

a “just-so” variety of marginal interest to the mythographer, such as the origin of foreign alphabets, under “Cangjie” (p. 85), or of the ginger plant, under “Shennong” (p. 196). The view offered of minority cultural practices continues to be valuable but seems to come through a particular lens: it is of interest that a creation epic of the Miáo 苗 (the People’s Republic umbrella term for the Hmong, Hmu, A-Hmao, and associated peoples of the southwest) is performed as a call-and-response among two or more singers, especially given the format of a classical text such as the “Tiānwèn,” 天問, but it could be dangerously misleading that denizens of the version given here are named in Pīnyīn and not, for instance, in the Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet (pp. 183–85). Elsewhere, identification of the familiar goddess Nǚwā with figures from Miáo, as well as Yáo 瑶, Tǔjiā 土家, and Shuǐ 水 traditions (p. 173), comes by a rather opaque calculus. A final and more pragmatic concern regarding “language policy” involves the numerous bibliographic references found here to Chinese-language sources. These are presumably of more interest to the specialist than to the general reader; however, stymieing the Chinese-literate reader is the fact that such book and article titles are given only in English translation. Thankfully, the more limited titles in “Print and Nonprint Resources” (pp. 251–60) are also rendered in Pīnyīn, but in many cases source-seekers will be in for more seeking than they might desire.

What is new about the *Handbook of Chinese Mythology* could be said largely to consist of potential-ly revelatory juxtapositions of diverse material, with the heavy lifting left to those inspired to perform it. It was of particular interest to this reviewer, for example, that the authors would express dissatisfaction with Birrell regarding translation of names of mythological figures (at issue are the treatments in her more popularly oriented *Chinese Myths* [London: British Museum, 2000]). Upon reflection, there does seem more progress to be made here by the application of philological tools—to wit, the word *wō* 渦/窩/蝸 ‘whirlpool, whorl, snail’ (for which semantics we might compare Ancient Greek *kokhlias* ‘spiral-shaped object [as screw, etc.], snail’) may not be without cosmogonic intimations in the anthropomorphized designation Nǚwā 女媧, but what, one wonders, is its genealogy? Such methodologies would be foreign here, of course, but the authors’ approach does serve to remind us that it is the pressure of inquiries from all directions that will continue to rattle the atom that is China into a new universe of particularities. A major virtue of Yang and An’s discussion of “Chinese mythology,” that is, turns out to lie in pointing again to the category’s tenuousness.

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Xiàndài Hànyǔ guīfān cídiǎn 现代汉语规范词典 [A Standard Dictionary of Modern Chinese]. Edited by Lǐ Xíngjiàn 李行健. Beijing: Wàiyǔ Jiàoxué yǔ Yánjiū Chūbǎnshè, Yǔwén Chūbǎnshè 外语教学与研究出版社, 语文出版社, 2004. Pp. 80 + 1758 + 34. ¥ 69.90.

Lǐ Xíngjiàn’s dictionary is a most exciting development in Chinese lexicography: a high-quality but independent alternative to the semi-official dictionaries that have dominated China’s market for reference books since the mid-1950s.

Li, a senior academic figure in the field of Chinese language, is the past Director and General Editor at China’s Language and Literature Press (Yǔwén Chūbǎnshè 语文出版社). In the 1990s he assembled a team of retired scholars and created this dictionary largely from scratch, with none of the usual bureaucracy or even (at first) government funding. He seems to have proceeded with one idea foremost: to compete with the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* 现代汉语词典 [Dictionary of Modern Chinese], the de facto standard Chinese dictionary since its first edition in 1978 and domestically even since its widely circulated 1959 trial edition (“*shìyìnběn* 试印本”). In discussion below, we use the short names common in Chinese: “the *Xiàn Hàn*” for the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* and “the *Guīfān*” for the present volume.

Competition with the *Xiàn Hàn* is apparent in many details: the *Guīfān* has added notes on part of speech, usage, and variant written forms—including remarks on which variant is officially standard and recommendations on which is to be preferred. It contains a great many more entries than the *Xiàn Hàn*.

Most important, however, the *Guifan*'s compilers appear to have gone out of their way to improve on the *Xian Han*'s definitions. Chinese critical discussion of the *Guifan* even has a special term for this effect: *bixian* 避現 'avoiding [duplication of what is in] the *Xian [Han]*'. The influence of the *Xian Han* on Chinese lexicography has been so great that its definitions appear, usually word for word, in various smaller dictionaries, without attribution. Li and his team seem to have been determined to create something different.

The *Guifan* has been controversial in China. One reason is that Li saw fit to name his dictionary "standard," even though it is not officially sponsored; the *Xian Han* itself would seem to be the true "standard" Chinese dictionary, even without the word in its title. This issue is basically political and because of it the *Guifan* has earned due notice in any future study of Chinese language policy, but frankly most users will not care. Another issue is that the *Guifan* has its share of typographical errors, seemingly more than recent editions of the *Xian Han*. Certainly, it would be best if a "standard" dictionary had few errors, if any. And there was grumbling about what were said to be "excessive" advertising claims when the *Guifan* was released. Li collected endorsements by the late Lǚ Shūxiāng 吕叔湘 and Lǐ Róng 李荣, both eminent scholars associated with early versions of *Xian Han*, as well as Xǔ Jiālù 许嘉璐, an influential lexicographer and scholar who has also held high rank as a Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress—all three names appear on the cover of the *Guifan* as *shǒuxí gǔwèn* 首席顾问 'chief consultants', above Li Xingjian's own.

But the controversy we find most interesting, in its bearing on actual content, is the question of *bixian*. Rather than defining words absolutely from scratch, Li's team in many cases seems to have first consulted the *Xian Han* and then set to work improving what was there. Perhaps they were only trying to carry out the principles of Hegelian-Marxist dialectic! Or perhaps they had grown sick (as have we) of seeing the same *Xian Han* definitions repeated everywhere and longed to shift the course of lexicography in a substantial way. Whatever the case, the practice of *bixian* has had at least two consequences. First, to *Xian Han* partisans, *bixian* has seemed to go beyond mere competition and approach actual infringement on the earlier book's content. That means it is being understood as a challenge that may result in improvements to the *Xian Han* itself. Second, by taking deliberate aim at the *Xian Han*'s own definitions, Li has made an articulate call for pluralism in one of China's most conservative milieux: the study of Chinese language.

We could cite various *Guifan* entries that we consider to be defined inadequately, but overall we find this book refreshing and now refer to it regularly. Even though its contents will probably appear soon in the chaos of unattributed lexical materials on the Internet, we predict that much credit will eventually be given to Li Xingjian and his team for having set Chinese lexicography ahead so boldly.

Below we present evidence of the craftsmanship of the *Guifan*. For each of eight examples, we offer first our own literal rendering, followed by the *Xian Han*'s definition and then the *Guifan*'s, each with our translation of the Chinese definitions. Clearly Li Xingjian and his team have made considerable improvements.

1. *qīnghuáng bùjiē* 青黄不接 Lit.: "green and yellow do not meet"

Xian Han: 指庄稼还没有成熟、陈粮已经吃完。比喻人力或物力等暂时的缺乏。[It means the crops have not yet ripened but the old grain has already been eaten up. Metaphor for a temporary deficiency in manpower or resources.]

Guifan: "青"指青苗、“黄”指成熟的庄稼。意思是陈粮已经吃完、新粮还未成熟、口粮接不上。常用来比喻新旧的人力或物力接替不上、呈现暂时的空缺状态。[*Qīng* 青 'green' means green seedlings and *huáng* 黄 'yellow' means ripe crops. This expression means that the old grain has been eaten but the new grain is not yet ripe, and there is a period of time without enough to eat. It is common as a metaphor for the new workforce not yet being able to succeed the old, or new resources not being available when old resources are used up, leaving a temporary gap.]

2. *qiūhòu suànzhuàng* 秋后算账 Lit.: "to do the accounts after the autumn"

Xian Han: 比喻等事情发展到最后阶段再判断谁是谁非、也比喻事后等待时机进行报复。[Metaphor for making a judgment about who was right and who was wrong, after

some event has developed to its final stage. It also means waiting for the right moment to take revenge after the fact.]

Guīfàn: 秋收后结算一年的收入、支出; 比喻事后评判是非、追究责任或进行报复。[A year's income and expenses are settled after the autumn harvest. Metaphor for judging who is right and wrong, for tracking down who is responsible, or for taking revenge—after the fact.]

3. *tóushí wèn lù* 投石问路 Lit.: “to check the route by tossing a stone”

Xiàn Hà: 比喻先以某种行动试探。[Metaphor for first probing with some sort of action.]

Guīfàn: 比喻在重大行动前、先用小的举动进行试探、以摸清情况。[Metaphor for first carrying out an exploratory probe with a small-scale action before embarking on some major action, in order to sketch out a clear idea of the situation.]

4. *guā shú dì luò* 瓜熟蒂落 Lit.: “when the melon is ripe, the stem drops off”

Xiàn Hà: 比喻条件成熟了、事情自然会成功。[Metaphor for an event succeeding naturally when conditions have become ripe.]

Guīfàn: 瓜熟了、瓜蒂自然会脱落。原比喻胎儿发育成熟,自然会分娩;后多比喻条件或时机成熟了、事情自然会成功。[When a melon is ripe, its stem drops off by itself. Originally a metaphor for parturition taking place naturally when a fetus develops and matures. Later, it has mostly been a metaphor for an event succeeding naturally when conditions or the moment have become ripe.]

5. *máo gǔ sǒng rán* 毛骨悚然 Lit.: “hair and bone are frightened”

Xiàn Hà: 形容很害怕的样子。[Describes great fright.]

Guīfàn: 寒毛竖起,脊梁骨发冷。形容极端害怕的样子。[One's fine hairs stand on end and one feels a chill in one's spine. Describes extreme fright.]

6. *bèi dào ér chí* 背道而驰 Lit.: “to gallop with one's back turned on the path”

Xiàn Hà: 朝着相反方向走。比喻方向、目标完全相反。[To move in opposite directions. Metaphor for directions or goals being diametrically opposed.]

Guīfàn: 双方朝相反的方向跑。比喻彼此的方向、目标完全相反;也比喻自己行动的方向跟所达到的目标完全相反。[Two parties run in opposite directions. Metaphor for directions or goals being diametrically opposed. Also a metaphor for the direction of one's efforts being diametrically opposed to the goal one wants to reach.]

7. *bēi huān lí hé* 悲欢离合 Lit.: “sorrow, joy, parting, and coming together”

Xiàn Hà: 泛指聚合、别离、欢乐、悲伤的种种遭遇。[The various experiences of being together, parting, joy, and sorrow.]

Guīfàn: 悲伤、欢乐、离别、团聚;泛指人生的种种经历、遭遇和感受。[Sorrow, joy, parting, and reuniting. The various experiences, encounters, and feelings in a person's life.]

8. *jié wài shēng zhī* 节外生枝 Lit.: “to grow a new branch outside of the expected place”

Xiàn Hà: 比喻在问题之外又岔出了新的问题。[Metaphor for interposing a new problem in addition to some other one.]

Guīfàn: 不该生枝的地方生出枝杈来。比喻在原有问题之外又产出新问题。[To grow a branch where it should not be grown. Metaphor for creating a new problem in addition to some original one.]

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