

Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics

Volume 1

A–Dǎi

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# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Bianca Basciano

Chao, Y.R. [Zhào Yuánrèn] 趙元任 (1892–1982)

Chao Yuan Ren (Zhào Yuánrèn 趙元任), often abbreviated as “Y.R. Chao”, courtesy name Xuānzhòng 宣重 (3 November 1892 in Tiānjīn 天津—25 February 1982 in Cambridge, Mass.), was the first linguist from China to make major contributions to linguistics in both China and the West. He was born when China was still ruled by the Qīng (Manchu) Dynasty, one of his ancestors being the famous poet and critical historiographer Zhào Yì 趙翼 (1727–1814). He thus received a traditional Confucian education, but as beneficiary of a scholarship from the “Boxer Indemnity Fund” (*gēngzǐ* 庚子 [or *quánluàn* 拳亂] *péikuǎn* 賠款), he was also among the second group of Chinese students (1910) sent to the West for training in Western science in the early 20th century. He was a consummate polymath and polyglot; the breadth and depth of

his knowledge and activities was incredible. He worked in the fields of physics, mathematics, linguistics, musical and literary composition, and translation, and was a pioneer in many of these fields. Although Chao's first degree (BA) was in mathematics (from Cornell University, 1914, where he also began to study Western music), and his Ph.D. was in philosophy (Harvard, 1918), some of his earliest teaching experiences were in physics at Cornell and Harvard. At Cornell Chao and other Chinese students created and edited a monthly journal called *K'o Hsueh* [Kēxué 科學] (*Science*) to introduce Western science to China. It continued in publication in Shànghǎi up to 1950. They funded the journal out of their own student allowances.

Chao accepted a position at Cornell in 1919 to teach physics, but took a one-year leave to return to China in 1920 to teach mathematics at Ts'ing Hua College (now Ts'ing Hua University; Qīnghuá Dàxué 清華大學), but was almost immediately seconded by Peking University (Běijīng Dàxué 北京大學) to be the interpreter for the philosophers Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) and the feminist Dora Black (later Dora Russell, 1894–1986), who visited China 1920–1921. As an advocate of the → vernacular literature movement and language standardization begun as part of the New Culture Movement (*xīn wénhuá yùndòng* 新文化運動) in the post-May Fourth period, that year he also translated Lewis Carroll's (1832–1898) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Zhào 1922) and made "National Language Records" (*Guóyǔ liúshēngjī piàn* 國語留聲機片) for promoting the new standard language. On June 1, 1921, with his good friend Hu Shih (Hú Shì 胡適, 1891–1962; cf. Hú and Zhào 1970 for their correspondance) as one of the witnesses, he married the physician Yáng Bùwěi 楊步偉 (1889–1981).

After that he returned to the US but did not go back to Cornell; instead he went to Harvard to teach logic and the Chinese language until 1925, then returned to China. There he worked with Lín Yǔtáng 林語堂 (1895–1976) and others on the system of National Romanization (→ *Gwoyue Romatzyh* ~ *Guóyǔ luómǎzì* 國語羅馬字) in the mid-1920s, part of their work in the Preparatory Commission for the Unification of

the National Language (*Guóyǔ Tǒngyī Chóubèi Wěiyuánhui* 國語統一籌備委員會). The system was designed to allow for the representation of tones without the use of diacritics. It was adopted by the government in 1928. After the Academia Sinica (*Zhōngyāng Yánjiūyuàn* 中央研究院) was founded in 1928, he joined its Institute of History and Philology (*Lìshǐ Yǔyán Yánjiūsuǒ* 歷史語言研究所), and became the head of the Linguistics Section (*Ērzú* 二組). He began organizing teams to do fieldwork in different parts of China to systematically record the different Sinitic varieties. One outcome of this was his *Xiàndài Wúyǔ Yánjiū* 現代吳語研究 [Studies of the modern Wú dialects], the earliest descriptive work of its kind in China. This was a major stimulus to a different kind of linguistics in China.

At that time he also collaborated with Luó Chángpéi 羅常培 (1899–1958) and → Li Fang-kuei (Lǐ Fāngguī 李方桂, 1902–1987) to translate → Bernhard Karlgren's (1889–1978) Ph.D. thesis, *Études sur la phonologie chinoise* (Karlgren 1915–1926), which brought another aspect of Western linguistics to China. This had a major impact on the way historical phonology was done in China subsequent to its publication. During those years, drawing on his experience in the sciences, he wrote his first two major contributions to Western linguistics, his 1930 article (written entirely in IPA!) describing the system of tone letters we now use commonly for transcribing tones, and his 1934 article "On the Non-uniqueness of Phonemic Solutions of Phonetic Systems", pointing out the fact that a phonemic analysis is a model of a language, and different models may be constructed for different purposes. This is sometimes referred to as "alternate structuralizing". The importance of the 1934 article is shown by the fact that it was selected for inclusion in Martin Joos' *Readings in Linguistics* (1957) or by the assessment of Voegelin and Voegelin (1963:79) that "one of the longest critical bibliographies in the history of 20th century linguistics will be concerned with tracing the reactions that followed Yuen-ren Chao's stimulus".

Because of the outbreak of war in China in the late 1930s, Chao returned to the US, spending

time in Hawaii, then at Yale and at Harvard. At Harvard he was recruited to lead the US Army Chinese Language Program, where he wrote his well-known *Cantonese Primer* (1947) and the *Concise Dictionary of Spoken Chinese* (with Yáng Liánshēng 楊聯陞, 1914–1990; Chao and Yang 1946). His work on the *Primer* led Chao to do the same for Mandarin, and this led first to his *Mandarin Primer* (1956), a widely used textbook for many years (the grammar introduction of which was translated into Chinese by Lǐ Róng 李榮, 1920–2002), and eventually to his *Grammar of Spoken Chinese* (1968), still the best and most comprehensive grammar of Mandarin Chinese available, as well as *Readings in Sayable Chinese* (1968). The 800+ page *Grammar of Spoken Chinese* is a great work of scholarship not only for its incredible thoroughness, but also because of his insightful inductive analysis, taking Chinese on its own terms (in fine Structuralist tradition) rather than trying to force it into any preconceived categories. Chao's frequently stated goal throughout his life's work was to describe things as they really were, and so he focused on naturally occurring spoken Mandarin. His *Grammar* was translated into Chinese separately by Lǚ Shūxiāng 呂叔湘 (1904–1998) in 1979 (partial translation, Zhào 1979) and by Ting Pang-hsin [Dīng Bāngxīn 丁邦新] in 1980 (full translation, Zhào 1980).

At different points in his career he was offered the positions of President of Ts'ing Hua University and Nanjing University (Nánjīng Dàxué 南京大學), but he was not interested in administration positions, preferring to focus on his research and teaching. In 1947 he was on his way back to China, but stopped off at the University of California at Berkeley, where he was offered a position, in which he remained until he retired in 1960, becoming Agassiz Professor of Oriental Languages and Literatures in 1952. He was also recognized for his contributions by being elected President of the Linguistic Society of America in 1945, Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1948, and President of the American Oriental Society in 1960. He was awarded honorary doctorates by Princeton (1946), Berkeley (1962), and Ohio State University (1970), and was appointed Honorary Professor of

Peking University (1981). In 1966 a special issue of the journal *Language* was dedicated to him, and included articles by 23 of the biggest names in the field. Among his well-known students (formal or informal) are → Wáng Lì 王力 (1900–1986), Chang Kun (Zhāng Kūn 張琨, 1917–), who replaced Chao at Berkeley when Chao retired, Ting Pang-hsin (Dīng Bāngxīn 丁邦新, 1937–), who replaced Chang Kun at Berkeley when Chang retired, Jerry Norman (Luó Jiérui 羅傑瑞, 1936–2012), and Anne Oi-kan Yue-Hashimoto (Yú Āiqín 余靄芹, 1938–).

This brief introduction in no way does justice to the breadth of Prof. Chao's work, covering almost all areas of Chinese grammar, phonology, semantics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics. For more information see Chao's autobiographies (1975, 1977), and for various aspects of his life and academic work, Chang (1982), Boorman (1967–1979), Dīng (1985), Dīng *et al.* (1991), Hong-Fincher (1978), Hú and Wáng (1996), Sū (1999), Wang (1983), Zhāng (1999), Zhào Xīnnà and Huáng (1998), and Zhū (1985). Chao (1976, 1977) feature fairly complete lists of his works up to that time, most of them included in the 20 volume edition of his complete works (Zhào 2007) or in Zhào (2015). Chao (1977) includes some of his famous pieces of "Language at Play".

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Randy Lapolla

## Character Amnesia

Character amnesia (in Chinese: *tíbǐwàngzì* 提筆忘字 ‘lifting one’s pen but forgetting the characters’) is the name for the phenomenon that people forget how to write Chinese characters which they previously were able to write. In most cases, the characters are not forgotten completely. Some people may remember the shape of the characters, but cannot remember the exact strokes to write them. Some may write the characters incorrectly, such as placing the components within a character in the wrong positions or missing some strokes (Huáng 2012:12–13). The phenomenon of character amnesia is common in China and Japan. According to a survey conducted by the *China Youth Daily*, 83% of the 2,072 respondents reported having forgotten how to write some characters (Hú and Wáng 2010). Another survey targeting college students in China found nearly 90% of respondents having encountered the embarrassment of character amnesia (Móu 2012:16–19). In Japan, a national survey conducted in 2011 showed that about 66.5% of the 2,069 respondents reported that they were losing their ability to correctly handwrite Japanese characters (*kanji*), and the figure has increased 25% in the last 10 years (*Japan Today*, 2012).

The high prevalence of character amnesia has been largely attributed to constant use of computers and mobile phones, which allow users to enter Chinese characters using their phonetic transcription. The → Hànyǔ pīnyīn 漢語拼音 input method, for example, is used by over 97% of users in Mainland China (Chen and Lee 2000). It allows users to input a Chinese

character (e.g., *mā* 媽 ‘mother’) by typing its pīnyīn spelling, a phonetic transcription of the character’s pronunciation (in this example, ‘*ma*’, but without tone), and then selecting the desired character from a list of characters sharing the same toneless pīnyīn spelling (e.g., (1) *ma* 嗎 ‘morphine; (question tag)’, ‘(question tag)’, (2) *mǎ* 碼 ‘a weight; number; yard; stack’, (3) *mā* 媽 ‘mother’, (4) *mǎ* 馬 ‘horse; a surname’, (5) *mà* 罵 ‘scold; abuse’, (6) *má* 麻 ‘(to have) pins and needles; tingling; hemp; numb; to bother’. In this example, we can enter the character 媽 by pressing the key ‘3’. The pīnyīn input method does not require the users to construct the characters by combining strokes, as one would do in writing Chinese characters by hand (Zhū *et al.* 2009) (→ Encodings, Fonts, and Input Systems).

The properties of Chinese characters can explain why learners are susceptible to character amnesia. The Chinese writing system is a logographic system, in the sense that the graphic units (the characters) generally correspond to words or morphemes (Coulmas 2003:50–60). A character is a salient visual unit, formed with different types of strokes which are grouped into identifiable stroke patterns or components, which are arranged in appropriate positions relative to one another to form a square character. Moreover, Chinese characters map onto whole syllables. This means that there is no stroke or component in a character (e.g., *mā* 媽) that is pronounced as a specific phoneme (e.g., /m/) in the syllable. As a result, writing in Chinese requires thousands of characters, and it takes pupils six to seven years to master 3,000 characters (DeFrancis 1984:152–153). In Japan, children are taught about 1000 *kanji* during six years of primary school (Gottlieb 2005:81–86). A prevalent strategy for learning Chinese characters in China and Japan is writing them by hand repeatedly. Through writing, the learners learn how to deconstruct characters into strokes and stroke patterns and then regroup these stroke patterns into a square unit, and form long-term motor memory of Chinese characters (Tan, Spinks *et al.* 2005). Indeed, neuroimaging studies have shown that relative to alphabetic languages, the processing of logographic characters more systematically engages brain regions that may support