

Treatment of entries with Chinese characteristics in English learner's dictionaries: A case study of *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8e*

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1. Introduction

Along with the dramatic increase in international exchange between Chinese people and Westerners, more and more words of Chinese origin infiltrate the English language. According to the Global Language Monitor (Radtko 2007), among the 2,000 new words and phrases added to English in 2005, 20% stemmed from Chinese. English learner's dictionary compilers have noticed the phenomenon and adjusted their practice accordingly. However, for various reasons, their treatment of words and expressions with Chinese characteristics requires improvement. A typical case is the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Eighth Edition* (OALD8, 2010), and in this study we examine such entries with Chinese characteristics.

There are two reasons for choosing OALD8 as our study object. The OALD is one of the best-selling English learner's dictionaries worldwide, and the annual sales volume of the bilingual Chinese version of OALD8 reached over one million. Moreover, The bilingualized version (English and Chinese) of OALD8 published by The Commercial Press in Mainland China occupied the first place by sales volume under the category of "English-Chinese/Chinese-English Dictionaries", according to the statistics of two major online stores (jd.com and amazon.com; data accessed at 21:20 on March 24th, 2016).

2. Research methods of the current study

The 'advanced search' function of the CD-ROM version of OALD8 was used to retrieve all the entries with the tags "originated from Chinese" or "used in the region of China". There were 47 entries with Chinese characteristics which we classified in 8 categories as shown in Table 1.

After the entries were selected and classified they were examined one by one with the aims of identifying possible imperfections in their treatment and making suggestions for improvements if applicable.

3. Analysis of entries with Chinese characteristics in OALD8

The entries with Chinese characteristics were analyzed from the perspectives of headword selection and inclusion, definitions, and labels.

3.1 Headword selection and inclusion

The English words listed in Table 1 have distinctive Chinese characteristics, most of which concern Chinese customs, including terms of sports and entertainment (kung fu, t'ai chi ch'uan, Chinese chequers, mahjong and Cantopop), clothing (cheongsam, samfu) and ways of doing things (feng shui, kowtow, Chinese lantern). The second largest category consist of words and expressions denoting philosophy. Chinese philosophy has a long history, some of

Table 1. List of entries with Chinese characteristics in OALD

category	headword
politics	Maoism, Maoist
economy	renminbi, taipan, yuan
language	Cantonese, Yue, Wu, Xiang, Chinglish, putonghua
philosophy and religion	Dalai Lama, lama, Lamaism, lamasery, Confucian, Taoism, yang, yin
customs	Cantopop, cheongsam, Chinese chequers, Chinese lantern, feng shui, kowtow, kung fu, mahjong, samfu, t'ai chi ch'uan
cuisine	chop suey, chow mein, dim sum, foo yong, hoisin, Peking duck, wok, wonton
craft	china, China-blue, china-clay, kaolin
animal and plant	Chinese cabbage, chow, ginkgo, lapsang souchong, lychee, pak choi

which dates back to over 2,500 years ago, and has profound influence on both Chinese culture and Western philosophy. It is not surprising that words referring to Chinese food constitute the next largest category, as its global popularity and influence have made the names of Chinese dishes enter the English language as loanwords. Table 1 shows that words and expressions with Chinese characteristics in OALD8 cover a wide range of fields from daily life to philosophy, from business to politics, from craft to custom, and from food to language. Moreover, a large proportion of these words and expressions comes from Cantonese, such as *taipan*, *kowtow*, *samfu*, etc. This might be due to the fact that Guangzhou was among the first cities in China that opened its doors to the West in ancient time, and that more immigrants from the Guangdong and Hong Kong areas went to live and work in English-speaking countries and brought their culture and language there.

According to the OALD8 blurb, the total number of headwords in the dictionary is 184,500, which means the number of Chinese-derived words and expressions (47) accounts for barely 0.03% of its entries. Nearly twenty years ago Benson (1997:133) has noted that English learner's dictionaries (ELDs) contain fewer references to China than their larger counterparts such as OED. The OED online version reveals through advanced search 250 entries of Chinese origin, that is 0.04% of the total 600,000 entries. However, as ELDs claim to be specifically designed for foreign learners, they may be expected to include more entries from other varieties than their larger counterparts for native speakers. Moreover, the number of headwords from Chinese is out of proportion to that of headwords derived from other languages, say Japanese. According to Zeng (2005, 2016), the number of headwords originating from Japanese in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is several times higher than those from Chinese. Last, but not the least, the headwords with Chinese characteristics in OALD8 are mostly from old times, and only a few refer to the current time. Since, as mentioned above, more and more new words from Chinese enter the English language in recent years, ELDs should reflect this language change accordingly.

3.2 The definitions

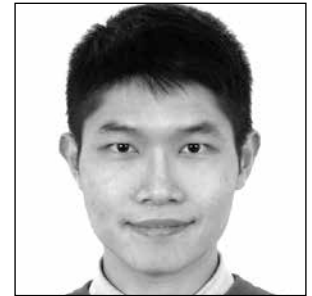
The words and expressions with Chinese characteristics seem to be alien to the OALD8 compilers, as some of them are not defined accurately. Besides, some definitions are too simple or vague and could cause a difficulty in understanding for dictionary users, even for Chinese native speakers.

3.2.1 Regional differences not indicated in the definitions

As a dialect of Putonghua, Cantonese shares the same Chinese character with Putonghua, but has different pronunciations. In many cases, the same word in Cantonese and Putonghua may refer to different referents in the real world, which is liable to lead to confusion.

For instance, the headword *chop suey* is from Cantonese, referring to a kind of mixed food made of meat and vegetables, is defined in OALD8 as “a Chinese-style dish of small pieces of meat fried with vegetables and served with rice”. This definition, however, is problematic for native Mandarin Chinese users as this dish in other parts of China is totally different from that in the Cantonese-speaking areas. The pinyin form of *chop suey* in Mandarin Chinese is *zasui*, which refers to a dish of cooked entrails of cattle or sheep (Liu 2009). For speakers of Cantonese and Putonghua, *chop suey* and *zasui* are two different kinds of dishes with different meanings. By reading this definition, speakers of Mandarin Chinese would normally understand *chop suey* to be another kind of dish rather than *zasui*.

Another example is *cheongsam*, which is defined as “a straight, tightly fitting silk dress with a high neck and short sleeves and an opening at the bottom on each side, worn by women from China and Indonesia”. While this word form is in Cantonese, the dress itself originates from Shanghai and was made fashionable by upper-class women at the beginning of the 20th century, referring to an exclusively traditional gown also known in Mandarin Chinese as *qipao*. For Cantonese speakers in the areas of Guangzhou, *cheongsam* usually constitutes a jacket with long sleeves, not necessarily a long dress covering the whole body. In Hong Kong, *cheongsam* is a dress for both women and men. Besides, the pinyin form of *cheongsam* is *changshan* in Mandarin Chinese, which denotes exclusively a piece of clothing for men: a long and loose-fitting piece of clothing that covers all of one's body and reaches the ground, worn especially by educated men in ancient China. It was a sign of rank, or at least of literacy, because at that time poor people were mostly illiterate and could not afford a piece of *cheongsam* (Xia 2015). It seems that OALD8 adopted the signifier of the concept in Cantonese and the signified object from Shanghai areas. No regional uses were shown in the definition. As a result, speakers of Mandarin Chinese will have difficulty in understanding the definition. Moreover, an English speaker travelling in China will also feel puzzled when he orders a *chop suey* or *cheongsam*



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but is served with or given a different dish or dress. One may argue that OALD8 describes these Chinese words in the English language, not their use in Chinese. The description of the English usage of these words, however, is not correct because their referents are not the ones they refer to in their original use in Chinese. As a dictionary is by nature both descriptive and prescriptive, it should inform its users of the right use of a foreign word in order to avoid possible misconception.

3.2.2 Narrower or wider meanings or extensions

Due to the cultural difference, the same concept may have different meanings or extensions. For example, *Maosim* is defined as “the ideas of the 20th century Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong”, a political term that denotes the concept of Mao Zedong’s thought as it is termed in China. It was formerly believed to be introduced and developed solely by Mao Zedong, but following the open policy adopted in China since 1978, the term was officially redefined in the Communist Party Committee’s Constitution as “Marxism-Leninism applied in a Chinese context”, synthesized by Mao Zedong and China’s “first-generation leaders” (Qi 2010). According to the official definition, it is the fruit of the collective wisdom of Mao Zedong together with other communist leaders of the first-generation from the 1920’s until Mao’s death in 1976. The current definition in OALD8 thus has a narrower sense as it is limited to Mao’s personal political theories.

The headword *dim sum* is defined in OALD8 as “a Chinese dish or meal consisting of small pieces of food wrapped in sheets of dough”. As a matter of fact, besides this sense *dim sum* refers also to Chinese sponge cakes, vegetables wrapped in dried bean milk cream in tight rolls, beef or pork meatballs, and so on. The pinyin form of *dim sum* is *dianxin*, which, in Chinese culture, refers to snacks, light refreshments or desserts that are served, often with tea, in small portions. The definition is thus incomplete in that it only covers one kind of *dim sum*.

On the other hand, the definition of *ginkgo* in OALD8 has a wider meaning that can encompass many other trees as well: “a Chinese tree with yellow flowers”. In biological terms, *ginkgo* refers to the plants of the ginkgo genus, the only living member of the gymnosperm family Ginkgoaceae. It has great biological and economic value in that it has a number of primitive features and its fruits can be used in food and medicine. The main characteristics of *ginkgo* are its fan-shaped leaves and yellow flowers.

3.2.3 Denotative meanings not defined

As common practice, the denotative or literal meanings of a headword should be first included and explained, then the extended meanings can be further illustrated. Otherwise the additional meanings would seem to come from nowhere.

For example, *kowtow* is defined in OALD8 as “to show sb in authority too much respect and be too willing to obey them”. Its denotative meaning in Chinese is to kneel and touch the ground with the forehead. It originates from the rite of *dunshou*, which consists of three steps – namely, keeling, bending over the body, and touching the ground with the forehead – and is the solemn rite of an inferior to a superior as formerly done in China. The metaphorical meaning of *kowtow* is to show someone, especially one’s superior, deep respect, worship, or submission. OALD8 has adopted only the metaphorical meaning of *kowtow* and ignores its literal meaning.

3.2.4 Definiens not included in the definienda

ELDs claim to use a limited defining vocabulary to define all the headwords, and all the definiens are included in the dictionary as definienda themselves. However, the definition of *Taosim* has *Lao-tzu*, which is not included in OALD8: “a Chinese philosophy based on the writings of Lao-tzu”. Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, was traditionally regarded as the author of the holy book *Tao Te Ching* and the founder of Taoism. In the book of *Lao Tzu*, Tao is considered as the basic source and supreme law of everything in the universe. The followers of Taoist teaching should stick to the state of vacancy and stillness mentally and physically to understand the nature of Tao. The dictionary includes the entries *Taoism* and *Taoist*, but not *Lao Tzu* or *Tao*, which may cause problems to users who are not familiar with the concept of Taoism. It is common practice for British general language dictionaries not to include proper names, which might result in such shortcomings, whereas American English dictionaries tend to include proper names.

3.3 The glosses and labels

Labels are used in dictionaries to remind users of additional meaning and usage for a lemma. As headwords of entries with Chinese characteristics have specific cultural connotations, it is advisable to illustrate them by way of labels or notes.

The headword *taipan* in OALD8 is defined as “a foreign person who is in charge of a business in China”. However, this is an informal term used during the 19th and early 20th century, and is passing out of current

use (Xia 2015). Therefore, a register label, such as *old-fashioned*, should be added to guard users against misusing it. The label means that the word is no longer used, but its counterparts in the real world exist.

The headword *Lamaism* is defined as “Tibetan Buddhism” by way of a synonymous paraphrase. The Chinese equivalent is *lama jiao*, an informal term for Tibetan Buddhism, where *jiao* means a religion. As a matter of fact, according to Tibetan Buddhists and researchers, *lama jiao* is offensive, which might mislead language users to regard it as an independent religion only worshipping the lamas instead of Buddha, or even creating their doctrines from nowhere but the teaching of Buddha (Lopez Jr., 1999: 6). It, therefore, is recommended that a note be added to warn the dictionary users against misusing it.

OALD8 does provide a gloss for the entry *t'ai chi ch'uan*, defined as “(also *t'ai chi*) a Chinese system of exercises consisting of sets of very slow controlled movements”. The entry thus lists *t'ai chi* as a variant. The terms *t'ai chi ch'uan* and *t'ai chi* are closely related in form and content but denote two different concepts, in which the former refers to a Chinese martial art characteristic of slow movements, and the latter to the ancient Chinese philosophy. According to the first half of *Xi Ci* in the *Book of Change*, the source of change is *t'ai chi*, which produces *Yin* and *Yang*. (Editing 2000: 340) In other words, *t'ai chi* is the source of everything and also the essential factor and condition for the change of everything. *T'ai chi ch'uan* is based on the philosophy of *t'ai chi*. Although *t'ai chi* is often used as the shortened form of *t'ai chi ch'uan* both in the West and in China, not denoting the difference might cause confusion to the dictionary users.

Conclusion

From our analysis it can be concluded that lemmas with Chinese characteristics in OALD8 have not been sufficiently well treated, although the dictionary, on the whole, is of high quality. A disproportionate number of Chinese-derived entries has flaws in the definitions and representations. Specifically, among 47 lemmas with Chinese characteristics, 10 have some flaws, which makes up 21%. The first cause for such flaw seems to be that they are not accorded the same status as other English lemmas, such as Japanese-derived ones. Another cause might be that these words have rich cultural connotations that make their compilation difficult for ELD lexicographers. It is understandable that they are not familiar with words and expressions with Chinese characteristics, but neither are

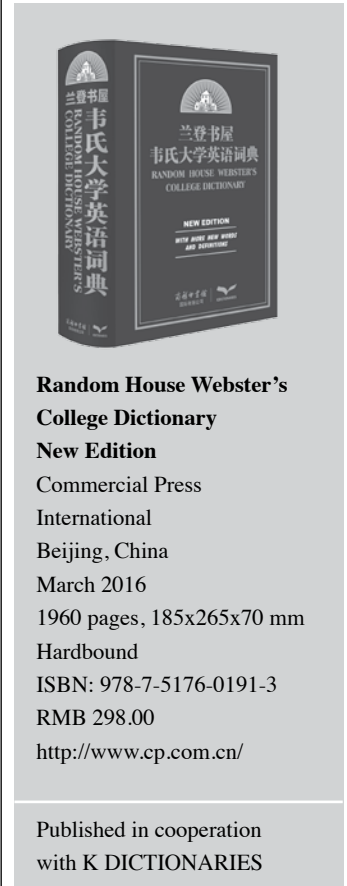
the dictionary users. Therefore, we have all the more reasons to clarify such occurrences in the dictionary and define them correctly and accurately.

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