

Chih-p'ing Chou, Yan Xia, and Meow Hui Goh. *All Things Considered: Advanced Reader of Modern Chinese*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. xi, 514 pp. Paperback \$32.50, ISBN 0-691-09048-3.

All Things Considered: Advanced Reader of Modern Chinese is the latest advanced reading textbook by Chih-p'ing Chou, a professor of Chinese at Princeton. For this book, Chou has teamed up with Yan Xia and Meow Hui Goh, both instructors of Chinese and also at Princeton. Editor of more than ten intermediate and advanced reading textbooks in as many years, Chou offers *All Things Considered* in another attempt to fill a resource gap in Chinese-language materials between the intermediate and advanced levels (roughly between the second and fourth years, respectively).

Many of Chou's previous contributions took the form of one volume for the text and a second for vocabulary, sentence patterns, and (sometimes) exercises. *All Things Considered*, however, is single volume in a new, all-in-one format that weighs in at over five hundred pages. It is divided into two sections: the first (about one-third of the book) consists of twelve dialogues, and the second, as described on the back cover, is "a selection of recent newspaper articles about contemporary Chinese society."

Regarding the topics chosen for inclusion, Chou, Xia, and Goh have selected a nice variety that should please and satisfy most third-year college students. The dialogues, especially, as has been said of the majority of Chou's previous textbooks, are lively and engaging. Other available textbooks at a similar level are often criticized for being dull, but Chou has applied his mastery of the Chinese language to providing truly interesting reading.

While it is explained that this text was developed for use in Beijing, now that the book is being marketed outside mainland China the first two chapters in Section 1, "Just Arriving in China" and "Renting a Bicycle," appear to be mismatched with the topics covered in the rest of the book. For both their subject matter and their levels of difficulty, they would probably be more suitable for the end of a second-year intermediate text.

The topics in *All Things Considered* are timely but not overly controversial. This last point is especially noteworthy if one remembers a certain American school that had recently adopted Chou's *Newspaper Reading: The U.S.A. in the People's Daily* (1993) for use in its overseas language program. It was told by the mainland Chinese government to change this textbook of choice because it put China and the Chinese people in an unfavorable light.

However, despite the broad range of its subject matter, there are other topics that might have better served the third-year student. The most obvious omissions,

in this reviewer's opinion, are chapters dealing with such topics as human rights, unemployment, and pollution. While human rights may be judged a bit too controversial for the third year, particularly for a text to be used in China, the Chinese people themselves are becoming more willing to discuss unemployment and pollution with outsiders, as this reviewer witnessed recently during his residence there. This could especially be the case now in light of the selection of Beijing to host the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Perhaps what makes the omitted subjects so obvious is that a number of others are covered twice. Admittedly, a solidly designed third-year textbook will incorporate repetition and reinforcement. However, having two chapters each on the care of the elderly and May-December weddings seems a bit odd, considering the opportunity either to add more variety or to examine in greater depth those topics that a mainly American undergraduate and graduate audience are most likely to read about.

There is an admitted convenience to having the materials presented in one bound volume. One drawback to this arrangement, however, is that as the material increasingly focuses on "current events," it tends to become dated after as little as two years, compelling language programs to plan their third-year curriculum virtually on a year-to-year basis. The most obvious example of datedness among the chapters in *All Things Considered* is "The President Has a Girlfriend" (Lesson 11), which deals with the affair between President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky—although no names are mentioned.

Perhaps the book's most serious flaw on the whole is that there are no grammar notes in any of the lessons. The authors provide only example sentences (mainly pulled directly from the text) with translations. While the text is offered as a vehicle for classroom discussion, this oversight could seriously hamper the deeper practicality that has come to be expected of "advanced readers." All texts in the book are provided in both traditional and simplified versions on facing pages. However, the example sentences are presented in simplified characters only. An effort should have been made to provide for traditional characters here as well. This could easily have been done without adding that much more to the length of the volume as it stands had the editors not chosen to use double spacing and large font sizes for the main texts. By the third year, students can be expected to handle at most 1.5 line spacing and a font size not exceeding sixteen points. If students are continually provided with text presented in a manner more suitable for the visually impaired, they will never be able to handle the real thing.

Speaking of fonts, it is indeed another mystery why the editors decided to use a typeface with a light brush style for the entire text. As the last part, roughly three-fifths, of the text purports to consist of reproductions of "actual" news articles, why was a regular Song typeface—more commonly encountered when reading news text—not used? This is simply a disservice to the student who, by

the third year, most assuredly wishes to get closer to the actual reading experience that s/he would find on the mainland, in Taiwan, or Hong Kong (regardless of whether simplified or complex forms are used). Furthermore, there is no research to date to prove that using a “softer” typeface in any way facilitates improvement in reading or comprehension of a second language.

Another disservice to students is the copious vocabulary lists provided after the main texts. Third-year Chinese should be *the* level when training in the practical use of dictionaries is provided (if it is not offered at the end of the second year). Typically, students continuing into their third year of Chinese have more of a vested interest in learning the language—more so, obviously, than the majority of students who are taking first- and second-year Chinese simply to satisfy a college language requirement. Thus, it is incumbent on the teachers of advanced levels of Chinese to make sure that their students, in addition to gaining access to a wide variety of interesting topics to read and discuss, also receive a healthy dose of practical instruction in the tools necessary to continue on their own once the formal instruction has concluded. After all, newspapers and magazines do not provide word lists.

A general guideline to follow is to gloss only those items from the text that may require more in the way of a cultural note or those items that have specialized usage. If, for some reason, exhaustive vocabulary lists are unavoidable, however, then it is suggested that an effort be made to generate roughly 40 to 50 percent of the glosses in the target language itself. This rule of thumb is based simply on the thinking that by the third year, learners of Chinese should have a large enough vocabulary to be able to understand simple definitions of more complex words. This cutoff will understandably vary from program to program, yet the principle underlying the rule of thumb remains the same: train students how to use real-world tools and to become more independent readers rather than send them the message that they will always be spoon-fed information. A middle step here might perhaps incorporate a glossary at the back of the book arranged by radical, in addition to the two indexes that are already provided by the editors in which vocabulary items are arranged alphabetically according to pinyin and English romanizations.

Like the example sentences mentioned above, the exercises here are also presented using only simplified characters. The exercises range from one to two pages per lesson, and for the most part are “activities” consisting, almost to the exclusion of other types, of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and composition. Overall, the exercises are unimaginative and limited in scope, focusing on discrete points of grammar or vocabulary and requiring no real critical thinking on the part of the student. With the exception of the composition sections, which do encourage free expression of thought on many interesting topics, the rest of the ex-

ercise sections generally work on receptive (i.e., passive) skills rather than on productive literacy training.

Princeton University Press and the authors may want to take note of a few errata and give the text another once-over before considering the product finished. A cursory examination of the book revealed the following example errata: on page 6, the traditional character for week should be 週, not 周. Also, in all of the vocabulary lists, there are various discrepancies between the pinyin romanization that is used here and the pinyin that was officially ratified and promulgated by the State Education Commission and the State Language Commission of the PRC in 1988. The main deviance worth mentioning is a general lack of word-final neutral tones throughout, with full tones provided instead (sometimes in error). For example: 小時候 *xiǎo shí.hòu* (Lesson 1, p. 8), 舒服 *shū.fū* (Lesson 1, p. 9; pinyin as in the original), and 不得已 *bù.de.yǐ* (Lesson 8, p. 110; pinyin as in the original, although glossed as 不得已 *bùdéyǐ* in Lesson 7, p. 98).

There is an overcompensatory use of apostrophes: *cānguān* is the accepted form for 參觀, not *cān'guān* (also on p. 273), and *guānguāngkè* is correct, not *guān'guāngkè*, for 觀光客. One instance where a required apostrophe is lacking occurs on page 273 with 大二, which should be *dà`èr* and not *dàèr*. No explanation is provided in either the Chinese version of the Preface (pp. vii–ix) or the English version (p. x) for these departures from the official and accepted standard of pinyin romanization, or for what pedagogical assistance the new modifications are supposed to provide, if any. It appears at first glance that the period used in Chou's pinyin system is there to signify a neutral tone, à la Yale romanization, but this practice for a third-year level textbook can only introduce unnecessary confusion for the target users.

To conclude, there should be more to creating a third-year textbook than simply gathering articles from the Internet and/or wire services and reprinting them. Further, by the third year, students should be introduced to more completely authentic (i.e., neither overly edited nor semi-authentic) materials, which includes presenting each item in a form more closely reminiscent of the original. The same effect as that created by Chou, Xia, and Goh in *All Things Considered: Advanced Reader of Mandarin Chinese* could easily be reproduced by almost any individual teacher after spending a little time doing keyword searches or reading on-line news editions on the Web.

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