [Chinese Language] (2nd ed.), vol.1-2. Beijing: author.

Smith, Arthur H. (1899). *Village life in China.* New York: Fleming H. Revell Company Publishers of Evangelical Literature.

Smith, Frank. (1971). *Understanding reading.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Smith, Frank. (1973). *Psycholinguistics and reading.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Spradley, James P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Sproul, Larry. (1978). *A thematic content analysis of Peking and Hong Kong elementary school Chinese language texts used in 1974-76.* Unpublished master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.

Stahl, Steven A., Pagnucco, Joan R., & Suttles, William C. (1996). First graders' reading and writing instruction in traditional and process-oriented classes. *Journal of Educational Research, 89*(3), 131-144.

Steinberg, Danny D., & Yamada Jun. (1978-79). Are whole word kanji easier to learn than syllable kana? Reading Ressearch Quarterly, 14(1), 88-99.

Stevenson, Harold W., Lee Shin-ying, & Chen Chuansheng. (1994). Education of gifted and talented students in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 17*(2), 104-130.

Stevenson, Harold W., Lee Shin-ying. (1995). The East Asian version of whole-class teaching. *Educational Policy. 9*(2), 152-168.

Stevenson, Harold W., Stigler, James W., Lucker, G. William, & Lee Shin-ying. (1982). Reading disabilities: The case of Chinese, Japanese, and English. *Child development, 53*(5), 1164-1181.

Su Lei (ed.) (1994). *Sān Zì Jīng* [Trimetrical Classic]. Beijing: Shijie Tushu Chuban Gongsi.

Tian Zhengli (ed.) (1995). *Sān Zì Jīng, Bǎi Jiā Xìng, Qián Zì Wén, Dì Zǐ Guī* [Trimetrical Classic, Hundred Surnames, Thousand Character Classic, Pupils Regulations]. Xi'an: Xing Jie Tushu Chuban Gongsi.

Tzeng, Ovid, & Hung, David. (1980). Reading in a nonalphabetic writing system: Some experimental studies. In J.F. Kavanagh and R.L. Venezky (Eds.), *Orthography, reading, and dyslexia* (pp. 211-226). Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.

Tzeng, Ovid, Hung, David, & Garro, Linda. (1978). Reading the Chinese characters: An information processing view. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 6(2), 287-305.

Tzeng, Ovid, Hung, David, & Wang, W.S.Y. (1977). Speech recoding in reading Chinese characters. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, 3, 621-630.

Tzeng, Ovid, & Singer, Harry. (1978-79). Failure of Steinberg and Yamada to demonstrate superiority of kanji over kana for initial reading instructions in Japan. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 14(4), 661-667.

UNICEF. (1996). [Country Profile — China]. (Available from the World Wide Web).

Unger, Jonathan. (1977). Post-cultural revolution primary-school education: Selected texts. *Chinese Education*, 10(2), 4-103.

Unger, Jonathan. (1982). *Education under Mao*. New York: Columbia University.

Venetzky, Richard. (1985). Language, script, and reading in China. In J. Mei (Ed.), *Reading in China: Report of the U.S. Reading Study Team to the People's Republic of China* (pp. 48-67) (Research/Technical Report No. 143). New York: National Committee on United States-China Relations. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 054).

Wang An-yan tang, Earle, Richard A. (1972). Cultural constraints in teaching Chinese students to read English. *The Reading Teacher*, 25(7), 663-669.

Wang Jianliang. (1990). Compulsory Nine Year Education in China: Issues and prospects. *Journal of Education Finance*, 15, 487-497.

Wang Hui. (1996, June 1). Chinese children enjoy happy, healthy growth. *China Daily*, p.4.

Wang Xiuyun. (1996). *Zěnyang xuéhǎo xiǎoxué yǔwén* [How to study for the primary school language class]. Beijing: Kexue Chubanshe.

Watkins, David. (1996). Hong Kong secondary school learners: a developmental perspective. In D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs (eds.) *The Chinese learner: cultural, psychological and contextual influences* (pp.107-119). Hong Kong & Melbourne: Comparative Education Research Centre & The Australian Council for Educational

Research Ltd.

Watkins, David, & Biggs, John. (Eds.) (1996). *The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological, and contextual influences*. Hong Kong and Melbourne: Comparative Education Research Centre and The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd.

Williams, J.D., & Capizzi-Snipper, G. (1990). *Literacy and Bilinguism*. New York: Longman.

Wu, David Y.H. (1987). Dong-feng: A Chinese preschool. In J.J. Tobin, D. Wu, and D.H. Davidson (Eds.), *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China, and the United States* (pp. 72-125). New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Wu Guanghua.(Chief ed.) (1994). *Chinese-English dictionary* (Vol.1-2) (2nd ed.). Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press.

Wu Yuchang. (1958). Report on the current task of reforming the written language and the draft scheme for a Chinese phonetic alphabet [report delivered at the fifth session of the First National People's Congress on February 3, 1958]. In *Reform of the Chinese written language* (pp.30-54). Peking: Foreign Languages Press.

Yang Dongping. (1990). China's crisis in education: Inadequate investment, low returns, and slow reform. *Chinese Education*, 23(2), 15-17.

Ye Xiangyang (1996, May 31). Confusing characters. *China Daily*, p.4.

Yeung Yun Choi & Bannister, Barry J. (1995). The administration of compulsory education in China—Lessons from Guangzhou. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 33(4), 59-68.

Yu Yan (1996, May 24). Expanding economy requires unified speech. *China Daily*, p.9.

Zeng Qiang, Chen Yuejin, Tang Zhihui, & Liu Xiguang. (1990). The impoverished education. *Chinese Education*, 23(2), 18-21.

Zeng Xianqin, Zhang Weikun, & Huang Guoquan (eds.) (1992). *Gǔdài yuèdú lùn* [Ancient theories of reading]. Zhengzhou: Henan Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

Zeng Xianqin & Han Xueping (eds.) (1992a). *Yuèdú xué yuánli* [Principles of the study of reading]. Zhengzhou: Henan Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

Zeng Xianqin & Han Xueping (eds.) (1992b). *Guówài yuèdú yánjiu* [Foreign reading research]. Zhengzhou: Henan Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

Zeng Xingchu. (1984). An appeal for justice for Chinese characters. *Chinese Education*, 16(4), 50-81.

Zhai Baokui, Xu Xun, Lu Yasong, & Ku Zhengya. (1983). Classroom observation of excellent language teachers (vol.1) (excerpts), *Chinese Education*, 16(4), 82-109.

Zhang Biyin. (1985). The psychology of reading in China. *School Psychology International*, 6, 30-33.

Zhang Jian et al. (Chief ed.). (1994). *Xiaŏxué jiàoyù baĭkeḡuánshū* [Encyclopaedia of primary education]. Zhengzhou: Henan Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

Zhang Lianfu. (1990). Professor Qian Jiaju makes a strong and vocal appeal for more investment in mandatory education: "Basic education is more basic a construction than basic construction. *Chinese Education*, 23(2), 34-37.

Zhang Shaowen & Wei Liming. (1987). Combatting illiteracy in China. *Beijing Review*, 30(7), 17-21.

Zhang Xia. (1996, June 14). Education wins extra funds. *China Daily*, p.4.

Zhang Zhigong. (1985). Chinese characters and reading: An outline. *Chinese Education*, 18(2), 41-56.

Zheng Yuan. (1994). Local government schools in Sung China: A reassessment. *History of Education Quarterly*, 34(2), p.193-213.

Zhu Jingben (1996). Yuèdú jiàoxué 'zhuó yǎn yú' shénme? [Reading instruction: What should we focus on?]. *Xiaŏxué Yuẃén Jiàoxué* [Primary School Language Instruction], 5, 3-4.