

## BOOK NOTES

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SHOUHUI ZHAO AND RICHARD B. BALDAUF, JR., *Planning Chinese characters: Reaction, evolution or revolution?* Dordrecht: Springer, 2008. Pp. xix, 418. Hb \$159.00.

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*Planning Chinese characters (PCC)* aims at a descriptive account of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) efforts to overhaul the Chinese writing system. Mandarin Chinese is the most-spoken language in the world, with its most important centers of population in the PRC, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Hong Kong, and Singapore. Despite this common language, the writing systems differ. In the PRC a system of simplified characters is used, whereas in other communities, unsimplified ("traditional") characters continue to be used. The book builds on the language policy and planning (LPP) expertise of Richard B. Baldauf, Jr. It comprises seven chapters, excluding appendices, notes, and references. The prologue succinctly explains the basic structure and usage as well as the history of *hanzi*, the Chinese writing system commonly referred to as "characters." The first half of the book deals with concrete details about *hanzi* simplification: its history and process, rationale, current adoption and use, and discussions of ongoing work to further standardize *hanzi*. The second half moves into speculative discussions of simplification's future direction and implementation. Although Zhao and Baldauf focus on the technical aspects, they also discuss myriad other factors that influence all aspects of continued change, both in the present and in the future. These aspects include sociological, political, and sociolinguistic ones.

From chapter 1, Zhao & Baldauf focus on issues of corpus planning, giving a historical account of the various movements to reform, standardize, or simplify the *hanzi*, and focusing on the three most recent movements in modern times, occurring in 1935, the 1950s, and 1977. Not only do the authors discuss the technical facts of the simplification schemes in a quantifiable manner, but they also attempt to identify why only the 1950s reform was widely adopted. The authors continue the discussion by laying out some of the common critiques and problems with the simplified *hanzi*, including inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and misunderstandings. Zhao & Baldauf assert that most Mainland Chinese vary in their writing, employing a mix of traditional and simplified *hanzi*, even varying between two forms of the same word. This observation about the inconsistency in usage of

simplification is often ignored elsewhere. Focusing on the technological complexity of combining *hanzi* and modern communication methods, the authors discuss the challenges confronting users of *hanzi* in the digital age. The complications faced by computer developers and programmers are not insignificant. Such issues as display, intersystem interpretation, input method, and the internet's handling of *hanzi* all receive major attention. Dealing with topics such as reducing and codifying the total number of Chinese words and addressing inconsistencies in internal structure, the authors lay bare the enormity of the task of making *hanzi* technologically accessible.

Zhao & Baldauf enter into an explicit discussion of status planning by drawing on existing LPP frameworks. They identify some of the sociological, political, and linguistic factors that ultimately will affect the outcome of the PRC's simplification scheme. Moving on to the demographic changes in China in regard to increased literacy, higher standard of living, and newly arising democracy and regionalism, they draw on earlier work by the second author to summarize the possibilities for change. Here, Zhao & Baldauf carefully address the politically contentious divide between Taiwan and the PRC, mentioning proposed solutions to combining the different writing systems in the event of unification. After examining historical and existing conditions that influence the situation of *hanzi* in China, Zhao & Baldauf offer a proposal to direct further LPP in China. They seek to encourage public involvement while minimizing the harmful effects of simplification in private and nonprofessional sectors, and expanding and deregulating existing government agencies charged with LPP concerns.

The book closes by returning to many of the issues already discussed, framing them as "critical issues." Touching again on the erroneously assumed-dead issue of romanization, Zhao & Baldauf underline the real possibility of its taking the forefront in Chinese LPP. Echoing the subtitle of the book, they attempt to legitimize simplification as another step in the inevitable linguistic "evolution" of the language. Within the context of the PRC's politics, simplification is a REVOLUTION as part of the ongoing socialism of China. The section on reaction couches simplification in terms of the sociological and sociolinguistic realities, revisiting themes of common acceptance and the Chinese response to simplification.

Zhao & Baldauf have written a comprehensive review of the history of Chinese writing reform from the earliest instances of *hanzi* to the most recent changes and challenges. A longstanding theme in discussions surrounding orthography reform is the need to make literacy more accessible to the people, and the authors discuss the challenges that remain. They underline the tensions between a writing system imbued with history and culture, and the modern technology of communication. While it is lacking in explicit theoretical LPP explanations aimed at connecting historical and modern realities to outcomes in Chinese writing, this book excels at providing the details of these realities.

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