

Chinalex and lexicographic activities in China

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Abstract

The China Association for Lexicography (Chinalex) plays an important role in Chinese lexicography. This article offers a general introduction to Chinalex and sets forth the functions it has performed in the lexicographic activities and characteristics of lexicographic practice in China, followed by a presentation of a new generation of learners' dictionaries and attempts made in computer-aided lexicography.

Keywords: China Association for Lexicography, Chinalex, lexicographic activities, learner's dictionary, computer-aided lexicography

1. An introduction to Chinalex

The China Association for Lexicography (Chinalex) was established on October 27, 1992 in Beijing. An Academic Board and the following seven Committees for specific lexicographic fields were set up: Chinese lexicography, Bilingual lexicography, Specialized lexicography, Encyclopaedic lexicography, Editing and Publishing, Computer-aided lexicography, and Theoretical and Historical lexicography.

Cao Xianzhuo was elected as the first President of Chinalex. He was concurrently Deputy Director of the National Language Committee and President of the Institute of Applied Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Social Science. The following lexicographers and dictionary publishers were elected as Vice-Presidents: Cao Feng (President of Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House), Wang Yaonan (Professor at Hubei University), Huang Jianhua (President of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, GDUFS), and Lin Erwei (President of The Commercial Press).

Along with the establishment of Chinalex, a constitution was drawn up and all lexicographic activities were organized to conform to its articles. The President or Vice-Presidents serve for a term of five years. The current President is Cao Guangshun (Chinese Academy of Social Science), and the Vice-Presidents are Yu Dianli (The Commercial Press), Wang Xuming (Language & Culture Press), Liu Qing (China National Committee for Terms in Sciences), Yang Bin (Sichuan Dictionary Publishing House), He Yuanlong (Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House), Gong Li (Encyclopedia of China Publishing House), Zhang Yihua (GDUFS), and Wei Xiangqing (Nanjing University). The General Secretary is Zhou Hongbo

(The Commercial Press), and Chair of the Academic Board is Zhang Yihua.

Over the past 20 years, Chinalex and its subordinate committees have created a platform for Chinese lexicographers to exchange ideas and take part in scholarly activities including lexicographic theory, practice and publication, which helped to enter a new period of rapid development. Many lexicographic institutions were set up, such as the Lexicographic Department of the Chinese Academy of Social Science, the Center for Lexicographical Studies of GDUFS, the Chinese Lexicography Research Center of Ludong University, the Institute of Ancient Books of Hubei University, the Lexicographical Research Institute of Shaanxi Normal University, the Center for Bilingual Lexicography and Bilingual & Bicultural Studies of Xiamen University, the Bilingual Research Center of Nanjing University, the Dictionary Research Institute of Sichuan International Studies University, the Dictionary Research Institute of Heilongjiang University, and the Lexicographical Research Center of The Commercial Press.

Chinalex also sponsors two journals, *Lexicographical Studies* (Cishu Yanjiu) and *Journal of Lexicography in China* (Zhongguo Cishu Xuebao). The former started its publication in 1979, and the latter in 2015.

2. Characteristics of lexicographic practice

All the main dictionary publishing houses in China are members of Chinalex, including The Commercial Press, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP), Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press (SFLEP), Shanghai Translation Publishing House, Sichuan Dictionary Publishing House, and Chongwen Book Company. The most important lexicographic projects, apart from *The Encyclopedia of China*, are all sponsored and published by these publishers, such as *Sources of Chinese Words* (Ci Yuan), *Sea of Chinese Words* (Ci Hai), *Grand Chinese Dictionary* (Hanyu Da Cidian), *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (Xiandai Hanyu Cidian), *Grand Dictionary of Chinese Characters* (Hanyu Da Zidian), *Xinhua Chinese Character Dictionary* (Xinhua Zidian), *Xinhua Chinese Dictionary* (Xinhua Cidian), *A New English-Chinese Dictionary* (Yinghua Da Cidian), and *The*



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Chinalex sub-committees, chairs and affiliations

- Academic Board – Zhang Yihua, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies
- Chinese Lexicography – Tan Jinghun, Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Science
- Bilingual Lexicography – Zhang Yihua, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies
- Specialized Lexicography – Peng Weiguo, Shanghai Century Publishing Group
- Encyclopaedias – Gong Li, Encyclopedia of China Publishing House
- Editing & Publishing – Zhou Hongbo, The Commercial Press
- Computer-aided Lexicography – Sun Hongda, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House
- Theoretical & Historical Lexicography – Yang Bin, Sichuan Dictionary Publishing House

English-Chinese Dictionary (Yinghan Da Cidian).

Whereas in the English language the basic unit is the word, in Chinese it is the character (字, *zi*). Ancient Chinese consisted only of characters, not words. Along with language evolution, Chinese characters have become very flexible in combination and may be used as fundamental linguistic signs to form words, while many characters maintain the traditional function of encoding semantics in different word classes without any change in form. Thus, we can have both a Chinese character dictionary and a word dictionary, with the following distinctive modern characteristics:

1. the dictionaries cease to function as a tool only to explain hard Chinese characters or words in classic writings, and serve to describe the language in a systematic and comprehensive way;
2. words take the place of Chinese characters and become the main part of the headword list;
3. synchronic description and diachronic explanation are combined (so native-language and foreign-oriented purposes are integrated into one in some bilingual dictionaries);
4. the entry structure is well-established,

including word class¹, pronunciation, word sense disambiguation, definitions, examples, collocation, and usage notes.

Recently, reference works of different types are increasingly produced every year.

Table 1 classifies dictionaries published in the last two decades by the three main dictionary publishers in China: Commercial Press, FLTRP and SFLEP. It shows that there are more bilingual dictionaries than monolingual ones, and more dictionaries for foreign language learners than general ones. Nearly all the English monolingual dictionaries originate from British or American publishers, for example, among the 71 English monolingual dictionaries published by SFLEP 41 are from Oxford University Press and 10 are derived from Collins COBUILD. In addition, there is a large number of English-Chinese bilingualised dictionaries, another feature of the local dictionary market that is a sign of

1 Since Chinese words are flexible in use, it has been said that the Chinese language has no word class. Chinese dictionaries for foreign learners began to mark word class in 1995. those for native speakers began to provide it systematically in 2006.

item	category	sub-category	quantity	remark
type	monolingual	English	105	
		Chinese	61	
		other languages	19	
	bilingual (around 87% English)	Foreign Language – Chinese	168	
		Chinese – Foreign Language	112	
		bi-directional	131	
	bilingualized	Chinese-English	87	
English-Chinese		3		
function	decoding		493	
	encoding		193	
user	native users		197	25 also for foreign users
	foreign/second language learners		512	around 87% English
language coverage	general		366	
	specialized		320	
time coverage media represent-ation	diachronic		46	3 also synchronic
	synchronic		640	
	print		674	
	electronic		12	
	verbal dictionaries		665	
	illustrative dictionaries		21	
user level	beginner		129	
	intermediate		178	6 also for intermediate-advanced
	advanced		379	

Table 1. Classification of contemporary dictionaries by main dictionary publishers in China

the popularity of EFL learning and teaching in China.

It is thus evident that dictionaries in China mainly focus on a synchronic description of language for general-purpose decoding tasks. Fewer encoding dictionaries are found on the market, and most learners' dictionaries are either bilingual or English-Chinese bilingualised ones. Electronic (including online) versions of the main Chinese dictionaries are not available except for a few mobile apps, a serious structural defect in dictionary distribution. However, it was recently announced that the newly revised *Sources of Chinese Words* (3rd edition) will become available in both print and electronic versions (on flash disk and online), and *The Encyclopedia of China* (3rd edition) will also be put online.

In recent decades, along with the increasing zeal for learning Chinese as a foreign language around the world, many learners' dictionaries have been compiled and marketed. The most representative one is *800 words of Contemporary Chinese* (Xiandai Hanyu Babaici, 1980), compiled by the distinguished linguist Li Shuxiang and designed to describe function words and other common words, focusing on the meaning, grammatical pattern, and usages of each lexical unit. Other dictionaries were published successively, such as *Modern Chinese Learner's Dictionary* (Xiandai Hanyu Xuexi Cidian, Sun Quanzhou, 1995), *Usage Dictionary of Modern Chinese Common Words* (Xiandai Hanyu Changyongci Yongfa Cidian, Li Yimin, 1995), *Usage Dictionary of Chinese Common Words* (Hanyu Changyongci Yongfa Cidian, Li Xiaoqi, 1997), *Chinese-English Learner's Dictionary* (Hanying Shuangjie Cidian, Wang Huan, 1997), *Contemporary Chinese Learner's Dictionary* (Dangdai Hanyu Xuexi Cidian, Xu Yumin, 2005), and *Commercial Press Learner's Dictionary* (Shangwuguan Xuehanyu Cidian, Lu Jianji, 2007).

A number of Chinese learners' dictionaries for native speakers were published as well. A representative one is *Contemporary Chinese Learner's Dictionary* (Xiandai Hanyu Xuexi Cidian, The Commercial Press, 2010).

3. A new generation of learners' dictionaries

According to Xinhua News Agency, students who received various kinds of higher education in colleges and universities in China numbered 35.59 million by the end of 2014. Furthermore, there were more than 200 million school pupils, including 57.36 million middle school students and 45.27 million high

school students. They all learn a foreign language, the majority being English. Chinese higher education attaches special importance to bilingual instruction. In 2001 the Ministry of Education stated that basic and specialized courses for undergraduates should be taught in English or another foreign language. But the students' lack of foreign language proficiency is usually an obstacle to bilingual instruction in specialized courses. The students must turn to learners' dictionaries for unknown lexical information, technical terms and expressions. Therefore, English learners' dictionaries attract much attention from lexicographers, and numerous researches have focused on the theory and practice of English pedagogical lexicography. The Center for Lexicographical Studies of GDUFS has proposed an integrated approach to the EFL learner's dictionary and lexicographic practice, which involves an original design made especially for Chinese learners, including the application and integration of cognitive linguistics and second-language acquisition theories.

Theoretical research has resulted in a dictionary project supported by the National Social Science Fund and SFLTP, called *A New Concept English-Chinese Dictionary for Active Use*. This dictionary features an innovative definition method, which results in a construction-based, meaning-driven, multi-dimensional definition (Goldberg 1995, 2006; Zhang 2006, 2010, 2015b). Event structure, participant/semantic



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deliver **v** 1 [VN(prep)] *sb delivers goods, packages, messages, mail or letters etc (to sb or somewhere), they take them to that person or place* 译文/Syn send, convey, dispatch 传递; 递送; 投递 (货物; 包裹; 讯息, 邮件或信件等) (给某人或到某地) ... (例证略) 译文/Opp receive, get 2 [VN] [正式] *sb delivers a statement such as a talk, address or speech, or a presentation, paper, lecture etc, they make a formal or special account on a particular topic in public, or to a group of people* 译文/Syn declare, announce, state, recite 发布, 发表 (讲话, 演讲, 宣言); 宣读 (论文); 做 (介绍, 讲座) ... 译文/Opp conceal, suppress, withhold 3 [VN(Prep)] [VN(prep)] *sb or sth such as an action or event delivers a blow, punch, or kick etc to sb else or a certain part of their body, they aim at and hit them hard* 译文/Syn deal, strike, give 给 (某人) (一拳, 一脚等); 猛击 [踢]; (行为或事件) 给 (某人) 沉重打击 ... 译文/Opp receive, suffer, take 派生/Der **delivery** *n*; **deliverer** *n*; **deliverable** *adj*.

fresh **adj** 1 [常用于名词前] (of food, vegetables or flowers) recently made, produced, or picked (食物; 蔬菜或花) 新鲜的; 新产的; 新采的: ... 2 [常用于名词前] (of method, style, or looks) completely new, not seen before, and different from of other thing of the same kind 近义词 original, novel (方法; 风格; 面貌) 新颖的; 独特的: ... 3 (of sth such as a news, track, act, or memory etc) lately appearing, made or added recently (消息; 线索; 行为; 记忆等) 新出现的, 新近的; 新增加的: ... 4 (of evidence, information and data) newly found or obtained 近义词 new (证据; 信息; 资料) 新获得的, 新发现的: ...

Figure 1. A sample entry of *A New Concept English-Chinese Dictionary for Active Use*

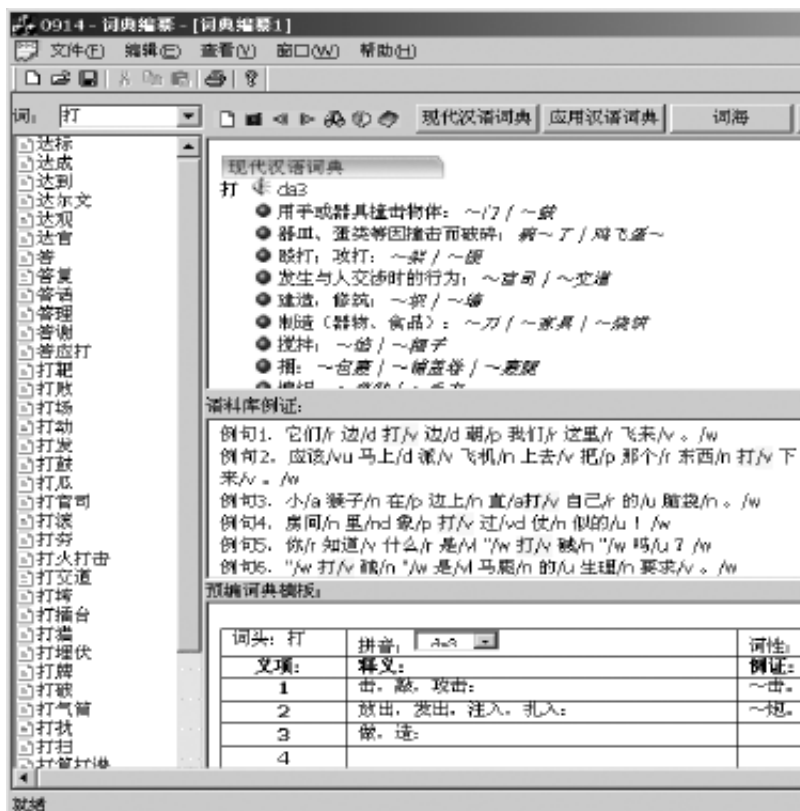


Figure 2. Writing interface of a corpus-based dictionary writing system

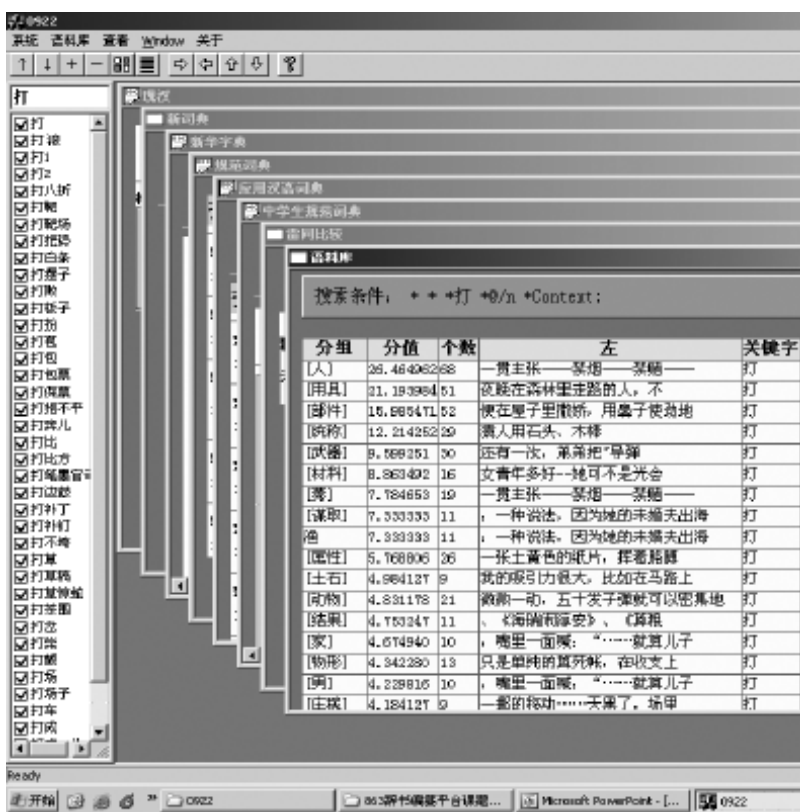


Figure 3. Checking the interface of a corpus-based dictionary writing system

roles, argument structure of related lexico-grammatical constructions, and syntactic-semantic interfaces are clearly shown in the definitional unit as the basis of multi-dimensional meaning representation. Figure 1 presents a sample entry.

A draft version of the dictionary is now completed. Obviously, the style is different from that of existing learners' dictionaries. The definition is bilingualised and firmly based on linguistic studies, and the participant/semantic roles are extracted from a large corpus by means of pattern analysis. Users can thus easily find the necessary morphological, semantic, and syntactic information, as well as co-occurrence patterns and usages of defined words.

4. Computer-aided lexicography

As a cross-disciplinary field of study, computational lexicography has developed into a relatively independent subject through serial researches over a rather long period of time, with a complete set of methodology and research objectives (Zhang 2015a). Recently, Chinese lexicographers have become increasingly aware of the importance of computer technology in lexicography. The main research is focused on dynamic balanced corpus data, semi- or full automation of dictionary writing, formalization of microstructure arrangement, digitization of dictionary media, the *intelligentization* (i.e. having intelligent search and discovery, in China English) of the dictionary query, and integration of multimedia into lexical data representation. The major bodies to have made significant efforts towards these ends – such as corpus building, developing a lexicographical database, or integrating a dictionary writing system – include The Commercial Press, the Center for Lexicographical Studies (GDUFS), SFLTP, and the Institute of Applied Linguistics (under the Ministry of Education).

The Institute of Applied Linguistics developed a corpus-based dictionary writing system that integrates a tagged corpus as well as several mainstream dictionary databases such as *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, *Applied Chinese Language Dictionary*, *Cihai* (Sea of Chinese Words), *Xinhua Chinese Character Dictionary*, and *Verb Usage Dictionary*. Lexicographers can use the system to both write new dictionaries and revise existing ones, as well as to find evidence to support their information. Figure 2 shows the system's interface divided into five parts: the left column displays the headwords; the bottom consists of a dictionary writing template; the top presents the entry preview or display; the middle left column

is used to extract examples from a tagged corpus that can offer information on word segmentation, word class, co-occurrence, grammatical pattern, senses and meaning; the middle right column serves to extract collocations (see also Figure 3).

Some research institutions, for example the Applied Language Institute and the Center for Lexicographical Studies (GDUFS), have proposed a comprehensive approach to electronic lexicography so as to integrate corpus, database, computer-aided compilation and revision, quality control, etc. into one system composed of three parts:

1. **Resources.** Related dictionaries, corpora and language norms and standards, constituting a large general language knowledge base, and serving as supporting information for dictionary writing.
2. **Processing.** Lexical data duplication checking through a conceptual relevance network, i.e., estimating similarities among related dictionaries; lexical conflict checking in a series of dictionaries; lexical normative checking against related linguistic and terminological norms or standards; description and representation of syntactic-semantic interfaces through corpus pattern analysis; and establishing lexical-semantic relations with phonological, morphological and conceptual relevance.
3. **Objects.** The products of the system include the dictionary generation system featuring automatic dictionary production based on a lexicographic database; a checking system as outlined above; an operational interface composed of system management, data-statistics, and multi-property retrieval, the latter including formal, phonetic, and semantic properties; inter-character relevance, sequential value properties; and related resources.

With such a system, almost all operations can be done on a single online-based and computer-aided programme, and all the data necessary for dictionary writing, checking, editing and revising can be made available by a click on the corresponding buttons or control icons.

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The Center for Lexicographical Studies of GDUFS

The study of lexicography at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) began in the 1970s by the GDUFS President, Professor Huang Jianhua, a pioneer in modern theoretical lexicography in China, and was followed by Professor Zhang Yihua a leading scholar. In the early 1980's, lexicography became the key study area in the former Institute of International Languages and Cultures and in the mid-1990's the Center for Lexicographical Studies (CLS) was established. From then on, Huang Jianhua, Chen Chuxiang and Zhang Yihua obtained significant achievements in their academic researches, exercising great impact on contemporary lexicography in China. With the development of lexicographical studies and growth of the academic team, CLS became an independent research institution of GDUFS in 2001, and it functions as the headquarters of Chinalex Bilingual Committee, of which Huang and Zhang are successively the former and current chairman.

Lexicographic study at CLS constitutes one of the three well-established research areas of the National Key Research Center for Linguistics and Applied Linguistics and is recognized as National Key Discipline. CLS comprises the following sections: lexicographic research; dictionary compilation; laboratory for computer-aided dictionary compilation; lexicography teaching; and a reference room. It includes 8 full-time faculty members and 10 guest or part-time ones, among them 7 professors and 5 associate professors, including 7 graduate supervisors and three PhD supervisors.
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