



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

The Linguistic Shaping of Thought: A Study in the Impact of Language on Thinking in China and the West. by Alfred Bloom

Benjamin A. Elman

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Book Reviews

ASIA GENERAL

Financial Institutions and Markets in the Far East. Edited by MICHAEL T. SKULLY. 1982. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982. 220 pp. N.p.

This useful little guide covers five territories, China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, bringing together in one book studies of their disparate financial systems for scholars and businessmen who tend increasingly to see the lands of East Asia as part of the same growth phenomenon. Although Japan is far ahead of the others and China well behind, all seek trade and other economic involvement with the West.

Skully himself contributes the chapters on China and Hong Kong, collaborating with Ching-ing Hou Liang on Taiwan. Hiromitsu Ishi covers Japan, and Sang-Woo Nam and Yung Chul-Park, South Korea. Despite the number of authors, each chapter follows the same pattern with a brief introduction, followed by straightforward description of the local institutions, and finally analysis and predictions. This format has kept the book factual and concise, though it has not managed to remain up to date on such a rapidly changing scene. The Chinese banking system, for instance, is constantly changing—the latest news predicts the establishment of a central bank. And some might think a few of the paragraphs of crystal gazing were too optimistic—Hong Kong's future looks more dubious than it did when the book was written, and at any time it would have been hard to concur with the final words of the Taiwan chapter (quoted from the *Christian Science Monitor*) that the island might become “one of tomorrow's big powers.”

COLINA MACDOUGALL
London

CHINA and INNER ASIA

The Linguistic Shaping of Thought: A Study in the Impact of Language on Thinking in China and the West. By ALFRED BLOOM. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates, 1981. 106 pp. Appendix, Index. \$16.95.

It has long been recognized, as A. C. Graham puts it, that the Chinese “tended to distrust too logical thinkers who insist on filling all gaps.” Despite the logical acumen of the classical Sophists and Mohists, “this huge intellectual adventure did not initiate a lasting tradition of rationalism” (“The Place of Reason in the Chinese Philosophical Tradition,” *The Legacy of China*, ed. by Raymond Dawson, pp. 55–56, [New York: Oxford University Press, 1971]).

Why this should have been the case has been a perplexing issue for students of

Chinese thought. Frederick Mote has suggested that the lack of development in the formal problems of logic in China may be due to “the ‘cosmological gulf’ between China and the rest of the world.” The “gulf” reflected a momentous choice for the Chinese: “The Chinese looked into formal logic and found it less important than other concerns in philosophy.” Speculation for speculation’s sake was not unknown, but, more often than not, it was ridiculed as empty learning. The “unwillingness to argue about theory” represented the “characteristic mindset” of the Chinese (*Intellectual Foundations of China* [New York: Knopf, 1971], pp. 93–109).

While intriguing in its own right, the issue of the lack of a rigorous logical tradition in China has elicited most interest in our understanding of the history of science there. If, as many have contended, the conscious application of experimental methods to quantifying the natural world, based on deductive and inductive logics of demonstration, was one of the minimum requirements for the emergence of modern science, then the lack of such a rigorous tradition in China may help to explain in part why modern science developed first in Europe and not in China. Joseph Needham has noted, for example, that “there was little to choose between ancient European and ancient Chinese philosophy so far as the foundations of scientific thought were concerned.” Nevertheless, Needham has conceded that Chinese science lacked the logical rigor necessary to development of modern science (Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954–] 2:198–203).

Graham, among others, has considered that “this general indifference to logical problems is somehow connected with the structure of the Chinese language” (1971: 55). Likewise, Needham has stressed that “differences of linguistic structure between Chinese and the Indo-European languages had influence on the differences between Chinese and Western logic formulations” (1954, 2:199). Mote has argued that the “great suspicion” Chinese have had for purely speculative theory must have acted as a major deterrent to the development of fields of inquiry, i.e., modern science, which required a precise logic of demonstration (1971: 107–108).

Until now no one has clearly identified the elusive problems involved in this issue of how the interconnection of Chinese language and thought is related to the general indifference to logical problems in China. With the publication of Alfred Bloom’s *The Linguistic Shaping of Thought*, however, we are presented for the first time with convincing arguments for the precise ways the Chinese language does indeed influence thought. To put it another way, Bloom’s work demonstrates how linguistic differences between Chinese and Western languages are paralleled by important conceptual differences.

In Bloom’s pioneering discussion, the distinctive cognitive legacies of Chinese and English are analyzed and quantified according to the degree to which each language encourages or discourages the development of specific cognitive schema. For Bloom, counterfactual thinking and entification of properties and actions constitute identifiable examples of a part of cognitive activity in which language-specific structures influence cognitive life. The observable linguistic differences between Chinese and English in marking counterfactuals, i.e., truth-commitment-free hypotheses, reveal how language can promote or inhibit cognitive structures that allow for more detached theoretical perspectives on that cognitive world.

Observed linguistic differences between Chinese and English in marking counterfactuals are thus not merely differences in language but differences in language that in part reflect and in part are responsible for the different ways English speakers and Chinese speakers operate cognitively in the world. Americans, hence, express their

proclivity for, and Chinese express their proclivity against, the counterfactual in such areas as literature, mathematics, history, philosophy, and science.

Similarly, the movement from description of the world in terms of specific actions, properties, and things to description in terms of theoretical entities that have been conceptually extracted from the speaker's baseline model of reality, i.e., entification, marks a tendency to divide up the world in a more conceptually detached manner. The virtual absence of this mode of thought in China since the classical Sophists indicates that the Chinese language has not provided its speakers, until quite recently, with the cognitive means, and thus the motivation, to create abstract generic entities. Unlike educated Americans, who automatically entify conditions and events into truth-commitment-free ideas, educated Chinese in Bloom's sample resist this tendency because it is not part of their everyday linguistic and cognitive activity.

Because the Chinese language has not offered its speakers incentives for conceptualizing the world in counterfactual and entificational ways, the language itself is likely to have contributed to sustaining an intellectual climate in which these modes of thinking were unlikely to arise. Remarkably, however, twentieth-century social, political, and intellectual pressures have led to a proliferation of abstract modes of thought in China. Why now and not before? Bloom, correctly to my mind, notes that to explain historically why counterfactual and entificational thinking did not develop on a greater scale in traditional China, one would have to take into account not only the characteristics of the language itself (which Bloom has done) but also the social and intellectual factors inhibiting such cognitive forms (this Bloom has not done), as well as the factors that now promote such forms.

Bloom's question, thus, is *not* why the Chinese language did not develop forms for counterfactual and entificational ways of speech or why Western languages did. Rather, Bloom concerns himself with the effects such linguistic phenomena have on the cognitive lives of native speakers. At the same time that he elucidates these linguistic facts, Bloom challenges others to go on and answer the broader question of why the bias against abstract modes of thought was so powerful in traditional China.

The findings in Bloom's book are provoking and challenging. They are based on a sophisticated use of quantitative methods, which includes carefully thought-out questionnaires (included in the appendix) and precise deliberation over statistical samples. Bloom places his discussion within an overall analysis of linguistic initiatives in the shaping and functioning of thought. If he is to be refuted or his findings modified, it will have to be done by researchers who have understood and applied the methodology of the cognitive sciences to the Chinese language. Certainly there is much more room for analysis. Classical Chinese has barely been touched in Bloom's book. Although his samples have cut across different segments of the populations in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States (i.e., students, workers, business people), Bloom's findings need to be further tested and extended.

Bloom's most important contribution to the problems discussed above may well lie in the area of methodology. It is clear that we can no longer be armchair linguists pontificating about the "Chinese mind" or the "Western mind." Bloom has demonstrated that what we have long suspected to be the case can be evaluated and measured with a great deal of precision. Perhaps his preliminary findings will not stand the test of time. Perhaps with a more nuanced approach and broader samples of native speakers in Europe, Japan and elsewhere, they will. But at least we finally have been shown a path of analysis that enables us to verify long-standing hypotheses about the Chinese language. In the natural sciences, for example, Chinese methods were more

often drawn simply from rearrangements of empirically derived data than from calculations based on theoretical considerations. This peculiar phenomenon can now be understood as an outgrowth of the cognitive life of the Chinese. The demand for practical solutions won out in astronomy and mathematics over theoretical formulations. (See Nathan Sivin, "Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy," *T'oung Pao* 55[1969]: 63–69.) Clearly, language and conceptual habits were intimately involved in the process.

BENJAMIN A. ELMAN
Institute for Humanistic Studies
Kyoto University

V. K. Wellington Koo: A Case Study of China's Diplomat and Diplomacy of Nationalism, 1912–1966. By PAO-CHIN CHU. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1981. xiii, 211 pp. Glossary, Bibliographical Notes, Selected Bibliography. HK\$87.

This is not a biography of V. K. Wellington Koo, as the title suggests, but a detailed description of several major episodes in twentieth-century Chinese diplomatic history in which Koo played a prominent role. Koo's career, with service to a succession of warlord governments in Peking as well as the Nationalist government in Nanking, spanned the entire Republican period (1912–1949) and offers a good vehicle for studying the diplomacy of this era.

Wellington Koo was one of the most influential of the "Anglo-American" diplomats, a group that included Sao-Ke Alfred Sze, Chengting T. Wang, and W. W. Yen. All of them had a great deal in common: they received traditional Chinese educations, were introduced to Western learning through Christian schools in China around the turn of the century, and went to the United States for higher education. Koo took his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1912. Thoroughly familiar with the West, these men were able to apply Western logical concepts to China's international problems. They were equally at home in London, Washington, Geneva, or Peking. Their American training probably encouraged policies that favored the Western powers rather than the Japanese or the Russians, though many other factors must be considered as well.

Pao-chin Chu argues that the substantial talents of the Anglo-American group provided consistency and continuity in foreign affairs despite almost constant upheaval on the domestic front. China's foreign policy, in other words, was not an extension of internal politics but a continuing effort to achieve equality, sovereignty, and national rights, according to Chu. By placing such principles above political and factional disputes, Koo and his colleagues were able to survive one change in government after another. Under the warlord governments, moreover, they often had considerable independence because most warlords were poorly informed about foreign affairs. The refusal of the Chinese delegation to sign the Treaty of Versailles despite orders from the Peking government is an especially vivid example of the autonomy of the Anglo-American group.

The author carefully documents negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference (which marked the beginning of modern Chinese diplomatic history); the 1921–1922 Washington Disarmament Conference; the 1923 Linch'eng kidnapping affair and a subsequent attempt by the foreign powers to control China's railways; negotiations to