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Book Reviews

Yuen Ren Chao's Autobiography: First 30 years 1892-1921. By Yuen Ren Chao 趙元任, 早年自. (*Life with Chaos*, vol. 2). (Ithaca, N.Y.: Spoken Languages Services, Inc. 1975. v+113 pages. Illustrations.)

This autobiography by Y. R. Chao, well-known authority on Chinese linguistics, gives the reader a vivid and informative glimpse into China at the end of empire and the early days of search for modernity. The author belongs to that generation of Chinese intellectuals who exerted their efforts toward a break with the past and who advocated many Western-influenced social and cultural changes. They were the ones who opened new fields and laid the first foundations for much of twentieth-century China's scientific and other scholarly knowledge. As there are only a very limited number of accounts in English that offer a first-hand view of the social and intellectual milieu in which the leading personalities of this changing culture lived and worked, the present volume is especially welcome.

Written in an informal style, enriched with many nuggets of Prof. Chao's own brand of good-natured humor, this account is divided into three chronological sections: Part I, "Early Reminiscences," records snatches of the author's earliest recollections of life in the extended family headed by Grandfather Chao, a Ch'ing official then serving in north China, down to 1902. The author's first years of education saw him going through the usual classical system, starting with rote learning of *Chung-yung*. It is evident that young Yuen Ren manifested not only the normal curiosity of a bright child, but was in addition constantly trying things out to see how they worked (such as testing the efficacy of a magnifying

lens around the house, "scorching this and burning that," until adults put a stop to it—with help from the undescribable and dreaded "chuchutz," perhaps?); early on, also, he showed intense fascination with the sounds of language, inspired by the various dialects spoken within the household, which surely was an indication of the direction in which lay his future life-work: the phonology of Chinese dialects.

Part II recounts the events in the Chao family between 1902 and 1910, including a series of calamitous changes beginning with the death of Grandfather, followed soon after by the deaths of both parents in 1904. Here the extended family system played its part in caring for the bereft youngsters, so that even though the deaths were losses deeply felt, the individual child himself did not necessarily feel utterly lost, for the stream of family life flowed on and he was part of it. After being initiated into his first modern school in Changchow, the ancestral district, Y. R. Chao entered the Kiangnan High School in Nanking where he was a student 1907-1910.

Part III, covering the years 1910-1921, sees Chao developing fully both as a young modern scholar and as an individual. Entering Cornell University as a Boxer Fund student, he gradually became thoroughly acculturated to the American academic community. While maintaining close contacts with fellow students from China, sharing with them a seriousness of purpose and a deep concern for China's future, Chao was, at the same time, acquiring a cosmopolitan outlook and exhibiting a basically apolitical attitude that was rare at that time. Graduating from Cornell with a brilliant record (he has modestly glossed over the fact that he was elected to both Sigma Xi and Phi Beta Kappa), he pursued his studies of physics and philosophy, and earned his doctorate from Harvard. After Harvard came an unsettled year for decisions regard-

ing the choice of a career and the resolution of some personal problems. Returning to China in 1920, he joined the faculty of Tsing Hua College in Peking, but was immediately asked to accompany Bertrand Russell on the latter's lecture tour of China and act as his interpreter. In Peking the author met Dr. Buwei Yang, the future Mrs. Chao. They were married in 1921 in a ceremony radically different from traditional practice, in that there was no ceremony at all. Their joint autobiography will constitute volume 3 of the *Life with Chaos* trilogy, volume 1 of the series being Mrs. Chao's *The Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* published some years ago.

Within the context of their era Y. R. Chao and many of his contemporaries did what they could to translate their ideas concerning China's needs into action, whether it be the promotion of science (tangibly expressed in the founding of the Science Society of China 中國科學社), the launching of the movement for the vernacular style of writing in education and literature, or the breaking of family-arranged engagements to marriage partners unseen. One comes to realize that, in spite of the onset of historical trends, the actual break with the old order still depended upon the resolve and effort of the individual. In the present book, because the recollections of life in the *fin de siècle* traditional household are told in a low-keyed, natural tone, the reader is able to get a useful sense of the way in which the value system of that world was internalized. To change, by conscious choice, from that set of traditional practices and attitudes that was taken for granted in one's formative years, to a different set that would in many ways contradict the earlier system, was the core of the story of Prof. Chao's generation in China: similar situations fill the biographies of many other persons active in the intellectual and professional fields in the period of this book.

One will not find in the present work analytical comments on the major events of the thirty years encompassed. The author's treatment of historical landmarks is cursory and detached: he was too young to take note of the Boxer War, and was in the United States during the Revolution of 1911 as well as the May 4th Movement of 1919. But if one were searching for the authentic colors and sounds, with their many nuances, of social and cultural change at the level of personal experiences that bridged different worlds, then this slender volume has much enlightening material to offer the searcher.

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The Life and Thought of Yeh Shih.

By Winston Wan Lo. (Gainesville and Hong Kong: University Presses of Florida and The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1974, 206 pp. Glossary, Bibliography, Index. US\$10.)

Professor Winston Lo's *The Life and Thought of Yeh Shih* concerns a period, the early Southern Sung, which is central to an understanding of the subsequent intellectual and perhaps even social and political history of the elite in traditional China. Yeh Shih, a younger contemporary and intellectual opponent of Chu Hsi, lived at a time when, amid often ferocious debate, the general form of what would become Ch'eng-Chu orthodoxy was hammered into shape. And while Professor Lo makes no very strong claims for Yeh's intellectual influence on his contemporaries, the positions that Yeh espoused remained lively enough to elicit a response from that modern re-molder of the Confucian tradition, Mou Tsung-san.