

## Book review

*edited by O.N. Markand and N.M.F. Murray*

**A Chinese-Russian-English Dictionary: arranged by the Rosenberg Graphical System (Mudrov's Chinese-Russian Dictionary with an English Text and Appendices), John S. Barlow (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, HI, 1995. 830 pp. Price: \$125)**

Even the long title of this large, nearly six-pound, Chinese red volume fails to list the full contents. As one can say of any newborn, 'What good is it?' Well, it all depends. This is an international journal, with scores of contributors, editors, reviewers and subscribers. Many of these are multi-lingual and, indeed, early issues of this journal carried articles in several languages (French and German). Even without the now-so-common world travel for meetings and symposia participation, it is likely that a THREE-language dictionary will be useful. Russian-English is readily available. Sino-Russian has a long tradition. Chinese-English is, of course, rare to find and difficult to work with.

The compilation of a Chinese-Russian-English dictionary presents such formidable obstacles as to seem impossible, particularly so for a Carolina-Harvard physician-/neurologist with self-taught proficiency in these three (and other) languages. Perhaps we need a new term to describe someone who also displays musical proficiency in the repair of and performance on organs (his initials are also J.S.B.), not to mention a bibliography citing the navigation of birds. Dr. John Barlow has given us this second opus only two years following Opus I (*The Electroencephalogram: Its Patterns and Origins*), but with a deceptively long gestation period which almost rivals his age. More senior readers with long memories will recall the reviews of Barlow's first foray into the Chinese language, *Contemporary Brain Research in China*, reviewed by Dominick P. Purpura in this journal in 1972.

At present, most of us are dependent on what Chinese and Russian authors present as English distillations and summaries of their work. Their native language versions are, in essence, a closed book. Even granting the near-universal acceptance of English as the lingua franca of science, there are some investigators and clinicians who wish to read the original work in the original tongue.

A dictionary implies some type of alphabet to allow an orderly sequence of words. The Cyrillic alphabet has only minor changes from our familiar English type. Chinese permits no such simple alphabetic order. This is reflected

by the lament of the Reverend Julius Doolittle (1865) that the invention of the Chinese language has been ascribed to the devil.

Dr. Barlow describes his method for achieving the well nigh impossible in the Introduction and numerous Appendices to the main text. This is fascinating reading. Each of the 6000 or more extant Chinese characters can be constructed from primary elements, or strokes. A stroke may be made in any of five directions (some curved), to yield the 22 graphic elements. The sequences in which the strokes are made and the combinations of the graphic elements may yield characters of great complexity. Thus, as in reading EEG's, good vision and lighting are imperative. (The EEG reading board is well suited for perusal of this large volume, which reaches to 22 inches when expanded.) Index F gives a candid account of the enormous effort expended by Dr. Barlow in his computerization of the three language symbols via a 600 dpi scanner.

Of particular interest to this reviewer is the inclusion of a brief history of the compilation of Sino-Russian dictionaries, beginning with Rosenberg in 1916. I enjoyed the brief account of the Rosenberg Graphic System. Since Chinese characters are not based on an alphabet, Chinese dictionaries may arrange word listings according to the pronunciation of the characters. Unfortunately, modern Chinese has relatively few sounds; five or more characters may have identical pronunciations! This Pinyin technique with transliteration to an alphabet is widely used in China. Dr. Barlow has kindly included a 5-item alpha tone code for a 400 'word-sound', Pinyin to Cyrillic

Only in comparison is the Rosenberg graphical more understandable. We have a photocopy of a photocopy of Rosenberg's preface-introduction to his system, dealing with 8000 Japanese and 22 000 Chinese characters. Only two copies of this 1916 opus are known to exist in the U.S. None are in University libraries, none in the British Library in London or in the Bibliotheque National in Paris. A rare treat for the dictionary buff. The text includes, with further simplification by Dr. Barlow, the account of the 22 basic Graphical Elements and how these are constructed from the five basic stroke elements which go to make up Chinese characters - which are then elaborated by additional strokes to yield some 880 graphemes. Will a computer ever replace the graceful calligraphy of the Chinese scholar?

Careful reading will disclose how these complex characters can be ordered to a useful, understandable, 'pseudo-

alphabetical' index-dictionary. This includes, for a general dictionary, a rich mix of scientific and technical terms. Colleagues who have examined Russian-English and Chinese-English samples praise the adequacy and variety of the definitions. Some Chinese words or concepts need dozens of English words and phrases to define them, yielding a veritable thesaurus of possible meanings.

Each of the 773 dictionary pages of the book has two blocks of trilingual definitions, Chinese first, next Russian, and then English. It would, of course, be almost hopeless to search through thousands of Chinese characters until the needed one was located, followed by its Russian and/or English definitions. A bewildering variety of approaches to this dilemma has evolved over many years.

The Preface describes how order has been achieved from chaos, thus enabling the reader to 'look up' a character and its definition. The key lies in a Romanization from Chinese to English (and other languages), based on the *sound* of the character, i.e. the Pinyin Index, with 5749 entries. The procedure is widely used in the Westernization of Chinese. Although only briefly described by Dr. Barlow, it has been elaborated by Raymond Lum in a long essay-review in the

*Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America*, No. 19, 1998. (I have finally found one item in his references, entitled 'Why Chinese is so Damned Hard'.)

It is customary to conclude a book review with an opinion/summary, often with a (complaining) comment on cost. In comparison to the easy-to-compile-and-print EEG atlas or the multiple-authored symposium volume, one must marvel that his 'big red book' is priced at only \$125. This admirable production comes from the University of Hawaii Press. And it will have a long and useful life, albeit there is little likelihood of a second edition. It is unlikely to reside on EEG laboratory shelves but will surely have a very long and useful life in the appropriate sections of good University libraries.

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