

BOOK REVIEW

Facts on File English/Chinese Visual Dictionary. John-Claude Corbeil and Mein-ven Lee. New York/Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1988. 823 pp.

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The introduction to this work states that it "is meant for the active member of the modern industrial society who needs to be acquainted with a wide range of technical terms from many assorted areas, but not be specialist in any."

The book contains over twenty-five thousand terms and three thousand illustrations. The material is arranged topically under 28 "themes" that include, for example, Vegetable Kingdom, Home Furniture, Food, Do-It-Yourself, Personal Adornment, Optical Instruments, Weapons.

Each theme is divided into "categories" and "subcategories." The Food theme, for example, is divided into Herbs, Pasta, Bread, Veal, Beef, Pork, Lamb, North American and French Cheeses, Desserts. There are illustrations for 16 kinds of herbs, 41 kinds of pasta, 28 kinds of bread, and 26 desserts.

All illustrations and their significant component elements are labeled in English and Chinese, the traditional characters (not the simplified forms) being used for the latter.

A detailed table of contents lists the themes, categories, and subcategories. An English index provides a page reference for each term. The same information is provided by a Chinese index that arranges the characters by number of strokes.

The typography is first-rate. The illustrations are well done, the labeling clear, and the Chinese characters generally quite legible, but barely so for complex ones of 26-29 strokes.

Extensive though the dictionary is, there is much that, of necessity, has been left out

among the almost limitless number of items in "modern industrial society" that are susceptible to graphic representation. The basis of what to select for inclusion seems to have been rather haphazard and arbitrary, though admittedly it would be difficult to make a balanced selection that would satisfy all of the intended readership.

Still, one wonders why two pages are devoted to "four-masted bark," with detailed labeling of masts, sails, and other components, whereas there is no mention of canoes, rowboats, dories, and dozens of other related items in more general current use.

Readers who find their field of interest covered in the work will probably be pleased with the presentation if, as is hardly likely, they are not at all bothered by the shortcoming I note below. Some readers may enjoy simply browsing through the book and discovering such tidbits of specialized exotica as the illustrations and names for 13 kinds of glasses, including two for champagne and separate types for bordeaux and burgundy.

My most serious criticism of this work is its failure to provide help for readers who might, not unreasonably, want to know how to pronounce the Chinese character equivalents for the English terms. Amazingly, no transcription whatsoever is provided for the characters. Chinese readers will be less bothered by this than non-Chinese, but even well-educated Chinese readers, especially nonstandard speakers, may have problems with how to pronounce some of the relatively rare characters that abound in this work. Many non-Chinese readers will surely en-

counter difficulties, and not only in the case of infrequently occurring characters.

The unsatisfactory handling of this important area can be illustrated by the case of the fruit (p. 80) labeled "Chinese persimmon" in English and glossed with a single character in Chinese. Readers who don't know the character will have to look up its pronunciation in another dictionary. There they will find the transcription *shì*. But that is not the spoken word for "persimmon." It is *shìzi*. (The tone mark is important, needed to give the precise pronunciation and to distinguish *shìzi* "persimmon" from *shīzi* "lion"). The character in question and its transcription *shì* are actually nonfree elements (comparable to *cran* in *cranberry*) and as such are bookish forms that cannot be used alone to represent the spoken word.

The character for *shì* occurs in the Chinese index. Neither *persimmon* nor *Chinese persimmon* appears in the English index.

Such lapses are minor compared to the failure to indicate the pronunciation of the Chinese terms. This is a major defect that illustrates once again the low state of Chinese lexicography, a condition due to the myopic fixation on written forms.

A French-English dictionary that gave *cran* as the English equivalent for French *canneberge* might lead a French user to ask: "Do you Americans always serve cran sauce with turkey?" Such a dictionary would be derided into oblivion. But the equivalent nonsense is par for the course in Chinese lexicography, where slighting and mishandling the spoken aspects of the language, as this work does, constitute a scandalous dereliction of duty that would not be tolerated for a moment in reputable dictionaries of other languages.