

PERRY LINK, *An Anatomy of Chinese. Rhythm, Metaphor, Politics*. Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 2013. 376 pages, €36.00. ISBN 978-0-674-06602-1

The omnipresence of rhythm and metaphor in Chinese politics is a phenomenon of modern Chinese language that has fascinated Perry Link for more than three decades. Citing the Chinese linguist Y. R. Chao that “unfamiliar (technical) terms [...] though safe from being misunderstood, are often also safe from being understood” (p. 2), the book opens with the promise to minimize academic jargon, a reassuring announcement given the book’s interdisciplinary potential.

In the Introduction (pp. 1–20) the author quotes phrases picked up on the streets of Beijing and in public spaces (e.g. toilets) and slogans from the Cultural Revolution, to outline the topics of the first (Rhythm), second (Metaphor), third (Politics) parts of the book. In each part the reader will find plenty of opportunity to compare Chinese and (American) English linguistic strategies. Each sentence is presented in Pinyin and Chinese characters, translated and thoroughly explained, so that readers who do not know Chinese may profit from this individual and original study. In addition, through many colorful and vivid examples and his irony between the lines the author arouses in his readers a fascination equal to his own.

The title of Part One (pp. 21–112), “Rhythm”, shorthand for “conventional rhythmic patterns” in language, encompasses stress, pause and pitch, what linguists call prosody. Chinese rhythmic patterns, more precisely five-character (*wuyan* 五言), seven-character (*qiyān* 七言) and four-character patterns, have always been common in traditional poetry, folksongs and popular sayings. They are unusually common in Modern Chinese as well. “Even McDonalds was using *qiyān* on CCTV: *shike changxiang maidanglao* 时刻畅想麦当劳 – always keep McDonald’s on your mind” (p. 36).

After searching for the specific roots of rhythm in Chinese, a variety of features of rhythm patterns are outlined: such as 1) “external” rhythm, which is beyond grammar and meaning; 2) readers’ and listeners’ awareness of its use; 3) function of rhythm, such as coordinating collective human activity, supporting personal and cultural memory, providing authority, and, last but not least, 4) the meaning of rhythm. Defining meaning “in the broad sense [...] of making at least some kind of difference in a received message” (p. 94), one can easily support the idea that rhythm, being meaningful in itself, definitely has an effect beyond the cognitive grasping of the message – thus asserting that far from being just “some kind of difference in a received message”, rhythm is a message in its own right which might emphasize or even run counter to semantics.

Besides rhythm, other formal features contribute to meaning in the above-mentioned sense: tones, vowels and consonants. In addition, here we find pitch that in combination with loudness and duration constitutes “stress”, and parallelism. Aware of the respective effects, such as authority, naturalness or “fit”,

the author touches upon a phenomenon already explicated in the 1920s by gestalt psychologists (p. 97) and taken up today by old and new phenomenologists.

The second part (pp. 113–233), “Metaphor”, opens with the relation between metaphor and thought, which the author uses to recapitulate the state of the art. There is no doubt that metaphors are based on bodily experience. Again, here the focus is on expressions in daily life – on “metaphors we live by” (George Lakoff / Mark Johnson: *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980). By illustrating time as a space metaphor, the difference between Chinese and English “lies not in their conceptualization but in the relative frequency of their use” (p. 137). Metaphorical use of colours in Chinese and English shows both similarities (red or blue in the face because of anger; green as metaphor for young) and differences as specific “cultural creations” (p. 153). The same is true of interrelated space metaphors, such as “up” and “down” or “North” and “South”. In the following passages, modern metaphor theory is applied to the Chinese conception of consciousness, of the Self, and of paired categories (dyads) in Chinese thought. How metaphors influence “ways to conceive the world” (p. 183), and vice versa, is the topic of two sections comparing metaphors that the two languages largely share and metaphors in Chinese that significantly diverge from English. Thus, descriptions of e.g. affection, smelling or difficulties may use quite similar metaphors in both languages, descriptions of eating, the identification of family and society or acting, for example, do not.

Conceptual differences rooted in metaphors (p. 209) raise the question of whether conceptual metaphors reflect philosophical differences (p. 215). Topic par excellence in this context is the prevalence of nouns in English and of verbs in Chinese.

At the end of Part Two the author emphasizes his astonishment at the many similarities between Chinese and English, which he explains with the structure of the human brain and the commonality of human experience – a blow, as it were, against extreme cultural relativism.

At first sight, the heading of Part Three (pp. 234–348), “Politics”, is somewhat misleading since its topic is in fact the bifurcation of Chinese into official political language and everyday language since imperial times. Hand in hand with this bifurcation two “truths” coexist in the Chinese world. In order to identify the official language of the late Mao and post-Mao years (1960s to the early 21st century) Perry Link refers to features, such as lexicon and metaphor, grammar and rhythm, moral weight, goal orientation, and “fit (politically)” as a form of truth. The remaining passages are dedicated to the “language game that citizens of the People’s Republic of China became obliged to engage with” (p. 278): how the game was played by the rulers (linguistic engineering as power engineering) and how the ruled responded (adaptation, avoidance, resistance, double meanings, satire, authorial anonymity and informal codes). The socio-psychological consequences of this language game should not be

underestimated: suspicion, hypocrisy and opportunism, a combination of behavioural features that F. Billeter calls “pathology of virtue” (p. 343) and D. Moser refers to as “schizophrenia” in the sense of a “split perception” (p. 343). Such diagnosis, which, given the above-mentioned resistance and changes in situational register, should, in this reviewer’s opinion, not be generalized, refers to the Maoist era. In the post-Maoist era official language has lost its dominant power. Yet, Chinese citizens still seem to play the language game, avoiding the discussion of specific topics, such as Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang: “People go through daily life – making money, enjoying fashions, playing sports, traveling, finding romantic partners, and doing things that people could not easily do during the Mao era – while simply avoiding the areas in the world of ideas that could cause ‘trouble’.” (p. 348).

While this avoidance strategy of the continuing language game reflects an omnipresent danger, inherent in it is another danger that arises from heightened nationalism and chauvinism.

In the Epilogue (pp. 349–355) the author reflects on the common characteristics of the three topics rhythm, metaphor, and politics: inadvertency (going unnoticed) and meaningfulness. Overcoming inadvertency, in other words becoming aware, “leaves us more free to think for ourselves” (p. 352). Furthermore, studying inadvertencies of language may help both to understand the workings of the human mind and, in a transcultural perspective, to avoid cultural misunderstandings. Last but not least, “there is also something fun” (p. 355).

All in all, Perry Link has written a fascinating book with a wealth of linguistic material, vast theoretical, political, and socio-psychological implications and insightful questioning of history and English language strategies.

*Gudula Link*

DAVID J. LORENZO, *Conceptions of Chinese Democracy. Reading Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, and Chiang Ching-kuo*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2013. 257 pages, €20.84. ISBN 1-4214-0917-8

David J. Lorenzo deals with an important and current issue. The latest developments around the so-called “Sunflower-Movement” and the student-led protests and occupation of the Legislative Yuan in the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan) were an impressive demonstration that there are still huge differences in the interpretation of Chinese models of democracy. This book is a helpful contribution to understanding and following the ongoing debate. By analysing the thoughts, theories and concerns of ROC’s former presidents towards democracy, David J. Lorenzo offers helpful input for a deeper understanding of Chinese ideas of democracy.