Contemporary Chinese Dictionary

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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE DICTIONARY

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The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (CCD) is an authoritative single-volume general-purpose Chinese language dictionary published by The Commercial Press in Beijing, now into its 6th edition (2012). It was originally edited by Lyu Shuxiang and Ding Shusheng, two prominent Chinese linguists at the Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, as a reference work on standard modern Chinese. Compilation of the dictionary was initiated in 1958 and trial editions were issued in 1960 and 1965, respectively, with a number of copies printed in 1973 for internal circulation and comments. However, due to the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1975), the final draft was not completed until 1977, and the first edition was not published until 1978. It was the first dictionary in the People’s Republic of China whose entries were arranged according to Hanyu pinyin, the official phonetic system for transcribing Chinese characters, with definitions and examples in simplified Chinese. The subsequent second through sixth editions were published respectively in 1983, 1996, 2002, 2005, and 2012 by The Commercial Press.

The dictionary has won a series of important awards, including China’s First National Book Award in 1994, the Second National Dictionary Award (first prize) in 1997, and Wu Yuzhang Humanities and Social Science Best Research Award (first prize) in 2002. By October 2013, it had been reprinted 484 times, thus establishing itself as one of the most popular dictionaries in China. Unlike the 12-volume Great Chinese Dictionary (henceforth GCD, Luo 1986–1993), which targets scholars and researchers, and the compactly-sized Xinhua Character Dictionary (11th edition, 2011), which has as its readers native learners of Chinese at the primary to secondary levels, the single-volume CCD is popular especially among Chinese students at the tertiary level and the general
Chinese population. This dictionary is also gaining popularity among foreigners learning Chinese, due partly to its status as the most authoritative Chinese language dictionary and partly to the lack of good dictionaries designed specifically for such learners.

The work under review here is the sixth edition of the CCD (henceforth CCD6) published in 2012, with Jiang Lansheng, Tan Jingchun, and Cheng Rong as the editors-in-chief. The review consists of two main sections. The first section discusses the five major improvements the CCD6 has made as against the CCD5; the second section focuses on four weak points. All the English glosses (mostly given in brackets) of the Chinese words and expressions are my own.

I. Major improvements in the CCD6

As an updated version, the CCD6 has made a number of improvements compared to its predecessors, the most important of which are the inclusion of new items, the rewriting of some definitions, more accurate part-of-speech marking, adding pictures for selected items, and updating pronunciation information for some entries. These are discussed in turn in the five sections below.

1. Major improvements in the CCD6

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1.1 Adding new words, new senses and new usage

First, the CCD6 has included a large number of new words, new senses and new usage to reflect new concepts and recent changes in the current life of the Chinese people. Compared with the fifth edition, the sixth edition has added over 4,000 new entries, with the total number of its entries now exceeding 69,000. These entries include over 600 new head characters (denoting mainly place names, Chinese surnames, and scientific and technological concepts; for an explanation of the notion of ‘head character’, see Zhao 2014: 440), over 3,000 new words and expressions, idiomatic phrases and idioms, and over 400 new senses. Unlike the GCD, which focuses on collecting words from classical Chinese writings, the CCD6 has added many new words and new senses of current use. Some of the new words reflect the booming real estate market in China in recent years, the government’s effort to tackle the housing problem, and the unhealthy practices on the housing market, such as 首付 (‘down payment’), 二手房 (‘second-hand housing’), 房改房 (‘a practice in the housing reform featuring the selling of its housing by an institution to its employees at the cost price’), 合租 (‘shared apartment-renting’), 产权证 (‘certificate of title’), 房托儿 (literally, ‘housing shill’; figuratively, ‘those who gang up with the real estate developer to trap people into buying a house or an apartment’), etc.

Another group of additions showcase new changes in the Internet age, such as 网店 (‘cyber shop’), 网购 (‘online shopping’), 网游 (‘online game’), 网速
‘Internet connection speed’), 网聊 (‘webchat’), 网络犯罪 (‘cyber crime’),
网络媒体 (‘Internet media’), 网络日记 (‘weblog’), 网络综合征 (‘net syn-
drome’), etc. Others show the recognition of Western culture in China, such
as 平安夜 (‘Christmas Eve’), 诺亚方舟 (‘Noah’s Ark’), 父亲节 (‘Father’s
Day’), 母亲节 (‘Mother’s Day’), 感恩节 (‘Thanksgiving Day’), 情人节
(‘Valentine’s Day’), etc. Still others exhibit Chinese social, economic and pol-
itical changes as a result of the country’s opening-up and democratic progress,
such as 草根 (‘the grass roots’), 基民 (‘a mutual fund-holder’), 和谐社会
(‘harmonious society’), 维稳 (‘to maintain social stability’), etc. The dictionary
has also added words that reflect the negative impact brought about by the
introduction of a market economy, such as 潜规则 (‘casting couch’), 买春
(‘to buy sex’), 卖淫 (‘to make a living as a prostitute’), 卖官 (‘to sell an official
post/title’), 封口费 (‘a bribe to prevent the person in the know from telling the truth’), etc.

For a number of existing items new senses have been added. For example,
人治 was defined in the CCD5 as ‘a pre-Qin Confucian tenet characterized by
rule by a few able and virtuous people’, but the CCD6 gives one more sense of
current use, ‘to rule a country or society with the will of the leader’. 被, a
common auxiliary word indicating passivity, is now presented in a popular new
sense, ‘usually used before a verb or a noun to indicate helplessness at being
falsely traduced/rumored to have done sth. or being forced to do sth.’ as in
被就业 (‘to be falsely listed as employed while actually jobless’) and 被捐款
(‘to be forced to make a donation against one’s will’). Similarly, 宅, which
originally meant a residence or home, is now recorded in its popular new sense
as a verb, ‘to stay indoors without going out (usu. said of people who are
obsessed by indoor activities such as Internet surfing or computer games)’,
as in 宅男 (‘indoorsman’) and 宅女 (‘indoors woman’).

Moreover, to better reflect the reality of language use in current China and
the trend of globalization as reflected in language, the CCD6 has also included,
in a separate section at the end of the dictionary, 239 letter words and words
starting with Western letters, such as API (‘air pollution index’), CAI (‘com-
puter-aided instruction’), PM2.5 (‘particulate matter 2.5’), ETC (‘electronic toll
collection’), EMBA (‘Executive Master of Business Administration’), BBS
(‘bulletin board system’), SUV (‘sport utility vehicle’), IP 电话 (‘Internet proto-
col telephone’), PC 机 (‘personal computer’), and POS 机 (‘point-of-sale
machine’). Interestingly, reader-friendly as it is, this practice has caused
much controversy among Chinese scholars the moment the dictionary came
out. For example, in a face-to-face online debate at people.com.cn (2012), one
of the key websites in China, on September 6, 2012, Li Minsheng, a researcher
in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, claimed that the inclusion of letter
words in such an authoritative dictionary seeking to standardize the Chinese
language and promote putonghua, or mandarin, would aggravate the latinization
of the Chinese language, sully its purity, cause confusion among Chinese
readers in their learning and use of the language, and ultimately threaten the safety of Chinese culture. He even accused the dictionary compilers of violating the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language* and *Regulations on Publication Administration* (State Council Act No. 594). In response, Jiang Lansheng, one of the editors-in-chief of the CCD6, argued that letter words had appeared as an inevitable consequence of social development, as they were concise in form, easy to use in communication, especially in the fields of science and technology, and universally accepted on the international arena, thus capable of raising the efficiency of communication. She also held that the cautious inclusion of such words in the CCD6 was lexicographically justifiable, because the dictionary should truthfully record what language is spoken or written, rather than regulate how it should be spoken or written, i.e. be descriptive rather than prescriptive. Finally, she refuted the accusation of law violation as groundless, since no laws in China forbade the inclusion of letter words in dictionaries and the CCD6 appended annotations to all the letter words and words starting with Western letters included in it, which conformed to the stipulations of the relevant laws. This questionable contention reminds us of the stormiest controversy in the annals of lexicography — that over *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (1961) — which, seen from another perspective, shows public concern for dictionaries.

The CCD6 has also incorporated loanwords and loan translations from other languages, notably (and understandably) from English, such as: 贝司 (‘bass’), 欧佩克 (‘OPEC’), 朋克 (‘punk’), 威客 (‘witkey’), 威亚 (‘wire’), 血拼 (‘shopping’), 雅思 (‘IELTS’), 蛙人 (‘frogman’), 人体炸弹 (‘suicide bomb/bomber’), and 路权 (‘right-of-way’), from Japanese, such as 过劳死 (Karoshi, ‘death from overwork’), 便当 (bento, ‘box lunch/meal’), 物语 (monogatari, ‘story’), 生鱼片/刺身 (Sashimi, ‘raw fish’), 手账 (hobonichi, ‘notebook’), etc. and from Germany, such as Verstand (‘rational’), etc. These words are now popular among the Chinese and show changes in Chinese people’s lifestyle as a result of globalization and China’s reform and opening-up. In addition, to reflect the diversity of the Chinese language, the CCD6 has also incorporated words from the Greater China Region, such as Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, etc. These words include: 马仔 (‘a lackey’), 空中大学 (‘open university’), 买春 (‘to buy sex’), 卖春 (‘to make a living as a prostitute’), 软体 (‘software’), 硬体 (‘hardware’), 网路 (‘network’), 数位 (‘digital’), 斯诺克 (‘snookers’), 水坝 (‘dam’), 呛声 (‘to challenge’), 绸笼 (‘sarong’), 跳腿 (‘to two-time’), 老鼠仓 (‘rat trading, referring to illegal stock market malpractice by market makers, such as fund managers, to manipulate prices’), 身段 (‘a woman’s shape or figure’), 拉风 (‘cool; stylish’), etc. With the enhanced communication between China and other parts of the Greater China Region in various fields, it is only natural for the CCD6 to incorporate these words to reflect the reality of language use.
In fact, the CCD has a long tradition in this respect. For example, the CCD5 included two words from Taiwan, 体认 (‘to experience and learn’) and 愿景 (‘vision’), in 2005, just two days before it was printed, since the two words — at that time rather unfamiliar in China’s mainland — had just appeared in the joint communique released by Hu Jintao, the then president of China, and Lien Zhan, the then Chairman of the Kuomintang, after their historic meeting in Beijing on April 29, 2005.

1.2 Refined entry definitions

The second feature of the CCD6 lies in its improved entry definition, the most essential element of a monolingual dictionary. According to Tan (2012: 561), one of the editors-in-chief of the CCD6, the dictionary has upgraded its definitions mainly in three ways. First, for some nouns denoting artefacts with specific use, the dictionary has added the function or use of these objects to their definitions, since without knowing the function, one can hardly claim to know the word. The CCD had generally done well in this respect, but there were still some nouns for which the functional components were missing, and these are furnished in the CCD6. For example, in the CCD5, 本子 (‘notebook’) was defined as 把成沓的纸装订在一起而成的东西 (‘a number of pieces of paper fastened together at one edge’), but in the CCD6, the definition has been revised into 把成沓的纸装订在一起而成的东西,用来写字\绘画等 (‘a number of pieces of paper fastened together at one edge, used for writing or drawing on’). Similarly, 线 (‘thread’) was defined in the CCD5 as 用丝\棉\麻\金属等制成的细而可以任意曲折的东西 (‘a thin string of silk, cotton, hemp, metal, etc. that is flexible’), but has been improved into 用丝\棉\麻\金属等制成的细长而可以任意曲折的东西,主要用来缝补\编制衣物等 (‘a thin, flexible string of silk, cotton, hemp, metal, etc. used mainly for sewing or making cloth’) in the CCD6. This change was perhaps inspired by English dictionaries; for example, in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (8th edition, Turnbull 2014), pad, translated as 本子, is defined as ‘a number of pieces of paper for writing or drawing on, that are fastened together at one edge’; and thread, translated as 线, as ‘a thin string of cotton, wool, silk, etc. used for sewing or making cloth’. Whatever the reasons behind the change, the new definitions are likely to be more helpful to dictionary users.

Secondly, the CCD6 has clarified the definition of entries by adding elements indicating the purpose of some verbs of action. For example, 坐 was defined in the CCD5 as 把锅\壶等放在炉火上 (‘to place a pot, kettle, etc. on a stove’), which only states the action the verb denotes, but fails to clarify its purpose. In this sense, the definition is not complete. The CCD6, instead, has added 给里面的东西加热 (‘to heat its content’), which, on the one hand, makes
the definition fuller and more complete, and on the other, helps the reader to discriminate the different shades of meaning of this entry.

Thirdly, the dictionary has refined its entry definitions by meticulously discriminating between the denotative meaning and contextual meaning of its entries. For example, 轻于鸿毛 (‘as light as a goose feather’), a four-character entry derived from the ancient Chinese philosophical saying 人固有一死,或重于泰山,或轻于鸿毛 (‘Though death befalls all men alike, it may be weightier than Mount Tai or lighter than a goose feather.’), was defined as 比喻死得不值得 (‘figuratively, one’s death is of no significance’). However, a more careful examination of this entry shows that it does not connote the meaning of ‘death’, which actually derives from the first part of the saying 人固有一死 (‘though death befalls all men alike’). Therefore, the CCD6 has changed the definition into the more accurate 比大雁的毛还要轻,多形容轻微或不足道 (‘literally, as light as a goose feather; figuratively, of no significance or consequence’).

In addition to the above lexicographically significant changes, the CCD6 has also improved definitions in other ways. First, it has corrected quite a number of other erroneous, inappropriate, or outdated definitions in the CCD5. For example, 爱巢, which normally refers to the bedroom of newlyweds, was defined in the CCD5 as 指新房,也指年轻夫妻的幸福家庭 (‘referring to a new house, or figuratively to the happy family of a young couple’), which is not appropriate, because 新房 (‘a new house’) can either mean a bedroom or a newly-built house. Therefore, the CCD6 has rightly redefined this entry as 指新婚夫妻的卧室,也指年轻夫妻的幸福家庭 (‘referring to the bedroom of newlyweds, or figuratively to the happy family of a young couple’). Similarly, 店小二 was defined in the CCD5 as 饭馆\酒馆\客店中接待客人的伙计,多见于早期白话 (‘someone who receives guests at a restaurant, wine-house or an inn, normally found in the early vernacular’). This definition is not accurate, because ‘someone’ may refer either to a waiter or to other people, the restaurant owner, for example, in a restaurant, wine-house or inn, but the word refers exclusively to a waiter or an attendant. Therefore, the CCD6 has revised the definition into 饭馆\酒馆\客店中接待客人的伙计,多见于早期白话 (‘a waiter or an attendant at a restaurant, wine-house or an inn, normally found in the early vernacular’), which is more accurate.

The CCD6 has also revised some outdated definitions. For example, 大行星 (‘major planets’) was defined in the CCD5 as 指太阳系的九大行星 (‘referring to the nine major planets in the solar system’). However, the International Astronomical Union created in 2006 a scientific definition for the word planet, demoting the former major planet Pluto to the lesser status of dwarf planet. The CCD6 takes note of this, and the definition of 大行星 now reads 指太阳系的八大行星 (‘referring to the eight major planets in the solar system’).
Secondly, to make itself more user-friendly, the CCD6 has supplemented some entries with their pragmatic meanings. For example, in the CCD5, 爱 as a verb was defined as "said of a change, to be liable to occur", as was shown in the entry example 爱晕车 ("to be liable to get carsick"). But the CCD6 has offered the pragmatic meaning of the entry by adding to the definition 通常是说话人主观上不愿发生的 ("usu. against the will of the speaker"), which informs the reader that such changes as 爱晕车 are against one’s will and are normally uncontrollable, thus further clarifying the meaning and usage of the item.

Thirdly, the dictionary has sought for greater precision in its entry definition, which may be illustrated with the definitions of 漂 in the different editions of the dictionary. In the second (1983) edition, 漂 was defined as 停留 在液体表面不下沉, 或顺着风向或液体流动的方向移动 ("to stay on the surface of a liquid without sinking, or to move along the direction of wind or the direction of a flowing liquid"). In the third (1996) and fourth (2002) editions, the compilers divided the sense of 漂 into two: one is 停留 在液体表面不下沉 ("to stay on the surface of a liquid without sinking") and the other is 顺着风向, 液体流动的方向移动 ("to move along the direction of wind or the direction of a flowing liquid"). Clearly, these changes were motivated by a desire to produce a more satisfying definition of this entry. In the fifth (2005) edition, the second sense of the entry was changed into 顺着液体流动的方向移动 ("to move along the direction of a flowing liquid"), and 顺着风向移动 ("to move along the direction of wind") was deleted. While appreciating the lexicographers’ efforts at improving the definition, we have to admit that the definitions in the previous three editions are all problematic. First, they have all omitted 停留 在液体表面不下沉 ("to stay on the surface of a liquid without sinking"), which is the most essential meaning of 漂. For example, a small stone brought along by river water or flood water is not 漂, since it does not float on the surface of the water. Second, the definition in the fifth edition omitted 顺着风向 ("along the direction of wind"), which is not right either, because a boat does move on the surface of water with the wind. For this reason, the CCD6 has revised the definition into 浮在液体表面顺着液体流动或风吹动的方向移动 ("to float on the surface of a liquid and move along its direction or along the direction of wind"), which is more exhaustive and accurate.

1.3 Improved part-of-speech marking

Another notable feature of the CCD6 is its improved marking of the part of speech of the entries. The CCD started to mark the part of speech of the entries in the 5th (2005) edition, which is of significance to the research on the Chinese language and the teaching of Chinese, including teaching Chinese as a foreign language (Zhao 2014). As an updated version, the CCD6 has cross-checked all
the parts of speech in the CCD5 and has made due revisions. For example, the synonymous triad 单身, 独身, and 只身 were all marked as nouns in the CCD5. However, according to Tan (2012: 565–566), in actual use, 只身, which means ‘alone’, is normally used as an adverb, though it resembles 单身 in form, which was marked as a noun in the CCD5 and means ‘a single person’, as in 只身赴美 (‘to go to the United States alone/by oneself’). Therefore, it should be marked as an adverb rather than a noun. 单身 is indeed a noun; however, it is also used as a verb, as in 他 一直单身, 和父母住在一套老房子里 (‘He remained unmarried and lived with his parents in an old house.’) and as an adverb (in this sense, it means 只身 or ‘alone’), as in 他 常年单身在外, 倍感寂寞 (‘Having been alone in a strange place for years, he felt extremely lonely.’) Therefore, the CCD6 has rightly added the two parts of speech to do justice to these non-nominal uses. In the same vein, 独身 was marked in the CCD5 as a noun, because it was defined as 单身, which was also inappropriately marked as a noun. However, an examination of the use of this word shows that 独身 is seldom, if at all, used as a noun; instead, it is either used as an adverb, as in 独身在外不容易 (‘Life alone in a strange place is not easy.’), or as a verb, as in 他 四十多岁了, 依然 独身 (‘He was over forty, but remained unmarried/single.’). For this reason, the CCD6 has revised the part of speech of this entry accordingly. Another example is found in 蝴蝶 (‘my humble abode or to live in a humble dwelling’), which is both a noun and a verb. Unlike the CCD5, which marked this word only as a noun, the CCD6 has marked it with both parts of speech.

1.4 Using pictures to facilitate the definition of ancient Chinese objects

Still another novel feature of the CCD6 lies in its use of pictures to help define ancient Chinese objects. In fact, the CCD5 had already included pictures, but they were very small in number and mostly used for illustrating specialized terms, especially in the fields of physics and mathematics, which average Chinese readers will not be familiar with, such as 扁率 (‘oblateness’), 横波 (‘transverse wave’), 三角函数 (‘trigonometric function’), 圆心角 (‘central angle’), 仰角 (‘angle of elevation’), etc. The CCD6, however, added nearly one hundred pictures of ancient Chinese objects, including 编钟 (‘ancient chime bells’), 编磬 (‘stone/jade chimes’), 狸犼 (‘a legendary beast often painted on prison doors in ancient time’), 戈 (‘an ancient Chinese weapon with a long shaft and a horizontal blade’), 鬲 (‘gong, an ancient wine vessel made of bronze’), 罂 (‘an urn-shaped wine vessel’), 坤虡 (‘an ancient plucked stringed instrument with five to twenty-five strings’), etc. Admittedly, these pictures are added mainly for the benefit of Chinese users; however, they are also useful to foreign learners of Chinese, particularly at the advanced level.
1.5 Revised pronunciations

The CCD6 has also revised the pronunciations of some entries to match their current use. It has revised the pronunciations of some loanwords. For example, as noted by Ma (2012: 156), in the CCD5, ‘taxi’ was given the pronunciation *diˇsı`, but in fact it is often pronounced as *diˇshi; ‘bye bye’ was given as *baˇibài, but in popular use it is pronounced *baˇibáı; ‘Cannes, a place in France’ is customarily pronounced as *gànaˇ rather than *jiˇanà. The new edition has revised these pronunciations accordingly. It has also adjusted the pronunciations of some ancient Chinese words. For example, ‘to stand on tiptoe’, a word from ancient Chinese texts, was inappropriately given as *qi in the CCD5, but has been changed into *qi in the CCD6. *qi, a polyphone, was treated as two independent entries with the same pronunciation *qiˇan in the CCD5; however, research shows that in its modern use, *qi is pronounced *qiˇn, meaning ‘beautiful’, but in Ancient Chinese it was both a verb and a noun with the same pronunciation *qing, meaning ‘to entreat or invite’ and ‘son-in-law’ respectively, but neither sense is in use today. Therefore, in the CCD6, the compilers have made due adjustment of the pronunciations of the entry. Similar adjustment can be found in *qi, *qi, and *qi as in *qiši, *qi, and *qiši, *qi, *qi, and *qi. The CCD6 has also revised the transcriptions of some everyday words based on their actual pronunciation. For example, the CCD5 treated *qi as a polyphone that could be pronounced as either *gái or *jiˇe, as in *qiˇcái (‘mustard leaf’) or *qiˇlán (‘cabbage mustard’); however, in modern use, both *qiˇcái and *qiˇlán are pronounced as *jiˇcái and *jiˇlán, instead of *gáiˇcái or *gáiˇlán. In other words, *qi has changed from a polyphone into a monosyllabic word, which is now appropriately presented in the CCD6. In addition, the CCD6 has also paid due attention to distinguishing the pronunciation of an entry in formal Chinese and colloquial Chinese. For example, ‘in a serious manner’ was given the pronunciation of *yí bèn zhěng jíng in the CCD5, which was changed in the CCD6 into: *yíˇbén-zhěngˇjíng (also pronounced as *yíˇbén-zhěngˇjíng in colloquial Chinese). The hyphen between *yíˇbén and *zhěngˇjíng presents the pronunciation more accurately, since it tells the reader that this Chinese four-character construction consists of two disyllables *bén and *zhěng, instead of four monosyllabic words *yí, *bén, *zhěng, and *jíng. Similar treatment can be found under *zhuò, *zhé, *jí, etc.

Apart from these major revisions, the CCD6 has also made many minor revisions. These include the use of punctuation marks and Arabic numbers. For example, it stipulates in specific entries that two sets of ellipsis points (…….) can be used to indicate omission of lines in a poem or paragraphs in a text and that a semicolon can be used to link two independent clauses, and clarifies the use of different types of brackets, such as ( ), [ ], [ ], and { }. It tells the reader that a comma or a space should be used for an integer or a decimal
consisting of four digits or more, as in 32,235,659 and 32 235 659, while an integer or a decimal consisting of four digits or less does not require a comma or a space for separation. It also prescribes that Arabic numbers should be used for conciseness or emphasis, while Chinese numbers (e.g. 一, 二, and 三) should be used for formality and elegance. These rules of use, though prescriptive, are important and practical to most Chinese writers, who, admittedly, have only a vague idea of how to use punctuation marks appropriately, a system borrowed from the West.

The CCD6 team have also been very careful to distinguish some Chinese words that are confusing in use. For example, many Chinese find it difficult to distinguish 工夫 (‘time’) and 功夫 (‘time and energy used to do sth.’) when they are used in gongfuchá (‘written as 功夫茶 or 工夫茶, referring to a tea-drinking fashion popular in China’s Guangdong and Fujian provinces’). The CCD5 treated 功夫茶 as the main entry and created the cross-reference 工夫茶. The CCD6, however, has done otherwise, treating 工夫茶 as the main entry and cross-referencing it to 功夫茶, as the compilers have made a distinction between 工夫 and 功夫, stipulating that things that require time alone should be 工夫, while things that require time, energy, and wisdom should be 功夫. Since gongfuchá is a tea-drinking activity aimed at killing time, it should be written as 工夫茶. Such a distinction allows writers to make better lexical choices. Even more noticeably, the CCD6 has deleted some discriminatory definitions. For example, in previous editions, 同性恋 (‘homosexuality’) had been defined as a type of psychological perversion; in the sixth edition, the word has been redefined as 性行为 (‘sexual behavior between persons of the same sex’).

2. Weaknesses

Authoritative as it is, the CCD6, like any other dictionary, also has some weak points. Entry inclusion is still inconsistent in places. For example, the dictionary includes 国民党 (‘Kuomintang or the Nationalist Party’) and 民国 (‘the Republic of China’) but not the ruling party 中国共产党 (‘the Communist Party of China’) and 中华人民共和国 (‘the People’s Republic of China’) or even 中国 (‘China’). The compilers of the CCD6 might have decided that no country names or party names should be included in the dictionary, but consistency in entry coverage should also be considered.

Some artefacts with clear uses still lack a description of their functions. For example, 叉 (‘fork’) is defined as 一把有两个以上的长齿而另一端有柄的器具 (‘a tool with a handle and more than two sharp points’), while a better definition would be 一端有两个以上的长齿而另一端有柄的器具,
The part-of-speech marking of some entries is still controversial. For example, 史前 is marked as a noun and defined as ‘remote antiquity without written records’. However, in actual use, the word can neither be modified by a numeral nor serve as a subject or object; instead, it often appears in collocations like 史前时代 (‘prehistoric age’) and 史前文明 (‘prehistoric civilization’). Therefore, it is better to mark this entry as an adjective. Some examples do not match the entries in part of speech. For example, 方便 is marked as an adjective, but judging from one of its examples, 把方便让给别人, 把困难留给自己 (‘giving convenience to others and leaving difficulty to oneself’), the word is a noun, rather than an adjective. In fact, this example testifies to the nominal use of this word, which, regrettably, is missing from the dictionary.

The dictionary also contains some other mistakes. For example, 打工 (‘to hire out for work’) is defined as 做工 (多指临时性的). However, the auxiliary word 的 in the brackets, which is often used after a modifier (in this case 临时性), should be changed into 地, an auxiliary word indicating that the word or phrase before it is an adverbial. Otherwise, the explanatory words in the brackets should be changed into 多指临时性的工作 to conform to Chinese grammar.

Some entry examples lack clarity or are inconsistent with entry definitions. For instance, 捕捉战机, one of the example phrases for 捕捉 (‘to catch’), is ambiguous in meaning out of context, because 战机 is a homonym, which can mean either ‘a warplane’ or ‘an opportunity for combat’. In Chinese, it is idiomatic to say ‘to catch an opportunity for combat’, but ‘to catch a warplane’ is rather awkward. In fact, this example, which is intended to illustrate the metaphorical use of 捕捉, can be replaced with better examples, e.g. 捕捉一个难忘的瞬间 (‘catch/capture an unforgettable moment/instant’) and 诗人从大自然中捕捉灵感 (‘A poet catches inspiration from nature.’). 伏 (‘any of the three periods constituting the hottest days in summer’) is supplied with an example of an encyclopaedic nature, 每伏十天 (‘Each period consists of ten days.’); this is inconsistent with the definition of 三伏 (‘the three periods of the hottest season’), which says that the first and last periods consist of ten days each, but the second period consists of ten or twenty days. Therefore, it would have been better if the example had been modified into 每伏十到二十 (‘Each period consists of ten to twenty days.’) However, the following three problematic areas of the CCD6 deserve special attention.

2.1 Conservative entry inclusion

Although the CCD6 has included a lot of words from the Greater China Region, it is still very conservative when it comes to new word inclusion.
For example, many other words from Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand which have become very popular in China’s mainland are still missing from the CCD6, for example: 警长 (‘sheriff’), 人盾 (‘human shield’), 夜店 (‘night entertainment venue’), 情趣店 (‘love store’), 起步费 (‘flag-fall price’), 热裤 (‘hot pants’), 教宗 (‘pope’), 警亭 (‘police box’), 吸药 (‘to take drugs’), 热裤裙 (‘culottes’),等。Besides, some words that reflect new popular social phenomena in China are not included, such as 裸官 (‘literally, naked officials, referring to officials with all their family settled abroad’), 裸奔 (‘to run naked’), and 性工作者 (‘sex worker’). In the first case, it might be advantageous to use corpus evidence covering the Greater China Region and include some of the popular ones after a careful evaluation of their frequencies of use. Of course, the dictionary compilers could also refer to relevant dictionaries, such as A Dictionary of Global Chinese (Li 2010) and A Dictionary of New Words in the Greater China Region (Zou & You 2010), which cover new words with both their sources and frequencies of use. In the second case, they need to be more open-minded about entry inclusion and less influenced by non-lexicographic considerations.

One of the reasons for the inadequate inclusion of entries in the CCD6 lies in the insufficient use of corpora for identifying potential items, as the use of corpora is not yet widespread in Chinese lexicography in general. In an email message answering my query about the use of corpora in the making of the CCD, Tan Jingchun, one of the editors-in-chief of the CCD6, said that the CCD had recognized the importance of corpora in dictionary compilation and had combined the use of corpora and human efforts in its own practice, with an emphasis on the latter, because, on the one hand, the corpora of Chinese were not sound, and on the other, compilers could not depend on corpora alone for dictionary making, a viewpoint that is identical with that of Pan Shaozhong, editor-in-chief of the second edition of New Age Chinese-English Dictionary (NACED2; see Zhao 2014), who said in another email to me that the NACED2 did not resort to corpora, because they had attempted to locate entries and their examples from a corpus of authoritative English translations of well-known Chinese works when they were making the first edition of the NACED, but the result was far from satisfactory. Therefore, they had mainly depended on the compilers’ own knowledge, as well as on some authoritative reference books, for the collection and selection of entries and entry examples.

Based on my own experience as a dictionary maker and on my own observations, the following three factors are responsible for the poor use of corpora in Chinese lexicography. First, most of the dictionaries in China do not have a corpus of their own and the existing ones are either confined to specific users or are unsuitable for use. For example, the BCC corpus (http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn) built by Beijing Language and Culture University and containing a total of 15 billion Chinese words, is used mainly for teaching Chinese as a foreign
language, the Chinese-English parallel corpus (http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_cecorpus/index.jsp?dir=chen) constructed by the Center for Chinese Linguistics, Peking University, is accessible to the university staff only, and the Chinese corpus built by the State Language Commission (http://www.cnccorpus.org/) currently contains only raw language material that cannot be readily used for dictionary making. Secondly, the dictionary compilers often have limited skills in corpus use. Thirdly, many dictionaries have formed their own tradition of compilation over decades of lexicographical exploration, which the compilers often feel reluctant to give up.

Take the CCD for example. As noted by Xu (2012), a senior lexicographer, all examples in the CCD are invented, rather than naturally-occurring citations. But these invented examples are not without a source. The source is the collection of over a million cards recording the use of the Chinese language, prepared by generations of linguist compilers at the Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, over several decades of painstaking efforts. Current CCD compilers seem to have become accustomed to using this example bank, now enhanced by material obtained through the use of the computer in the modern age. However, admittedly, such a practice is rather old-fashioned and inefficient compared with that of leading corpus-based dictionaries in the world. Nevertheless, with the growth of a new generation of Chinese lexicographers who are increasingly technology-conscious and with improvements in and easier access to Chinese corpora of various kinds, the use of corpora may be expected to increase.

2.2 Cases of definitional circularity

Definitional circularity, according to Adamska-Salaciak (2012: 8–9), consists of two types: direct circularity and indirect circularity: The former occurs when a lexical item is defined by itself, and the latter does not remain within the confines of a single definition, but affects at least two definitions, with two or more lexical items being used to define each other. Though not always detrimental to understanding, circularity should be avoided whenever possible, as it is not illuminating to dictionary users and is likely to cause confusion or inconvenience to them. The CCD6, unfortunately, contains quite a few cases of definitional circularity. For example, 事业 (‘an institution’) is defined as 特指没有生产收入,由国家经费开支,不进行经济核算的事业, 高低 (‘height’) as 高低的程度, and 远近 (‘distance’) as 远近的程度. All these, clearly, fall into the category of direct circularity. Cases of indirect circularity can also be found in the CCD6. For example, 似乎, 仿佛, and 好像 are three synonymous adverbs meaning ‘as if’ that are defined in terms of each other: 似乎 as 仿佛, 好像, 仿佛 as 似乎, 好像, and 好像 as 似乎,仿佛.
However, it must also be noted that, although indirect circularity should be avoided, direct circularity, particularly in the form of an explanation, has a reason to exist, at least in Chinese dictionaries. For example, 嘶叫（'to howl as a mating signal; be in heat'）is defined as 有些动物发情时发出叫声, 因多在春季, 所以叫嘶叫 (‘Some animals may howl (‘嘶’) in the mating season, often in spring (‘春’); therefore this is known as 嘶叫.’) in the CCD6. As this indirect circularity serves to explain the etymology of this entry, it is justified. Besides, unlike English words, many Chinese disyllables have developed from monosyllables, such as, 航行 从 航, 行列 从 行, etc. Therefore, in many cases, defining a monosyllable with a disyllable that contains the monosyllable is unavoidable and not problematic. For example, 过 is defined as 过火 (‘going too far’), 果 as 果实 (‘fruit’), 国 as 国家 (‘country’), etc. Lastly, quite a number of Chinese disyllables are formed out of two other disyllables, such as, 艰苦 from 艰难 and 困苦, 刻毒 from 刻薄 and 狠毒, etc. Therefore, to define 艰苦 as 艰难困苦 (‘arduous and difficult’) and 刻毒 as 刻薄狠毒 (‘mean and vicious’) should not raise objections, though, in the strict sense, these are also cases of direct circularity.

2.3 Problematic definitions

Some of the definitions in the CCD6 still leave room for improvement. For example, 宿便 is treated as if it were a medical term and defined as 长时间滞留在肠道中的粪便, 对人 体健康不利 (‘human waste that has remained in the intestinal canal for a long time and that is harmful to human health’). However, 宿便 is not an actual medical term; rather, the word was coined by certain companies to promote their weight-loss products. Also, since the so-called 宿便 does not constitute a health problem, 对人 体健康不利 or ‘which does harm to human health’ should be deleted from the definition. To take another example, 砧板 (‘cutting board’) is defined as 切菜时垫在桌底的木板 (a wooden board on which to place vegetables for cutting), which is not accurate in the modern sense of the word for two reasons. First, the use of a cutting board is not limited to cutting just vegetables; it is also used for cutting other kinds of food, especially meat. Second, a cutting board need not be wooden, but may also be plastic, steel, glass, or marble.

Secondly, some definitions are politically or historically inaccurate. For example, 民国 is defined as 中华民国 (‘the Republic of China’), which is politically misleading, since in the eyes of Chinese mainlanders, 民国 is already a historical concept going back to 1911, the collapse of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and ending in 1949, the founding of the People’s Republic of China. Although the present Taiwan is also locally referred to as 中华民国 or 民国, such a name is not recognized by the mainland and the international community. Since the CCD6 does not include 中华民国 as an
entry, it is necessary to add an explanatory note to 民国 to clarify this historical concept.

Thirdly, the dictionary is not consistent in defining related entries. For example, 热狗, 粉丝, 软饮料, and 鸡尾酒 are all loanwords from English, but are treated differently as follows:

【热狗】中间夹有香肠,蔬菜,调味酱等的面包. 是英语 hot dog 的直译.
【粉丝】是指迷恋,崇拜某个著名的人. [英fans]
【软饮料】不含酒精的饮料. 如汽水,橘子水等.
【鸡尾酒】用几种酒 加果汁,香料等混合起来的酒. 多在饮用时临时调制.

Clearly, the dictionary does not seem to have a uniform and clear-cut rule for the treatment of such items. In the case of 热狗 and 粉丝, the English words or expressions from which the entries derive are provided, but presented inconsistently with or without brackets. However, in the case of 软饮料 (‘soft drink’) and 鸡尾酒 (‘cocktail’), no English sources are mentioned. As modern Chinese includes a large number of loanwords from other languages, it is necessary to clarify their origins in a consistent manner, so as to help dictionary users better understand these words.

Lastly, some synonymous entries are defined in a way that may leave dictionary users confused. For example, 即刻, 登时, 马上, 立即, and 立时 are invariably defined as 立刻 (‘at once’), giving dictionary users, especially Chinese middle school students and foreign learners of Chinese, an impression that these words mean exactly the same and can be used interchangeably. However, this is not the case, because each word has a different collocational behavior in Chinese. Besides, this practice, when used inappropriately, may easily lead to indirect circularity. For example, in the CCD6, 立刻 is defined as 马上, and 马上 as 立刻, constituting indirect circularity.

2.4 Unclear principles of entry inclusion

The CCD6 seems to be inconsistent in its entry inclusion, which results in its failure to incorporate some very commonly used words, notably, 剩男, 剩女, and 同志. Jiang Lansheng, one of the editors-in-chief of the CCD6, expounded the dictionary’s principle of including new words and the reason for its refusal to incorporate the above three words. According to her (2012), ‘We assess new words and new senses individually. For example, we have included 宅男 (‘indoorsman’) and 宅女 (‘indoors woman’), but we refuse to incorporate 剩男 (‘literally, leftover men, men at a mature age unable to find an ideal spouse’) and 剩女 (‘literally, leftover women, woman at a mature age with a good education and high salary but unable to find an ideal spouse’), because
the former two are neutral in meaning, but the latter two show disrespect to the persons in question, as the reasons for their being single vary.’ [my translation, ZG] She further adds, ‘It is not that we do not know 同志 (‘literally, comrade’) means gays. However, as a standard dictionary, we refuse to include this sense of the word, though we do not care how people use it in private. This shows that we do not advocate these things and do not wish to draw people’s attention to them.’ [my translation, ZG] The principle given, however, fails to explain why the CCD6 has included a lot of other similar words, such as 二奶 (‘a married man’s kept woman; a mistress/concubine’), 卖春 (‘to visit a prostitute; buy sex’), 卖春 (‘to make a living as a prostitute’), 买官 (‘to buy an official post/title; pay a bribe to obtain an official post’), 碰瓷 (‘to maneuver a car in such a way that another car bumps against it, and claim damages’), etc.

It is true that these words could be taken to denote either a corrupt social atmosphere or unhealthy social trends in China that should not be encouraged, but should a general-purpose dictionary like the CCD6 not focus on recording the language as it is, rather than prescribing what it should be? Now that 剩男, 剩女 and 同志 are so commonly used in the Chinese people’s daily life and reflect new Chinese social phenomena, it is pointless to exclude them from the dictionary for personal dislikes, or for social or political reasons (in China, 同志 is not only commonly used by unacquainted people to address each other when they first meet, it is also used to address government officials at all levels, including the president and other high-ranking officials).

Despite these sporadic inadequacies mentioned above, the CCD6, a dictionary with a long tradition, remains one of the most authoritative and important general-purpose dictionaries of Chinese in China’s mainland, or even in the Greater China Region, exerting a tremendous influence on its users both at home and abroad. Meanwhile, due to the lack of quality Chinese dictionaries for foreign learners of Chinese, it has also become, quite unexpectedly, an important tool for foreign learners, especially advanced learners, of Chinese and Chinese culture. It can be anticipated that this dictionary, like its predecessors, will continue to play an important role in the life of the Chinese people and in Chinese lexicography.

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A. Dictionaries


B. Other literature


