Curious Lexicographic Relic of the Cultural Revolution

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Abstract

This paper considers the fact that many verbal Chinese idioms are defined in recent Chinese-English dictionaries with misleading parts of speech — they are generally described only as being nouns. This situation originates in the 1978 Hán-Yīng cídiǎn 汉英词典 of Wú Jìngrong 吴景荣, whose definitions have exerted overwhelming influence on the field since then. We document Wú’s principal sources and the viewpoints that motivated him, including the heavy political pressure to which his lexicographic team were subjected in the late Cultural Revolution. In addition, we consider Wú’s anomalous misreading of the purpose of the influential Giles and Mathews dictionaries, which had been to document the many senses of each character with multi-character words, rather than to document multi-character words per se.

We embark on our exploration of why many verbal Chinese idioms are defined in recent Chinese-English dictionaries with misleading parts of speech — they are generally described only as being nouns. We consider this odd situation to have a specific historical origin.

I. “Lisper”: an example of the problem

As an example, consider the word dàištōu 大舌头, which is defined as “lisper” and “thick-tongued person” (or very similar expressions) in all major Chinese-English dictionaries of Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) origin. Although its internal structure is that of a noun phrase meaning “big tongue”, in living usage this word is generally attested as having verbal sense and meaning “to enunciate language unclearly.” For instance:

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The verbal usage must have developed from out of the literal sense “big tongue” and the dictionaries’ translation “lisper; thick-tongued person” must be a further derivation from the literal noun or the verbal sense. But there is no denying that the verbal usage is prominent in contemporary usage. To illustrate that usage, here are some examples:

(2) 他有点大舌头, 说出来的台词老是让人听不清 (Anon. #003)
    [He has a slight speech impediment: when he says his lines, people can never hear them clearly.]

(3) 因长着一双小小的老鼠眼, 说话还大舌头, 我们这些皮女们都很不喜欢他。
    (Anon. #005)
    [Because he had a pair of beady rat-eyes and didn’t articulate clearly when he talked, we mischievous women really didn’t like him.]

(4) 又来个大舌头的, 俺听了半天没听懂 (Shaun Weng, 2008)
    [And then another person came who had a speech impediment — I listened and listened and couldn’t make out what he was saying.]

This usage is regular and well attested, it is somewhat strange to find the following published definition of 大舌头, in Wú Jingróng’s 吳景榮 汉英词典 Hàn-Yīng cidìăn 汉英词典 (1978), the most prominent of all modern Chinese-English dictionaries:

(5) 大舌头: a thick-tongued person; one who lisps; lisper (Wú Jingróng, 1978:127)

So there are two problems: “lisping” is but one of many kinds of speech defect embraced by 大舌头, and Wú Jingróng has completely omitted treatment of the verbal use of the word. We regard the imprecision of the definition as a small matter, but the omission of the correct part of speech (POS) is a widespread problem in the book.

Extensive numbers of Wú’s idiom glosses have continued to appear in later large Chinese-English dictionaries, because of the common lexicographic practice of cross-consultation. Dictionaries in the Chinese world are often the work of large, semi-official teams, in which there is strong continuity with past editions, even those which appear under the by-line of a different editor. It is not unusual for individual entries in a given dictionary to retain the wording found in earlier works, but the result is the perpetuation of practices inherited from those earlier works.

But a consequence of that influence is that there is a persistent pattern in recent Chinese-English dictionaries to define this word as though it were only a noun. Consider the following examples, taken from a dozen major sources ranging back to the 1870s, of 大舌头 大舌头, which we find to be in common use as a verb phrase and define ‘to articulate language unclearly’:
Notice Wú’s place as the first lexicographer to have introduced the definition and POS that recur in all of the later dictionaries. Although Liang Shih-Ch’iu’s definition, seven years before Wú’s, is verbal, that verbal usage does not seem to have been in the collective field of vision of PRC-based Chinese-English lexicographers since Wú Jingróng’s time.

This issue is compounded by a separate problem, which we treat briefly here. One of the extensive differences between English and Chinese is that many Chinese verbal expressions of description are rendered into English using the verb “to have” followed by a noun of some sort. For instance Chinese says tā dìzi hěn dà 他肚子很大, literally “as for him, the belly is big,” where English says “he has a big belly;” Chinese says tā méimào hěn xī 她眉毛很细, literally “as for her, the eyebrows are thin,” while English says “she has thin eyebrows.” Even though in many ways the two languages seem superficially close in structure, in equivalent expressions it is common to find different constructions in use. In many of the examples that follow, the English translations are of the type “have” plus noun, and these should be recognised as rendering Chinese verbal phrases.

II. The magnitude of the problem

For a verb to have the apparent structure of a noun is common and natural in Chinese; most Mandarin words describing a person’s physical appearance are intrinsically nouns but also function prominently as verb phrases, yet the Wú Jingróng dictionary usually defines them as though they were nouns alone. Obviously, for both the English-speaking learner of Chinese and the Chinese-speaking learner of English, that could be a confusing situation. Below we document a few more such examples; since Wú does not explicitly name POS, we use the notation “ = N” in square brackets to show the POS implied by the wording of his English definitions. Below “N” stands for noun and “VP” for verb phrase, which can function as a whole predicate in Chinese.
For bāoyá 鼻牙 and its near-equivalent bāoyú 暴牙, meaning both ‘buckteeth’ (N) and ‘to be bucktoothed’ (VP), Wú gives only ‘bucktooth’ ([＝N]). Here are some contemporary examples, in which the verbal usage is clearly seen:

(7) 他一向是有点龅牙的, 现在也是那样, 寒凛凛的露了两个大门牙在口唇外, 加上他双颊没有肉, 颊下就陷得厉害, 好似两个黑洞, 看久了, 他的脸就真有点像个骷髅, 有点可怕. (Yū Lihuá, 2008)

[He had been a little bucktoothed and he still was, with two front teeth sticking coldly and menacingly outside his lips. And his cheeks had no flesh on them and were terribly sunken — like two dark caverns. If you looked long enough, his face really did look a little like a skull — it was a bit frightening.]

(8) 小野木看出那人比自己稍微年輕一點兒, 大約二十六七歲, 長型臉、鷹鉤鼻子, 有點兒龅牙. (Anon. #001)

[Onogi saw that the man was a bit younger than himself, maybe 26 or 27, and had a long face and hooked nose, and was a little bucktoothed.]

(9) 這個男人也是滿臉鬍子, 大而扁的朝天鼻, 還有一點暴牙. (Anon. #002)

[This man also had a beard growing all over his face and a big, flat pug nose, and he was slightly bucktoothed.]

For jiànméi 剑眉, ‘straight eyebrows rising at the outer ends (often associated with men)’ (N) or ‘to have such eyebrows’ (VP), Wú gives ‘eyebrows slanting upward and outward; dashing eyebrows’ ([＝N]). Here are examples of verbal usage:

(10) 讀書的少年約十七八歲, 生得劍眉星目, 脣朱齒皓, 端的是個俊美絕世的佳公子. (Guīyū, 2006)

[The young man reading was about 16 or 17. He had eyebrows like swords and eyes like stars, his lips were red and his teeth were white — he truly was a uniquely handsome prince charming.]

(11) 我的男人, 一定是貌若潘玉, 剑眉星目, 玉树临风, 气宇轩昂. (Zíchāihèn, no date)

[My man will definitely look like Pān Yù: he will have eyebrows like swords and eyes like stars, suave and handsome like trees of jade facing the wind, and a lofty bearing.]

(12) 映入眼帘的是个相当俊美的男人, 剑眉星目、唇红齿白, 实在是俊俏极了. (Guìmìàn Fǔjūn, 2003)

[Before her very eyes was a really handsome man, with eyebrows like swords and eyes like stars, red lips and white teeth — he really was extremely attractive.]

For mǎlǎn 麻脸 ‘pockmarked face’ (N) or ‘to have such a face’ (VP), Wú gives ‘a pockmarked face’ ([＝N]). Here are examples of verbal usage:

(13) 这也是一种牺牲. 她以死聲明了位置, 使其夫可以再順理成章地娶一个女人, 虽然麻脸却可以生育子嗣延续香火. (Jī Hóngzhēn, 1999)

[This is also a kind of sacrifice: through her death she has vacated her place, allowing her husband to take another wife as a matter of course. Even though the new wife has a pockmarked face, she can still bear sons and continue the family line.]
For júzhào 酒糟鼻 ‘grog-blossom: red, bulbous nose’ (N) or ‘to have such a nose’ (VP), Wú gives ‘acne rosacea; brandy nose’ ([ = N]). Here are examples of verbal usage:

(16) 这回大家看清楚了，這人生得獐頭鼠目，酒糟鼻，一把山羊鬍子，又聳肩，又縮頭，生相猥頹。(Dōngfāng Yú, no date)
[This time, everyone saw him clearly. This man had a narrow head and beady little eyes, a red bloom on his nose, and a goatee. His shoulders were hunched and his head was drawn back — he looked creepy.]

(17) 一张小方案後面站著一個頭戴瓜皮帽的瘦小老頭，不過五十來歲，鬥雞眼，酒糟鼻，嘴上留了兩撇黃鬍鬚的八字鬍。(Dōngfāng Bái, no date)
[Behind a little square table was standing a skinny little old man wearing a skullcap. He couldn’t have been past 50. He was cross-eyed, had a red bulbous nose, and wore a yellowed moustache.]

(18) 五短身材，胖得像個肉球，上尖下圓，尖尖的腦袋頂門光光，四周(披]下一圈短灰髮，小眼睛酒糟鼻，血盆大口露出一口大板牙。(Yúnzhōng Yüè, no date)
[He had short arms and legs and a short body, and was so fat he looked like a ball of flesh. He was pointy at the top and round at the bottom — the pointed top of his head was shiny, with a ring of short grey hair draping down on all sides. He had small eyes and a red nose, and in his big red mouth his big front teeth were visible.]

For guāzhíliăn 瓜子脸 ‘delicate, oval face’ (N) or ‘to have such a face’ (VP), Wú gives ‘oval face’ ([ = N]). Here are some examples of usage:

(19) 窸窺鏡過了時，俏麗的瓜子臉取而代之，姚太太新添的孩子便是瓜子臉。(Eileen Chang, 1943)
[When oval faces are out of style, they are replaced by the cute and pretty melon-seed face. Mrs. Yáo’s new child has a melon-seed face.]

(20) 新娘比他高出一頭，描眉畫目，瓜子臉兒，頗有幾分姿色。(Chén Róng, no date)
[The bride was a head taller than him, with her eyebrows and eyes elegantly made up; she had a melon-seed face, and was quite good-looking.]

(21) 我夢見看到東邊天空有一位仙女, 瓜子臉細高個, 穿著粉紅的霓裳. (Zhūgè Jūn, 1999)

[I dreamed I saw a fairy in the eastern sky — she had a melon-seed face and a thin tall build, and was wearing a pink rainbow dress.]

It is not only in the case of physical traits that words functioning as verbs are being defined as nouns; there are numerous examples of more diverse verbal idioms being treated this way, of which we document a small selection of twenty-five in the Appendix. (We separate these materials in order to make the essay proper more compact and readable.) The major Chinese-English dictionaries published in China over the past 30 years tend to define these idioms in very similar language and using the same implied POS.

In other words, these sources constitute a single glossing tradition in recent Chinese-English lexicography, as part of which Chinese POS is persistently misconstrued in the wording of definitions and translations. How did this situation come into being?

III. Resistance to the inclusion of POS

Why Wú omitted the POS of nouns and verbs in the first place seems to have been a combination of intellectual disagreement together with the result of historical forces unique to his era. We discuss these two issues in turn.

It is clear that Wú himself disagreed with notating the POS that are most crucial in Chinese. He writes:

我们采取标七种词性(助词、象声词、量词、叹词、连词、副词、介词)其余不标的做法，这是因为汉语词性问题比较复杂，其中最难定的是动词、形容词和名词，常常要根据一个词在句子里的功能来定. (1980:35)

[We chose the method of marking seven POS (particles, onomatopoeic words, measure words, exclamations, conjunctions, adverbs, and covers) and leaving the rest unmarked. This is because POS in Chinese are rather complicated. The hardest of them to assign are the verb, adjective, and noun. It is often necessary to make the decision based on the function of a word in a sentence.]

We agree that it is often — indeed, almost always — most effective to treat POS not as an intrinsic characteristic of a Chinese word but precisely as a word’s syntactic function in a particular context. A given word may therefore have different POS in different contexts and also different corresponding English translations. It is also quite true that verb, adjective, and noun are the hardest POS to assign correctly, and we therefore feel that there is no avoiding the close examination of specific examples in order to make the assignments correctly. By

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2There are two other major traditions. Chang Fang-Chieh 1992 is a revision of Liang Shih-Ch’iu 1971, as are and more recent Far East Publishing Company editions. Yale 1966 and Wang 1967 and 1971 are revisions of War Department 1945; the hand of the late John DeFrancis (1911–2009), together with Fred Fangyu Wang 王方宇 (1913–1997) and Kenny K. Huang 黃庚, is in evidence in the latter, in that words are alphabetised by Pinyin without attempting to segregate words by their component syllables, so that for example jiang appears between jiandu (jian+du) and jianjia (jian+jia), a favorite principle of his. But DeFrancis’s later dictionaries, published under his own by-line, are very clearly in the separate glossing tradition of Wú Jingróng. There seem to have been no successors to the 1972 dictionary of Lin Yütang.
his choice, Wú withheld POS notations of the greatest utility to the dictionary’s users; those he did mark are for the most part evident to the user from the content of a definition.

Wú follows this statement with examples of adjectives that can function as verbs or nouns. For hóng 红 ‘red’, the derived verb is ‘to redden’:

(22) 红了樱桃, 绿了芭蕉
[(The flowing moonlight...) redden] the cherries and [green] the bananas.] (Jiǎn Jié 蒋捷, jínshí 1274)

Wú also cites a noun usage, ‘redness’:

(23) 林花谢了春红, 太匆匆
[The forest flowers have shed their spring redness — but they are too rushed.] (Lǐ Yù 李煜, 937–978)

(24) 落红不是无情物, 化作春泥更护花
[Falling redness (= ‘red flowers’) is not heartless — it turns to Spring mud, the better to protect the flowers.] (Gōng Zhàizhēn 龚自珍, 1792–1841)

For lǜ 绿 ‘green’, the derived verb is ‘to make green’:

(25) 春风又绿江南岸, 明月几时照我还?
[The spring wind green again the southern banks of the river; when will the bright moon light my way home?] (Wáng Ānshí 王安石, 1021–1086)

There is another example of “to make green” in the Jiǎn Jié quotation, above. For àn 暗 ‘dark’, the derived verb is ‘to darken’:

(26) 青海长云暗雪山, 孤城遥望玉门关
[Long clouds over Blue Lake darken the snowy mountain; a solitary fort gazes from afar at Jade Gate Pass.] (Wáng Chānglíng 王昌龄, 698–765)

For shú 熟 ‘ripe’, the derived verb is ‘to ripen’:

(27) 湿湿岭云生竹菌, 冥冥江雨熟杨梅
[Damp ridge–clouds make the bamboo–fungus grow; dark river rain [ripens] the bayberry.] (Wáng Ānshí)

Wú’s examples are curious as support for his claim that Mandarin POS is complicated. They come not from Mandarin but from the literary language of poetry, whose grammar is somewhat different from Mandarin’s. Though Wú calls them “verbs”, his examples are all adjectives functioning specifically as transitive verbs — “to make red”, “to cause to become green”, and so on — but in Mandarin that is unusual; it is far more common for Mandarin adjectives to function as intransitive verbs — “to grow red”, “to become green”, etc. — as shown below in combination with the completion-aspect particle le 了 and a following extent-complement jīfēn 几分 ‘by several degrees’:

(28) 女人说完打了一个酒嗝, 脸就又红了几分。 (Su Xiàorán, 2009).
Usage of this kind is already straightforward in Mandarin and it is curious that Wú turned instead to literary language for illustration.

But he has a second and more interesting reason for avoiding POS notations:

We hold that in an English dictionary, POS usually has to be marked because changes of function in English often cause morphological changes. There are basically no morphological changes in Chinese. Some comrades have argued that the Chinese should have had POS marked. That is essentially the same as to consider the problem by proceeding from English.

In other words, Wú is resisting pressure from other lexicographers, and he feels their analysis of Chinese is unduly influenced by the example of English.

As a linguistic statement, we consider the reasoning unpersuasive. English differences in function do not necessarily correspond to differences in morphology; there are many examples of nouns and adjectives or verbs in English that are spelled identically (desert, address, record, etc.) and in some cases pronounced identically (list, change, book, etc.). But in fact any reputable dictionary will distinguish their POS. Furthermore, when English words differ only by morphology, in formal terms they render POS marking less rather than more necessary, exactly because morphology marks syntactic function. Contrary to what Wú says, POS is included in English dictionaries because that information is considered necessary for correct usage. A dictionary is a guide not only to meaning but also to usage, which is itself a normal part of a modern dictionary entry.

Wú’s point about “considering the problem by proceeding from English” is an attempt to dismiss Chinese POS as an intrusion of non-Chinese issues. But even if we pretend that POS is not important in Chinese, a bilingual dictionary represents a kind of interface between two languages and cannot avoid treating characteristics of them both. Wú is simply dismissing the issue of Chinese POS by associating it with a foreign influence, a rhetorical trick but one that a part of his Chinese audience must have found very powerful in his
day. In other words, it is not exactly a linguistic statement. Wú did have very articulate reasons for omitting POS notations — not long after the dictionary’s release, he published a substantial study of POS in Chinese and English, giving full detail to his views (Wú Jingróng and Wáng Jiānzhī, 1981). But it is no coincidence that one of his book’s most serious errors is precisely in the apparent POS with which Chinese idioms are defined in English. If he had included POS for Chinese verbs and nouns, he would surely not have defined so many of them in syntactically misleading English. The existence of these errors eloquently refutes Wú’s linguistic arguments.

To restate the point, Wú’s most serious systematic error came about not because POS is a foreign notion unsuited to Chinese linguistic realities, but simply because he should have considered POS and did not. His statement about the use of POS being the result of “proceeding from” a foreign language does not alter the fact that his linguistic philosophy caused him to make a mistake.

Since the POS of a Chinese word must be determined empirically, the process frankly requires a certain amount of hard work. Now, clearly it was Wú Jingróng’s intellectual resistance to distinguishing POS, rather than a desire to avoid hard work, that prevented him from including them. Wú believed, for example, that examples were necessary in a dictionary:

[Supplying examples is done mainly to explain usage . . . mainly to explain verbs and collocation. . . Sometimes, when we ran into certain words and felt they were difficult to use, we gave examples for them, too.] (Wú Jingróng, 1980:40)

He was clearly willing to do the hard work of collecting examples, merely not to do it for the purpose of distinguishing POS. In fact, enormously more hard work went into this dictionary than one might guess, for reasons to be explained in Section V below, and those reasons constitute what we consider the “curious” legacy referred to in the present paper’s title.

IV. “Giles did not really understand Chinese”

Let us digress for a moment to relate that Wú left records of his experiences and thoughts in compiling the 1978 dictionary. To the contemporary reader of those records, it is surprising how harshly he condemns all of the Chinese-English dictionaries preceding his own (Wú Jingróng, 1979, 1980, 1991, 1992). Most especially, he condemns the motives and competence of Western dictionary-makers such as the renowned Herbert Giles (1845–1935). Certainly all dictionaries produced by Westerners in China between the Opium Wars and the Communist revolution may be suspected of having been “in the service of imperialist colonialism” (1979:1). As for competence, those dictionaries by all means contain errors and omit important words. Most of the idioms we have listed in the Appendix (because of their apparently incorrect POS) also happen not to appear in older dictionaries of the missionary-consular period. That is rather striking. The large number of errors and perceived omissions is something that Wú interprets, in
the case of Giles, as the result of the fact that Giles “没有真正懂得汉语 [did not really understand Chinese]” (1979:1). Giles is an easy target, since even his own “imperialist colonialist” collaborator Edward Harper Parker (1849–1926) had a very low opinion of his ability as a lexicographer (Branner, 1999:13–14). Then again, Giles’ *Dictionary of Colloquial Idioms in the Mandarin Dialect* (Giles, 1873) contains a thousand sentences in natural and fluent Mandarin, illustrating different Chinese equivalents of English homonyms and the correct use of vernacular grammar forms troublesome to foreign learners, such as resultative verbs and the *shì...de* 是...的 construction. If these sentences can be taken as evidence, Giles’ Chinese was not nearly as bad as Wú makes out.

But as for Wú’s larger criticism about the selection of headwords in earlier dictionaries, and what he says that selection shows about the quality of the books and competence of their compilers, we find that the true situation illuminates a fact about Wú’s work that is not obvious. In brief, the uses to which Western lexicographers intended their dictionaries to be put were not the same as Wú’s. They were not trying to document the whole of normal Mandarin usage and they did not have access to the resources he did to make that task possible.

This is a subject that deserves comprehensive study, but it is clear that these dictionaries were intended for use in administrative and missionary work; they also drew heavily on previous Chinese–English dictionaries in the same tradition. The needs of administrative work explain the quantity of words for objects and ideas in trade, industry, science, and twentieth-century life generally, especially in Mathews’ 1931 revision of the dictionary of Frederick W. Baller (1852–1922), which added more than 64,000 words to Baller’s 40,000. Busy administrators probably had more need of specialised terminology than educated idiom. As for missionaries, we can get some idea of what they were actually reading when they had to use a dictionary from Baller’s description of the texts he checked in order to choose the characters for his dictionary:

the Four Books and Commentary, the Sacred Edict, the Three Character Classic and Commentary, the Book of Rewards and Punishments, the Old and New Testaments, Old Testament History, the Pilgrim’s Progress, and Martin’s Evidences of Christianity . . . (Baller, 1900:iii)

That is, the essential reading of the anglophone missionary in the 1890s was Christian translations and a few well-known Classical or literary Chinese texts important in children’s education.

It must also be significant that most of these dictionaries emphasised characters over whole words; Baller continues:

The use of these [characters] has been copiously illustrated by examples drawn from Morrison, Williams, Legge, Giles, Mayer, Chalmers, Hirth, Mateer, and others, as well as from the aforementioned and other native books. These examples might easily have been multiplied, but it seemed neither necessary nor advisable to do so. For instance, the names of birds, beasts, fishes and plants alone, would have more than doubled the size of the book . . . (Baller, 1900:iii)

Giles makes this interesting comment:
As to number of phrases, it is there, so it seems to me, that the strength or weakness of a Chinese dictionary may be said to lie. It is impossible to exhaust the meanings of a Chinese character by definitions, each word being (to quote from Professor Sonnenschein) “like a chameleon, which borrows its colour from its environment.” (Giles, 1912:viii)

His goal in including so many multi-character words and expressions was “to exhaust the meanings of a Chinese character”, rather than to exhaust the inventory of words and expressions. So the multi-character words he has included are not those he judges most important as words; many of them are there to illustrate the meanings of characters. Mathews restates this idea:

As far as possible, every use of a character has been illustrated by examples. Some of these expressions may have passed out of current use, but their inclusion in a dictionary is warranted by the fact that they occur in the literature of the period. (Mathews, 1931:vi)

Perhaps the competence of Giles and his fellows has, after all, been somewhat misappraised.

In criticising his predecessors, Wú Jìngróng neglects to mention that he had a great advantage that no Chinese-English dictionary-maker before him ever had, including even Liang Shih-ch’iu 梁實秋 (1971) and Lin Yú-t’ang 林語堂 (1972): he was able to draw heavily on a superb all-Chinese dictionary, the “trial” draft edition (“shìyìnběn 试印本”) of the Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (hereafter, “Xiàn Hán”). Initially compiled in the 1950s and finally published in 1978, after two decades of nationwide comment and discussion, the Xiàn Hán was the collective work of hundreds of skilled hands and surely the most thorough Mandarin dictionary ever compiled up to that time.

Wú relied on this book for his selection of words and their definitions, a fact that was apparent to at least one early non-Chinese reviewer:

It would have been little additional effort to have added syntactic markers to the stylistic markers usefully provided but since this dictionary is obviously a digest translation of the Xiàndài Hányǔ Cídiǎn, which does not provide these essential features, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect them here. (Sloss, 1980:782)

Moreover, Wú himself never pretended that his dictionary was compiled from scratch. He describes his debt to the Xiàn Hán very clearly and gratefully:3

我们选择了《现代汉语词典》(试用本)作为选词释义的重要参考(同时我们也参考了《国语词典》、《辞海》、《新华字典》、《同音字典》等), 因为《现汉》的规模同我们的词典差不多, 同时它也强调现代汉语并使用汉语拼音。我们这样做既可以节省时间, 避免可能发生的重要遗漏, 并可以在汉语释义的精确性上得到比较可靠的保证。例证大部分是根据自己收集的材料加以改写的, 一部分是经过多次推敲集体编写的。

3In an interview in 2008, Nancy Hodes confirmed Wú’s use of the Xiàn Hán. Hodes spent her formative years in Beijing and shared an office with Wú’s main English consultant, David Crook, during her year working on the dictionary (1975–6). She said, “we considered ourselves to be the translation into English of the Xiàn Hán.” She added that the consultants did not refer to other dictionaries; “people relied on Wú Jìngróng, himself” for that, and Wú made heavy use of the Xiàn Hán, either its index cards or a pre-publication printing of it. Hodes said that the work of the English consultants was done on sheets of paper rather than on index cards. (Hodes, 2008). An examination of Wén Wèn 范文’s Hán-Yìng zhǎi shùcè 汉英词汇手册 (1970) suggests that Wú did not draw heavily on the English translations and definitions there; he clearly produced original work.
David Prager Branner and Yuan-Yuan Meng

We also chose the trial edition of the Xiàn Hán as a major reference for the choice of entries and their definitions (we also consulted such books as the Gwoyeu tsyrdean, Cihài, Xiànhuá zìdiǎn, and Tōngyīn zìdiǎn) because it was of about the same scope as our dictionary. At the same time, it also emphasised modern Chinese and used Pinyin. By doing this we could not only save time and avoid important omissions, but also get a relatively reliable guarantee as to the accuracy of the Chinese definitions. Most of the examples were rewritten based on materials I collected myself, though a portion of them were compiled collectively through repeated deliberations.

When Xiàn Hán was being compiled in the Institute of Linguistics at the Academy of Social Sciences and was nearly completed. So we used it as the blueprint for the Chinese-English Dictionary, thus saving much time and effort. Not only could we prevent omissions in our selection of words and ensure the reliability of the definitions, but we could also make use of some of their style guidelines and examples. Of course, we didn’t simply copy the whole thing. From the point of view of the inclusion of words, the Chinese-English Dictionary surpasses the Xiàn Hán; there are differences in the selection of definitions. As for the examples, we made many additions and deletions, in accordance with the particular characteristics of a bilingual dictionary. All this apart, the official Pinyin romanisation plan had been finalised, and so the section on character look-up was easy to settle.

In short, the Xiàn Hán gave Wú and his team an unprecedented leg up in their own work. It was the first dictionary of its kind, combining literary and vernacular lexicon and defining words in clear colloquial language. Wú is correct when he says that much important cultural and idiomatic lexicon is not found in previous Chinese-English dictionaries. But it is not found in the all-Chinese dictionaries predating the Xiàn Hán, either. By way of example, the Appendix contains the definitions of the various idioms we have chosen to examine not only in Chinese-English dictionaries but also in the three most important all-Chinese dictionaries published prior to the Xiàn Hán: Cíyuán 解源 (1915), Cihài 解海 (1941), and the Gwoyeu tsyrdean 國語辭典 (1943). Cíyuán documents mainly the traditional literary language. Cihài is concerned with both literary language and the new scientific and other foreign-inspired terms that were rapidly being introduced in its time, while the Gwoyeu tsyrdean describes vernacular Mandarin, paying particular attention to correct pronunciation of the still little-known Béipíng 北平 standard and its mainly non-literary lexicon. Most of the idioms
documented in the Appendix happen not to appear in these three books, either. That is surely not because Chinese lexicographers before Wú’s time “did not really understand Chinese” but because their interest was elsewhere. And contrary to Wú’s contention, the interest of the Western lexicographers was also elsewhere. Most of the more purely cultural and idiomatic lexicon that we find in Wú’s dictionary simply could not have been expected to appear in the Chinese–English dictionaries of the consular-missionary period. The compilers of those dictionaries were interested in the illustration of the meanings of characters and in vocabulary of practical interest to missionaries, consular officials, and those foreign residents of China who knew some Chinese. But unlike Wú, they had no all-Chinese dictionaries of idiomatic lexicon to consult — no such dictionaries existed.

In stark terms, in his harsh criticisms of earlier dictionaries, it seems that Wú has forgotten the enormous social change in the use of Chinese during the century prior to the Communist revolution. The “trial” Xi`an H`an of the 1950s was the first Chinese dictionary to combine literary and vernacular idiom in a single volume, and Wú was the first Chinese–English lexicographer to have access to it for reference. That, and not the imperialism or the incompetence of his Western predecessors, is the reason his dictionary is as good as it is.

V. “Getting rid of filthy junk”

Western imperialism was not the only political issue in Wú’s book. There is also an extraordinarily shrill political tone in some of the content, which was not lost on its early foreign readers.

Foreign reviews of Wú Jingróng’s book were uniformly superlative when it appeared. Its definitions were considered far better and more complete than those of Mathews, Baller, or Giles, which had been the mainstays for decades; they were also better than those of the substantial recent works of Liang Shih-ch’iu and Lin Yü-t’ang. But the lingering Maoist tone of some of the content certainly was and has remained striking even to Western admirers. Robert P. Sloss describes the book as “somewhat excessively sanctified with Marxist theology” (1980:782). Thomas Creamer finds “alarming” the “unnecessary moralizing” (1980–1:160).4 Orville Schell, further removed than others from the Cultural Revolution, writes affectionately of the dictionary’s “time-warped universe” of “militant language” and “defiant Maoist phraseology” (1987).

A few examples will suffice. Under lāchūqù 拉出去, which the dictionary defines ‘pull out; drag out’, the illustration is:5

(32) 拉出去，打进来是阶级敌人用惯的手段 (Wú Jingróng, 1978:402)

It’s a common practice of the class enemy to drag our people into their camp and to infiltrate our ranks.

Under pī 扯, defined ‘drape over one’s shoulders; wrap around’:

(33) 一伙披着马列主义外衣的政治骗子 (Wú Jingróng, 1978:515)

a bunch of political swindlers who deck themselves out as Marxist-Leninists

4See also Kiriloff 1981: pp. 181–182.
5The translations under the following five sample sentences are original to Wú’s dictionary.
Under méiyōu 没有, defined 'not have; there is not; be without':

(34) 没有共产党就没有新中国。 (Wú Jingróng, 1978:462)
Without the Communist Party there would be no New China.

(This last is an outright slogan.) Under qǐngwèn 请问, defined ‘we should like to ask; it may be asked; one may ask’:

(35) 请问, 要是不学大寨, 咱们队能有今天吗?。 (Wú Jingróng, 1978:557)
I’d like to ask, could our production brigade be what it is today without learning from Dazhai?²⁶

Under juédìng 决定, defined 'determine; decide':

(36) 思想上政治上的路线正确与否是决定一切。 (Wú Jingróng, 1978:374)
The correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything.

In some cases, it is as though someone has conceived of the dictionary not as a guide to meaning and usage at all but as an index of slogans.

But if this operatic style seems awkward or quaint today, consider the following: Wú says he and his team spent two years (!) removing examples that had become ideologically unacceptable by the time the book was to be published. The book that we actually possess today was redacted from a far more politically explicit original:


[There were also unfavourable factors affecting the Chinese-English Dictionary. Compilation began at the end of 1970, in the mad days of the Gang of Four. Through their lackeys, the Gang of Four controlled the whole cultural realm, including dictionaries. They said, “The dictatorship of the proletariat is to go into every single entry.”]

[No conscientious intellectual can stand for an absurdity like that. But at the time, no one could resist them, because the consequence of doing so would certainly have been severe. The whole editorial staff of the Dictionary might well have been accused of being revisionists, and the Dictionary would not have been published. Fortunately, the Gang of Four later fell from power, and we spent two years trying to find ways to get rid of the filthy junk they forced on the Dictionary.]

²⁶Dazhai 大寨 was a model agricultural commune in Shànxi’s hardscrabble Xiàyáng County 山西省昔阳县 during the Cultural Revolution. It received covert government subsidies in order to make it appear independent and efficient, and was held up as a political ideal for the whole country.
Even so, the *Dictionary* bears deep marks of its time. The most obvious is that there are too many tendentious examples. Some are no more than slogans and basically fail to serve as examples of usage. . . . Although a dictionary can never completely escape ideological dictates, after all is said and done it is not a political handbook. What is more, the users of a dictionary do not all think alike, so one should not force these resounding phrases on people — to say nothing of the fact that slogans reflect subjective idealistic thinking!

It is hard to imagine how much useful revision Wú and his team could have done on the dictionary if they had not had to spend two years cleansing it of “filthy junk.” We suspect that Wú might well then have had the leisure to notice and correct the systematic POS errors we have mentioned, and perhaps even to reconsider his resistance to notating POS. In a very real and causal sense, then, the POS errors in Wú’s work may be the residue of political interference during the Cultural Revolution. They are indeed “deep marks of its time.”

**VI. Conclusion**

Reflecting on Wú’s superb dictionary, his lexicographic philosophy, and his reminiscences as a unified whole, we can see today that there is an untoward political element linking them — something other than the overtly political tone of the sentences that remained in the book. Wú had a principled resistance to noting POS for Chinese words, which led him to define many idioms imperfectly in English, failing precisely in the matter of POS. He could perhaps have corrected this error by spending enough time choosing really good examples, but whatever time he had was occupied instead with removing slogans and propaganda, and presumably also with shoring up his own position against the political consequences. If he had been able to choose good examples, he might well have noticed the effects of his decision to omit the main POS and realised that the issue was not one of Chinese versus English needs, after all.

Having purged a part of his book’s most objectionable propaganda content, Wú went on to excoriate foreign lexicographers as both imperialist and ignorant, conveniently neglecting to mention that he had had advantages of time and place that they did not, or that the work of his Chinese predecessors also had certain lapses in common with that of the foreigners. There is something disingenuous about this. Wú’s book is superb; who would dismiss it because of its peripheral politics, or even because of Wú’s own politics, whatever they may have been in 1974? We suspect that the stridency of his criticisms of Giles and the rest has something to do with protecting himself after having taken a strong political stand in 1976–78.

As it happened, Wú’s dictionary became so influential that almost all large Chinese–English dictionaries published in China are effectively redactions of it, and his errors in the POS of idioms have found their way into many newer and larger books. Those errors, undiscovered because of two years spent undoing political intrusions, are surviving traces of a sunless era in modern Chinese history. We wonder when those traces will finally disappear for good and a verb will be called a verb.

**Appendix**

This appendix contains examples of four-syllable Chinese literary idioms whose modern usage is predominantly verbal, but whose definitions in the Wú Jingróng *Chinese-English
Dictionary of 1978, as well as in the majority of large dictionaries following it, appear to be noun phrases.

Since most dictionaries do not explicitly state the POS of a Chinese word, the POS implied by the wording of the English definition is given in brackets. The definition appearing on the same line as the idiom is our own, based on careful study of contemporary usage.

Small and pocket dictionaries are not considered here because they generally lack serious treatment of idioms. Dictionaries of Chinese into languages other than English are not considered because it is the wording of the English definitions that is at issues.

For comparison, definitions are also given from large Chinese-English dictionaries going back to that of Samuel Wells Williams (1874), and from the four major all-Chinese dictionaries that predate Wú’s work. The 1993 dictionary of Wú GUANGHUÁ 吴光华 and its enormous 2003 revision (not included here) are not strictly redactions of Wú JINGRONG’s work, as they gather the content of almost all known modern dictionaries, including Wú Jingrónɡ’s. For that reason, no POS is listed for Wú GUANGHUÁ. Note that the original spelling and punctuation is always supplied; it has not been regularised.

It will be seen that the Chinese-English dictionaries since Wú’s time follow Wú’s definitions closely and therefore generally fail to correct the apparent POS in Wú’s book.

Note that in most of these cases, Wú is the first lexicographer to have included these idioms in a Chinese-English dictionary.

(A1) 千奇百怪

English sources:
- Hui Yú (2004) [\text{VP}] to take all sorts of strange or unexpected forms
- DeFrancis (2003) [\text{NP}] all sorts of strange things
- DeFrancis (1996) [\text{NP}] all sorts of strange things
- Wú GUANGHUÁ (1993) [\text{NP}] all sorts [kinds] of strange things; . . . ; an infinite variety of fantastic phenomena
- Dài and Dài (1991)
- Wú JINGRONG (1978) [\text{NP}] all kinds of strange things; an infinite variety of fantastic phenomena
- Lin YÚTANG (1972) [\text{NP}] all sorts of strange things
- Liang SHIH-ch’iu (1971) [\text{NP}] numerous strange forms; grotesque or weird shapes
- Gánbù Xuéxiào (1964)
- Mathews (1931) [\text{NP}] all sorts of strange things
- Baller (1900) [\text{NP}] all sorts of absurdities
- Giles (1892) [\text{NP}] very strange
- Williams (1874)

Chinese sources:
- Xiàndài Hányǔ àidian (1978) 形容各种各样奇怪的事物 . [describes all sorts of strange things]
- Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) 謂各種奇怪之狀 . [it means all sorts of strange situations]
- Cihài (1941)
- Cíyuán (1915)
to engage in internal strife

family members drawing swords on each other — internal/fratricidal strife; internecine feud

internal strife

— . . .; internal strife; internecine feud

family members drawing swords on each other — internal strife; internecine feud

—

interneic warfare

to engage in internal strife (especially said of brothers)

family members drawing swords on each other — internal strife; internecine feud

quarrels between brothers

revive; resurge

dying embers blaze up again — revive; resurge

resurgence; revival

— . . .; dying embers glowing again — resurgence; . . .; revival; . . .

dying embers glowing again; resurgence; revival

dying embers glowing again — resurgence; revival

old fire (“dead ashes”) is kindled again — said of repeated flare-ups of rebellion

(said of emotion, esp. love, crushed rebellious force, dormant ideas, etc.) rekindled; rejuvenated

The dying ashes burn again.
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —
Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn (1978)

中文来源：比喻已经停息的事物又重新活动起来(多指坏事)。[metaphor for something that had ceased becoming active again (said mostly of bad things)]

Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943)

...喩事已平定而復發作，...，原意指失勢者可再得勢。[metaphor for some matter starting up again after having settled down; ... originally meant one who has lost power may be able to regain it]

Cíhùi (1941)

...此本喩失勢者將復得勢也，今恆引為事平復發之喩。[this was originally a metaphor for one who has lost power regaining power in the future; now it is commonly used as a metaphor for something becoming active again after having been settled]

Cíyuàn (1915)

...喩敗而復振也。[metaphor for resurgence after defeat]

(A4) 水流湍急

VP
to flow rapidly (of a river or stream)

English sources:
Hui Yu (2004) [ = V] (of rivers) have a rapid flow; have rushing current
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] rushing current
DeFrancis (1996) —
Wu Guanghua (1993) —
Dai and Dai (1991) [ = Phrase] The current is swift. (found under 湍急)
Wu Jingrong (1978) [ = N] rapid flow; rushing current
Lin Yutang (1972) —
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) —
Ganbu Xuexiao (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn (1978)
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943)
Cíhùi (1941)
Cíyuàn (1915)

(A5) 渾然一体

VP
to be perfectly integrated (usually said of visual elements)

English sources:
Hui Yu (2004) [ = N] integrated mass; integral whole; unified entity
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] an integral whole
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] an integral whole
Wu Guanghua (1993) —
Dai and Dai (1991) —
Wú Jingróng (1978) \([ = N]\) one integrated mass; a unified entity; an integral whole
Lin Yútáng (1972) —
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) —
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978) —
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) —
Cíhài (1941) —
Cíyuàn (1915) —

(A6) 耳人接物 \( \text{VP} \) to interact with people

English sources:
Huì Yú (2004) 熟 \([ = N]\) way one conducts oneself in relation to others; way one gets along with people
DeFrancis (2003) \([ = N]\) ① the way one treats people ② one’s personality
DeFrancis (1996) \([ = N]\) ① the way one treats people ② one’s personality
Wú Guānghuá (1993) the way one gets along with people; . . .
Dái and Dái (1991) \([ = N]\) the way one gets along with people
Wú Jingróng (1978) \([ = N]\) the way one gets along with people
Lin Yútáng (1972) \([ = N]\) manner of dealing with people
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) \([ = N]\) the way one treats people; one’s personality
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978) \([ = V]\) 跟人相处 . [to interact with people]
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) —
Cíhài (1941) —
Cíyuàn (1915) —

(A7) 一帆風順 \( \text{VP} \) to go smoothly and without difficulties

English sources:
Huì Yú (2004) \([ = \text{VP}]\) plain/smooth sailing — everything goes smoothly; everything goes/runs on wheels
DeFrancis (2003) \([ = N]\) plain/smooth sailing
DeFrancis (1996) \([ = N]\) plain/smooth sailing
Dái and Dái (1991) \([ = N]\) plain (或 smooth) sailing
Wú Jingróng (1978) \([ = N]\) plain (或 smooth) sailing
Lin Yútáng (1972) \([ = \text{Phrase}]\) bon voyage
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) \([ = \text{VP}]\) (literally) May you have favorable winds in your sails! — to proceed smoothly without a hitch
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) \([ = \text{Phrase}]\) all plain sailing
Mathews (1931) \([ = \text{Phrase}]\) May you have favourable winds in your sails!
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892)
Williams (1874)

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hányǔ cídàn (1978)  [ = V]  比喻非常顺利,毫无挫折. [metaphor for (progress or action) being very smooth, totally without difficulties]

Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943)  喻事之进行无阻. [metaphor for some matter proceeding without obstruction]

Cìhái (1941)  帆船遇风,则进行顺利,故恒引以行为事顺利之词. [When a sailboat encounters the wind, its progress is smooth. Therefore this is commonly used as an expression meaning that something is done smoothly.]

Cìyuán (1915)  —

(A8) 精打细算  VP  to do price calculations or budgeting with great care

English sources:
Huí Yǔ (2004)  [ = N]  careful calculation and strict budgeting; careful and meticulous calculations; shrewd consideration of self-interest

DeFrancis (2003)  [ = N]  careful calculation and strict budgeting
DeFrancis (1996)  [ = N]  careful calculation and strict budgeting
Wú Guānghuá (1993)  . . . ; careful calculation and strict budgeting; . . .

Dài and Dài (1991)  [ = N]  careful calculation and strict budgeting
Wú Jìngróng (1978)  [ = N]  careful calculation and strict budgeting
Líng Yùtáng (1972)  —
Líáng Shíh-ch’iú (1971)  —
Gànþù Xuéxiào (1964)  [ = N/VP]  careful and detailed calculation; to count every cent and make every cent count

Mathews (1931)  —
Baller (1900)  —
Giles (1892)  —
Williams (1874)  —

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hányǔ cídàn (1978)  [ = V]  (在使用人力物力上)仔细地计算. [to calculate exactingly (in using manpower or resources)]

Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943)  —
Cìhái (1941)  —
Cìyuán (1915)  —

(A9) 精耕细作  VP  to practice labour-intensive management or cultivation

English sources:
Huí Yǔ (2004)  [ = N]  intensive cultivation; intensive and meticulous farming

DeFrancis (2003)  [ = N]  intensive cultivation
DeFrancis (1996)  [ = N]  intensive cultivation
Wú Guānghuá (1993)  intensive and meticulous farming; intensive cultivation
Dài and Dài (1991)  intensive cultivation; meticulous cultivation
Wú Jìngróng (1978)  [ = N] intensive and meticulous farming; intensive cultivation

Lin Yūtáng (1972) —
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) —
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964)  [ = N] intensive-cultivation; intensive and meticulous farming

Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:
Xiándài Hàn yú ádiàn (1978) —
Gwoyeu tsyrdéan (1943) —
Cíhái (1941) —
Gíyuán (1915) —

(A10) 統籌兼顧 VP to do overall planning and take all factors into consideration

English sources:
Huì Yú (2004)  [ = N] unified planning with due consideration for all concerned; making overall plans and taking all factors into consideration; overall planning and all-round consideration

DeFrancis (2003)  [ = N] a plan considering all factors
DeFrancis (1996)  [ = N] plan considering all factors
Wú Guánghuá (1993) . . . ; make overall plans and take all factors into consideration; . . . ; unified planning with due consideration for all parties concerned

Dài và Dài (1991)  [ = N] unified planning with due consideration for all concerned; making overall plans and taking all factors into consideration

Wú Jìngróng (1978)  [ = N] unified planning with due consideration for all concerned; making overall plans and taking all factors into consideration

Lin Yūtáng (1972) —
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971)  [ = VP] to plan jointly so as to take into consideration every aspect of a matter
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964)  [ = N] the unified planning with due consideration for all parties concerned; overall planning, all-round consideration

Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:
Xiándài Hàn yú ádiàn (1978) —
Gwoyeu tsyrdéan (1943) —
Cíhái (1941) —
Gíyuán (1915) —

(A11) 萬衆一心 VP to be united (said of a large group of people)

English sources:
Huì Yú (2004)  [ = VP?] all people of one heart and one mind
DeFrancis (2003)  [ = N] universal agreement; complete unity
DeFrancis (1996) [ N/VP] universal agreement; completely united

Wú Guānghuá (1993) millions of people united as one man; All have one heart; all of one heart; All united in one purpose; unite as one; with one heart and one mind

Dài and Dài (1991) [ N] millions of people all of one mind

Wú Jingróng (1978) [ N] millions of people all of one mind

Lin Yütang (1972) [ VP] all united in one purpose

Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ Phrase/Adv/N] all for one and one for all; with one aspiration in their heart; solidarity

Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) [ VP] united as one man

Mathews (1931) [ N] all of one heart

Baller (1900) —

Giles (1892) —

Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978) 千万人一条心. [thousands or tens of thousands of people all being of one mind]

Gwoyeu tseondean (1943) —

Cíháì (1941) —

Cíyuán (1915) —

(A12) 萬紫千紅 VP to be very colourful (said of flowers)

English sources:

Hui Yù (2004) [ N] a variety of colours; riot/blaze of colour

DeFrancis (2003) [ N] a riot of color; vast display of dazzling colors (of flowers)

DeFrancis (1996) [ N] a riot of color

Wú Guānghuá (1993) a riot of colour; a blaze of colour; . . .

Dài and Dài (1991) a riot of colour; a blaze of color; . . .

Wú Jingróng (1978) [ N] a riot (或 blaze) of colour

Lin Yütang (1972) —

Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ N] (of flowers) a vast array dazzling colors

Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) [ N] a profusion of colour

Mathews (1931) —

Baller (1900) —

Giles (1892) —

Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978) 形容百花齐放, 顏色艳丽. [describes hundreds of flowers blooming, colors bright and beautiful]

Gwoyeu tseondean (1943) 状花木之盛. [describes flourishing flowers and trees]

Cíháì (1941) —

Cíyuán (1915) —

(A13) �OperationException VP for there to be loud gongs and drums

English sources:

Hui Yù (2004) [ N] deafening sound of gongs and drums —

DeFrancis (2003) [ N] festive scene; loud music of drums and gongs

DeFrancis (1996) [ N] deafening sound of gongs and drums
Wú Guānghuá (1993)  
...; a deafening sound of gongs and drums;  
...

Dài and Dài (1991)  
Wú Jingróng (1978) [ = N] a deafening sound of gongs and drums  
Lin Yütang (1972)  
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ = N] (literally) sound of gongs and drums shakes the sky — noisy celebration of a festival or carnival

Gàn bù Xué xiào (1964) [ = N] 鐘鼓喧天地: beating of gongs and drums

Mathews (1931)  
Baller (1900)  
Giles (1892) [ = Phrase] the sound of gongs and drums went up to heaven

Williams (1874) [ = Phrase] the gongs and drums resounded to the sky

Chinese sources:  
Xiàndài Hányú ǎidiànxí (1978)  
Gwoyeu ǔsyrdéan (1943)  
Cíháí (1941)  
Cíyuán (1915)

English sources:  
Huí Yú (2004) [ = N] exceptionally/unprecedently grand occasion; unprecedented grandeur  
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] unprecedentedly grand occasion  
DeFrancis (1996)  
Wú Guānghuá (1993) ...; an unprecedentedly grand occasion  
Dài and Dài (1991)  
Wú Jingróng (1978) [ = N] an exceptionally grand occasion  
Lin Yütang (1972)  
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ = VP] unprecedented in grandeur, festivity, etc.

Gàn bù Xué xiào (1964)  
Mathews (1931)  
Baller (1900)  
Giles (1892)  
Williams (1874)

Chinese sources:  
Xiàndài Hányú ǎidiànxí (1978)  
Gwoyeu ǔsyrdéan (1943)  
Cíháí (1941)  
Cíyuán (1915)

(A14) 盛況空前  
VP to be unprecedently magnificent and attended by a large number of people (said of public events)

English sources:  
Huí Yú (2004) [ = N] exceptionally/unprecedently grand occasion; unprecedented grandeur  
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] unprecedentedly grand occasion  
DeFrancis (1996)  
Wú Guānghuá (1993) ...; an unprecedentedly grand occasion  
Dài and Dài (1991)  
Wú Jingróng (1978) [ = N] an exceptionally grand occasion  
Lin Yütang (1972)  
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ = VP] unprecedented in grandeur, festivity, etc.

Gàn bù Xué xiào (1964)  
Mathews (1931)  
Baller (1900)  
Giles (1892)  
Williams (1874)

Chinese sources:  
Xiàndài Hányú ǎidiànxí (1978)  
Gwoyeu ǔsyrdéan (1943)  
Cíháí (1941)  
Cíyuán (1915)

(A15) 門庭若市  
VP to have lots of visitors (often of businesses)

English sources:  
Huí Yú (2004) [ = N] the courtyard is as crowded as a marketplace — a much-visited house  
[ = Phrase] the shop is doing booming business  
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N/Phrase] ① much-visited house ② ...  
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] much-visited house  
Wú Guānghuá (1993) ...; The courtyard is as crowded as a marketplace — a much visited house; ...  
Dài and Dài (1991) ...; a much visited place; ...
Wú Jingróng (1978) [ = N] the courtyard is as crowded as a marketplace — a much visited house
Lin Yütang (1972) [ = N] thriving business, many callers
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ = VP] doing booming business; swarmed with visitors —
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Williams (1874) [ = Phrase] 門庭如市: his court-yard was like a market, —

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978) [one’s gate and courtyard are as bustling as a market; describes there being many people coming and going]
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) [metaphor for there being many people coming to one’s gate]
Cíhái (1941) [it means visitors coming in throngs; later also used mockingly to mean attracting people who are pursuing wealth and fame, said of someone of high rank]
Cíyuán (1915) [means that many people come to one’s gate]

(A16) 青黄不接 VP to have a temporary shortage (usually of manpower or resources)

English sources:
Huí Yú (2004) [ = N] the crop is still in the blade while the old stock as all been consumed; the granary is nearly empty but the new crop is not yet ripe — temporary shortage of food, personel (sic), etc
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] ① temporary shortage ② . . .
Dài and Dài (1991) [ = N] . . .; temporary shortage
Wú Jingróng (1978) [ = N] when the new crop is still in the blade and the old one is all consumed — temporary shortage
Lin Yütang (1972) [ = N] food shortage between two harvests, gap between generations or any gap in succession (literally) The old grains are used up before the harvest of the new crop — a period of insufficiency to tide over
Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ = N] (literally) The old grains are used up before the harvest of the new crop — a period of insufficiency to tide over
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) [ = Adv/N] between seasons; at the end of spring and beginning of summer; gap (n.)
Mathews (1931) [ = Phrase] the green crops of this year will not be ripe before the yellow grain of last year is exhausted — used of bad years or a difficult time to tide over
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) [ = Phrase] there is no sequence in the greenness and yellowness, — of the crops, as in a plentiful season
Williams (1874) —
Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978)

指庄稼还没有成熟，陈粮已经吃完，比喻暂时的缺乏。[the old provisions are eaten up before the crops are ripe; metaphor for a temporary shortage]

Guoye tsyrdean (1943)

謂舊穀已絕新穀未熟之時, 以喻偶然匱乏。[metaphor for an occasional shortage, when the old grain is used up and the new grain is not yet ripe]

Cǐhāi (1941)

謂舊穀已絕新穀未長之時也。...俗亦以喻一時之匱乏，曰青黃不接。[means the time when the old grain is used up and the new grain has not yet grown full; ... colloquially, “green and yellow do not meet” is also used as a metaphor for a temporary shortage]

Cǐyuán (1915)

(A17) 乾打雷不下雨 VP to be all talk and no action

English sources:

Huí Yǔ (2004) [ = N] all thunder, but no rain — all show and no go; much noise, but no action; all talk and no cider

DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] ① thunder but no rain ② much noise but no action ③ a big bluffer

DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] ① thunder but no rain; much noise but no action ② a big bluffer

Wú Guānghuá (1993)

Dài and Dài (1991)

Wú Jǐngróng (1978) [ = N] thunder but no rain; much noise but no action

Lin Yùtāng (1972)

Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971)

Gàn bù Xuéxiào (1964)

Mathews (1931)

Baller (1900)

Giles (1892)

Williams (1874)

Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978)

Guoye tsyrdean (1943)

Cǐhāi (1941)

Cǐyuán (1915)

(A18) 人山人海 VP for there to be crowds of people

English sources:

Huí Yǔ (2004) [ = N] oceans of people; ocean of faces; huge crowds of people

DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] oceans of people

DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] oceans of people

Wú Guānghuá (1993)

Dài and Dài (1991) [ = N] huge crowds of people; a sea of people [faces]; the sea of humanity (in a crowd)

Wú Jǐngróng (1978) [ = N] huge crowds of people; a sea of people

Lin Yùtāng (1972) [ = N] huge crowds (“a sea of human beings”)

Liang Shih-ch’iu (1971) [ = N] a large crowd
Gānbù Xuéxiào (1964)
Mathews (1931) [ = N] crowded conditions
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hán yǔ cídiǎn (1978) 形容聚集的人极多. [describes a great many people gathered]
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) 極言人多. [an emphatic way of saying that there are many people]
Cíhǎi (1941) —
Ciyuán (1915) —

(A19) 人才濟濟 VP for there to be a wealth of talent

English sources:
Huí Yū (2004) [ = N] abundance of capable people; wealth of talents
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] a wealth of talent
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] a wealth of talent
Wú Guānghuá (1993) a galaxy of talents; large assembly of men of talent
Dài and Dài (1991) —
Wú Jìngróng (1978) [ = N] a galaxy of talent
Lin Yùtāng (1972) [ = N] a galaxy of talent
Liang Shī–ch’īu (1971) Phrase There is a wealth of talents.
Gānbù Xuéxiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hán yǔ cídiǎn (1978) —
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) —
Cíhǎi (1941) —
Ciyuán (1915) —

(A20) 人聲鼎沸 VP for there to be hubbub

English sources:
Huí Yū (2004) [ = N] hubbub; a hubbub/babel of voices
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] hubbub
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] hubbub
Wú Guānghuá (1993) . . . a hubbub of voices . . .
Dài and Dài (1991) —
Wú Jìngróng (1978) [ = N] a hubbub of voices
Lin Yùtāng (1972) —
Liang Shī–ch’īu (1971) —
Gānbù Xuéxiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) [ = N] noise of people (talking) like the bubbling of a caldron
Williams (1874) [ = Phrase] the clamors of the people bubbled up, as a seething caldron

Chinese sources:
Xiàndài Hán yǔ cídiǎn (1978) —
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Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943)

Cihäi (1941)

Ciyuán (1915)

(A21) 痛心疾首

VP

to feel a combination of anger, disappointment, and disapproval

English sources:

Hui Yü (2004)  
[ = Adv/VT] with bitter hatred/resentment; with deep hatred and resentment; resent/hate deeply; deplore greatly

DeFrancis (2003)  
[ = N] deep heartache

DeFrancis (1996)  
[ = N] deep heartache

Wú Guànghuá (1993)  
... with bitter hatred

Dái and Dài (1991)  
[ = Adv] with bitter hatred

Wú Jíngróng (1978)  
[ = Adv] with bitter hatred

Lin Yútāng (1972)  
[ = VT] resent or hate deeply

Liang Shíh-ch’iu (1971)  
[ = VT] to hate deeply; to feel bitter about ...

Gàn bù Xuéxiào (1964)  
—

Mathews (1931)  
—

Baller (1900)  
—

Giles (1892)  
—

Williams (1874)  
—

Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978)  
形容痛心到极点, [describes hating to an extreme degree]

Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943)  
恨恶之極, [the extremity of hatred]

Cihäi (1941)  
—

Ciyuán (1915)  
謂恨之甚也... [it means an extreme degree of hatred]

(A22) 妇紫嫣红

VP

to have rich and vivid colors (said of flowers or things associated with flowers, such as springtime)

English sources:

Hui Yü (2004)  
[ = N] deep purples and bright reds — beautiful flowers

DeFrancis (2003)  
[ = N] beautiful flowers

DeFrancis (1996)  
[ = N] beautiful flower

Wú Guànghuá (1993)  
—

Dái and Dài (1991)  
[ = N] brilliant purples and reds; deep purples and bright reds; beautiful flowers; gaily dressed maidens

Wú Jíngróng (1978)  
[ = N] brilliant purples and reds — beautiful flowers

Lin Yútāng (1974)  
[ = N] gaily dressed maidens (literary language)

Liang Shíh-ch’iu (1971)  
[ = VP] (said of flowers) beautiful and luxuriant; (said of a party, etc.) colorful; star-studded

Gàn bù Xuéxiào (1964)  
—

Mathews (1931)  
—

Baller (1900)  
—

Giles (1892)  
—

Williams (1874)  
—

Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídiǎn (1978)  
形容各种好看的花, [describes all sorts of beautiful flowers]
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) to be a common occurrence

Cihài (1941) —

Ciyüán (1915) —

(A23) 屢見不鮮 VP

English sources:

Hui Yú (2004) —
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] common occurrence; nothing new
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] common occurrence; nothing new
Wú Guānghuá (1993) . . . common occurrence; . . . ; nothing new; . . .

Dài and Dài (1991) [ = N] common occurrence; nothing new
Wú Jìngróng (1978) [ = N] common occurrence; nothing new
Lin Yùtáng (1972) —
Liang Shih-ch'iü (1971) [ = VP] not rare; of ordinary occurrence or common sight

Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídíán (1978) 数见不鲜. (under which it says: 经常看见, 并不新奇. [often seen, in no way new or unusual])

Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) —
Cihài (1941) —
Ciyüán (1915) —

(A24) 春風化雨 VP
to exert a transformative, nurturing influence (said of a teacher on a student)

English sources:

Hui Yú (2004) [ = N] life-giving spring breeze and rain — salutary influence of education; beneficial influence of good teachers
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] salutary influence of education
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] salutary influence of education

Dài and Dài (1991) —
Wú Jìngróng (1978) [ = N] life-giving spring breeze and rain — salutary influence of education
Lin Yùtáng (1972) [ = N] stimulating influence of teacher compared to spring atmosphere
Liang Shih-ch'iü (1971) [ = N] education of the young
Gànbù Xuéxiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:

Xiàndài Hányǔ cídíán (1978) 适宜于草木生长的风雨, 比喻良好的教育. [breezes and rain that are good for the
growth of plants; metaphor for good education

English sources:

Huì Yú (2004) [ = N] vast clear/cloudless skies; boundless stretch of blue skies
DeFrancis (2003) [ = N] clear and boundless sky
DeFrancis (1996) [ = N] clear and boundless sky
Wú Guānghuá (1993) . . . ; a clear and boundless sky; . . .
Dái and Dái (1991) —
Wú Jíngrōng (1978) [ = N] a clear and boundless sky
Lin Yútáng (1972) [ = N] a big, clear open sky, the vast clear sky
Gàn bù Xué xiào (1964) —
Mathews (1931) —
Baller (1900) —
Giles (1892) —
Williams (1874) —

Chinese sources:

Xiàn dài Hányǔ diànián (1978) —
Gwoyeu tsyrdean (1943) —
Cǐhǎi (1941) —
Cǐyuán (1915) —

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