

CHINESE VERTICAL WRITING FOUND EASIEST READING

Chinese, eldest of languages, is commonly thought of as the most difficult. But this is an error, if the difficulty of a language is measured by the speed with which it may be read.

Prof. Walter R. Miles of the department of experimental psychology of Leland Stanford University and Eugene Shan, a graduate student, in a series of comprehensive tests have learned that Chinese may be read more rapidly than English, and that type set vertically is more efficient and causes less eye strain than type set as is this.

In arriving at these conclusions Dr. Miles made use of eleven Chinese students, all of whom were born in China and were brought up on "vertical newspapers"; that is, on Chinese print reading up and down. He photographed their eyes, measuring their movements and noting how long each rested on a single group of words and calculating from that their speed in reading the two classes of selections.

While the entire eye was illuminated and photographed it was the cornea, or white of the eye, that presented the opportunity for study. The cornea, being illuminated, changed its angle of reflection during each movement. The scientists found that the eye is never absolutely still, for when photographing a member fixed on a single spot, its edges left a hazy outline on the negative.

The selections read were in both English and Chinese, taken from a magazine article. The Chinese was set both horizontally and vertically for various experiments. It was found that at each reading pause the eye perceived a greater number of words of vertical type than of horizontal, while a greater number of vertical words were read each second than were horizontal words.

The vertical reading matter, which Dr. Miles found to be more efficient, if applied to newspaper and magazine columns in the United States would bring about this change: You would commence reading at the upper right hand corner of the column or page and read down, progressing by columns from right to left. Each succeeding letter of a word would be set beneath its predecessor rather than alongside. Punctuation marks to indicate pauses, sentences and paragraphs would be used as at present.

It has been a popular idea of long standing that horizontal reading matter may be perceived and understood with less strain to the eye, and, in fact, many Chinese papers have changed over to this style of type-setting during the last few years. But Dr. Miles' analysis of his investigations indicate this to be an erroneous impression. Investigations subsequent to those he has already reported upon bear out the earlier conclusions.

A young tree grows faster than an old tree.
