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RECENT AND FORTHCOMING CHINESE-ENGLISH AND ENGLISH-CHINESE
DICTIONARIES FROM THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Introduction

Lexicography in China has had a long and interesting history. The first known Chinese dictionary, SHI ZHOU PIAN, was compiled during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.); the first Chinese bilingual dictionary, HUA YI CIDIAN, was published in the early 1400s by a government bureau established to study things foreign. Many of the early bilingual dictionaries dealt with technical subjects.¹ Chinese-English and English-Chinese dictionaries began to appear in the 1800s as Christian missionaries and foreign traders settled in China. There have been a number of bilingual dictionaries early this century, by such compilers as Giles, Mathews and Zheng, but with the profound changes in the Chinese and English languages, most are now obsolete.

In recent years lexicographers in the People's Republic of China have published numerous Chinese and English dictionaries that are far superior to any works in the past. This paper surveys recent and forthcoming bilingual works, including HAN YING CIDIAN, XIAO HAN YING CIDIAN, XIN YING HAN CIDIAN, YING HAN DA CIDIAN, and XIN YING HAN XUESHENG CIDIAN (full references are given in the Bibliography of cited dictionaries at the end of this volume).

Selection of entries

The selection of entries in a dictionary with Chinese as the source language is a difficult process for two reasons. First, due to the structure of the Chinese language, there is no consensus as to what constitutes a word.² Second, until the appearance in 1978 of XIANDAI HANYU CIDIAN (A DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE, hereafter XIAN HAN), no authoritative monolingual dictionary of the everyday Chinese language existed. Until that time, the standard monolingual dictionaries (CIHAI and CIYUAN) were compiled for readers of the Classical literature and only contained 'hard' words. The two Chinese-English dictionaries discussed in this paper have, to varying degrees, overcome these obstacles. The selection of entries in HAN YING CIDIAN (hereafter CHINESE-ENGLISH) is based on XIAN HAN. The more than 56,000 headwords in the CHINESE-ENGLISH accurately reflect the vocabulary of modern China.³ Two problems exist, however. First, the editors included numerous scientific and technical terms, but on occasion the coverage is too complete for a medium-size dictionary. Second, certain uniquely Chinese terms are not included. These are exactly the type of terms that translators and language students have the greatest difficulty with because of the 'foreignness' of Chinese culture and the complexity of the Chinese language. A number of these terms can be found in XIAN HAN, but not in the CHINESE-ENGLISH. Despite these problems, the CHINESE-ENGLISH, because of its excellent selection of entries, should be

the first choice of Chinese-to-English translators.

XIAO HAN YING CIDIAN (hereafter SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH), although smaller in scope than the dictionary discussed above, is notable for its judicious selection of entries. The selection was based in part on the experiences of the teachers at the Beijing Languages Institute in their teaching of Chinese to foreigners. The 18,000 entries in the SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH address the general Chinese vocabulary, with only minimal attention given to scientific and technical terminology. On occasion, the SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH approaches the coverage of the CHINESE-ENGLISH, e.g. under the head character qūan 'to watch/observe' the CHINESE-ENGLISH has 20 entries and the SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH has 15, under wěn 'firm, steady' the CHINESE-ENGLISH has 13 entries and the SMALL ENGLISH-CHINESE has 10. Because of its compact size, the SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH is best used by foreign students beginning their study of Chinese and by those needing a handy reference when doing light reading.

Lexicographers working from English to Chinese have a decided advantage over their colleagues working from Chinese to English because of the number of excellent monolingual English dictionaries available today. If an editor is knowledgeable enough and careful enough in the selection of entries, he or she is well on the way to compiling a good English-Chinese dictionary. It should be noted that lexicography in China was seriously affected by the chaotic political and cultural environment during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and the Gang of Four era. During these tumultuous years, with 'politics in command', lexical purity was stressed over lexical reality.

The XIN YING HAN CIDIAN (hereafter NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE) contains more than 50,000 entries covering general vocabulary, scientific and technical terms, abbreviations, contractions, foreign words and geographical names. The editors are to be commended for their sensitivity and balance in selecting entries to describe modern English, both American and British. From entries such as bring (with 53 definitions and uses) through schlepp to zing, the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE provides the most complete coverage of English of any English-Chinese dictionary. The coverage is so thorough that the editors felt it necessary to include a disclaimer in the preface explaining that many words were included even though they "reflect the decadent social phenomena of dying capitalism".

As a revision and enlargement of the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE, the forthcoming YING HAN DA CIDIAN (hereafter LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE) with 150,000 entries promises to be even more comprehensive and accurate. The major sources from which entries are being selected include the MERRIAM-WEBSTER NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY, THE CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY, WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD, 6000 WORDS (Supplement to WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL), the Supplements to the OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, and the BARNHART DICTIONARY OF NEW ENGLISH.

On occasion, the editors of the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE were not selective enough when choosing entries. On the one hand, they included cowboy boots, bell-bottomed trousers and extinct volcano as headwords. In the interest of consistency, however, entries such as work boots, hiking boots, straight-legged trousers, flared trousers and active volcano should be added. Obviously, such additions would

only clutter the text. These entries could be better included as examples under boots, trousers and volcano. On the other hand, certain words such as contour farming and extrasensory perception were embedded as examples under the headwords contour and extra-sensory. These and similar entries might be better entered as headwords. Nevertheless, when completed, the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE will be the most comprehensive English-Chinese dictionary ever published.

The selection of entries in the XIN YING HAN XUESHENG CIDIAN (hereafter STUDENTS ENGLISH-CHINESE) is noteworthy for its coverage of basic modern English and because it enters as headwords words that a beginning Chinese student of English might find confusing. Phrasal verbs are listed as separate entries; in addition, instead of subsuming words under broad headwords (as is the case with the CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY or the more recent NEW YORK TIMES EVERYDAY DICTIONARY), the STUDENTS ENGLISH-CHINESE lists compound words separately, e.g. after show it has separate entries for show around, show biz, showboat, show business, etc. Because the editors of the STUDENTS ENGLISH-CHINESE selected the more than 25,000 entries with the Chinese student of English in mind, it is sure to be a popular reference book.

Definitions

Any dictionary stands or falls on the accuracy of its definitions. The accuracy of definitions in Chinese and English bilingual dictionaries is an especially difficult problem because of fundamental linguistic and cultural differences. All too often absolute equivalents do not exist, leaving the lexicographer to choose from partial equivalents or extended explanations.

The accuracy of definitions in the CHINESE-ENGLISH have been praised in review after review. The definitions are so precise that the dictionary has been adopted by the Joint Publishing Research Service of the U.S. Government as "the standard reference in rendering into English various terms and phrases appearing in the printed media of the People's Republic of China".⁴

Problems do exist, however. One is the lack of definite articles or prepositions to distinguish parts of speech. For example, the infinitive verb fumó is simply defined as 'stroke'. Even in a small dictionary like WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD HANDY POCKET DICTIONARY, the entry stroke has four distinct definitions. The addition of the preposition to to the definition, inclusion of synonyms, or an example of usage would help to clarify the meaning.

Definitions in the SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH are, for the most part, to the point, logically arranged and well balanced. For example, fèichu is succinctly defined as 'depose', yīn as '(1) cause, reason; (2) according to, on account of; (3) because, for, thanks to', and tiao liang xiao chou as 'clown, buffoon (silly and contemptible person)'. One disturbing feature of the definitions in the SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH is the occasional borrowing of definitions directly from other reference works.

The definitions in the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE are well-written and comprehensive. For example, apart is defined as '(1) separated by, away from; (2) separate from, detached from; (3) aside, beside; (4)

in pieces; (5) difference, distinction'. In addition to clearly written definitions, many entries are treated in great detail, sometimes a half or full page in length. The headword set, e.g., has 24 definitions as a transitive verb, 11 as an intransitive verb, 9 as an adjective, 17 as a noun and almost another page and a half of accompanying phrases. Many of the definitions in the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE compare favourably with medium-size monlingual English dictionaries.

Definitions in the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE will set the standard for accuracy and comprehensiveness for future English-Chinese dictionaries. One reason for the excellent definitions is the heavy reliance on English dictionaries. Another reason is the solid basis provided by the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE from which the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE is derived. The most important reason is the skill with which the editing was done and the staff's overall attention to detail. As always, there is room for improvement. Discrete meanings are sometimes grouped together, e.g. under the headword crackup the meanings of a mental breakdown and fragmentation (e.g. of a coalition) are not distinguished.

Definitions in the STUDENTS ENGLISH-CHINESE are clear and concise. For example, shoot up is defined as 'to rise quickly, to grow rapidly, to increase sharply' and as a colloquialism ('to riddle with bullets'). Some, however, seem too concise, e.g. when sulk as an intransitive verb is defined as shēngqì, which is usually rendered as 'to become angry', and does not explain the state of being withdrawn or sullen.

Labels

The CHINESE-ENGLISH employs labels extensively. A list appears on pages 5 and 6 of the 1978 edition under the heading Table of Abbreviations. This includes 75 abbreviations enclosed in square brackets, but does not include unabbreviated terms such as ping-pong. Overall, the labels are carefully used without cluttering the text. One area of improvement would be regionalisms. It would help if entries indicated the area of occurrence; is a particular term from Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou? Another improvement would be the addition of a label for idioms or set phrases.

The SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH uses labels for parts of speech only. A list of the labels can be found on page 6 of the prefatory material. Not all the entries are labelled, however. For example, sài pǎo is defined as 'race', but there is no indication whether it is a verb or noun.

The NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE employs more than 80 labels which are found on page 10 of the introduction under the heading List of Abbreviations. The list is divided into four categories, languages (e.g. Japanese), types of language (e.g. colloquial), technical (e.g. musical), and scientific (e.g. metallurgy). In addition, parts of speech are also labelled. One especially useful group of labels for the non-native speaker of English is that for the different varieties of English such as British, American, Irish, etc.

The labels in the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE and the STUDENTS ENGLISH-CHINESE have yet to be finalized because both dictionaries

are still being compiled in Shanghai. It can be assumed that the labels in the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE will be similar to the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE.

Examples

The inclusion of examples adds an extra dimension to any dictionary. Examples give the user an idea of how the word is used in context or in the 'real world'. One of the most useful features of the CHINESE-ENGLISH is that numerous examples are incorporated in the text. Many are phrases, some are complete sentences. One disturbing feature is the political overtone of certain examples. One example under kūnàn reads "Wars launched by imperialism have caused the people untold suffering"; the U.S. is often referred to as imperialists, the Soviet Union as revisionists and the Kuomintang as reactionaries.

There are no illustrative examples in the SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH.

All examples in the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE were taken from English language sources, either books, magazines and newspapers or English dictionaries. Generally, the examples are well-placed and helpful. As in the CHINESE-ENGLISH, a number of the examples are laced with political implications.

Examples in the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE are drawn from a citation file of more than 250,000 items. Some examples seem redundant, e.g. for drawbridge, dressing gown or drumstick, while others seem too specific (e.g. "The beet crop fulfilled expectations"). To their credit, the editors have removed most of the political statements embedded in the examples. For instance, under the entry for imperialism the examples read "the imperialism of Caesar", "cultural imperialism", and "an act of press imperialism". The LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE Dictionary Group is also using native English speakers to review all examples for accuracy and idiomaticity.

Examples are essential in a monolingual or bilingual student dictionary. Many of the entries in the STUDENTS ENGLISH-CHINESE include excellent examples such as, under shorten, "She shortened the skirt by an inch", "shorten a report to 1,000 words", and "The days shorten in winter". The majority of entries have only a few examples, but difficult words have many (e.g. should has 22 and show has 40).

Explanatory notes

Like labels and examples, explanatory notes provide the user ready information that would otherwise have to be sought in a grammar, history text, or encyclopaedia. The notes in the CHINESE-ENGLISH for the most part are taken from XIAN HAN. Usage notes are enclosed in brackets and are very informative (they are given in Chinese). In addition, meanings are often clarified in parentheses, e.g. the definition for bàiluo reads 'decline (in wealth and position)'.

The SMALL CHINESE-ENGLISH uses explanatory notes sparingly, but effectively. A number provide historical information, others clarify points of modern Chinese society. One very welcome feature is the

inclusion of measure words for certain nouns, e.g. in the entry gēzi 'dove' it is noted that the proper measure word is zhī.

Many entries in the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE are supplemented with explanatory notes. Some pertain to usage and are set off in brackets, e.g. the use of above as a preposition is explained in definition (1) as relating to pōsition or rank, in definition (3) as pertaining to number or age, and in definition (5) as pertaining to a person's character, conduct, ability, etc.

Like the NEW ENGLISH-CHINESE, the LARGE ENGLISH-CHINESE includes numerous explanatory notes. For example, the Ching Kang Mountains are described as being in Jiangxi Province and as the base of the first Chinese peasant revolution. "Catch-22" is explained and then noted as being the title of the novel by Joseph Heller. There are also notes, set off by a diamond mark, to explain the usage of 'difficult' words, e.g. ago vs. before.

The users of the STUDENTS ENGLISH-CHINESE will find its explanatory notes enlightening. Some of these augment the Chinese definition, e.g. when a sultan is defined as sū dān, a transliteration of the headword, and then described in parentheses as a sovereign of certain Muslim countries. Others help to put definitions in context, e.g. when suffuse is explained as concerning liquid, colour, light etc. The dictionary also incorporates cross-references for purposes of comparison, e.g. the headword should directs the user to also see ought.

Conclusion

China's long history of lexicographic activity is continuing today with great vigour. Bilingual lexicographers in China are especially active, particularly those working with English. After many generations of adequate bilingual dictionaries we now have available several excellent resources. This paper has attempted to introduce and briefly analyze new and forthcoming Chinese and English bilingual dictionaries from the People's Republic. The publication of these and other outstanding reference works demonstrates the high quality of lexicography in China today and demands our attention.

Notes

- 1 For more information on lexicography in China cf. Creamer (forthcoming), Fang (1979), Li (1982), and Xue (1982).
- 2 Cf. Zgusta (1971:241), Hu (1981:232-259), and Gao and Wang (1980:31-46).
- 3 Cf. C. Kiriloff "How well do some recently published dictionaries meet the needs of translators of modern texts?" Mimeo, Canberra College of Advanced Education.
- 4 No. 5 (January 1983), p. 1 of the JPRS Newsletter for Chinese Translators.

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