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# The first English learner's dictionary: the Chinese dimension

TOM McARTHUR

Reflections on the *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* and its mother book, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*

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[An adapted and enlarged version of a presentation to language teachers in Hong Kong on 17 Apr 04, at the launch of the 4th edition of the *OALECD*, a bilingualization by Lu Gu-sun, Zhuang Yi-chuan, and Shi Xiao-shu of the *OALDCE*, 4th edition.]

BOOKS have biographies too. Publishers and others often talk about 'the life of a book', hoping it will be long and profitable. Length and profitability have certainly been true for what I usually think of simply as the *ALD*: the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary* – an almost biblical bestseller that originated in East Asia in the 1930s, since when it has passed through many forms, formats, and editions. Its complex story includes for example both the latest *OALDCE* itself (the 6th edition, 2000) and a work about whose existence I became aware only recently, the *OALECD*, or *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, in its revised and extended 4th edition of 2002. You might say that these are two very different books, and that I should therefore be dealing with two biographies, and you would be right. But since they are historically two among many variations on a single *Advanced Learner* theme, I am right too. We might therefore compromise and think in terms of a dual legacy that has emerged out of, and remains part of, one original tradition.

## A dual legacy

There are many twists to this tale, some very large and some very minor indeed, but intrigu-

ing. For example, the title on the front cover of the 'mother dictionary' has tended to be different from the title on the title page. Thus, for example, the cover title on both my 1995 and 2000 copies is simply *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, but on the title page inside it is the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Odd, you may think, that the language with which the book deals doesn't appear (need to appear?) on the cover. The language seems simply to be taken for granted, maybe because of space constraints but maybe also because the *OALD(CE)* is the most famous dictionary of its kind – was the *first* of its kind –

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is indeed an archetype that led to a whole genre of dictionaries (think Longman, Collins, Chambers, Cambridge, Macmillan...) for foreign and/or second-language learners of the world's lingua franca.

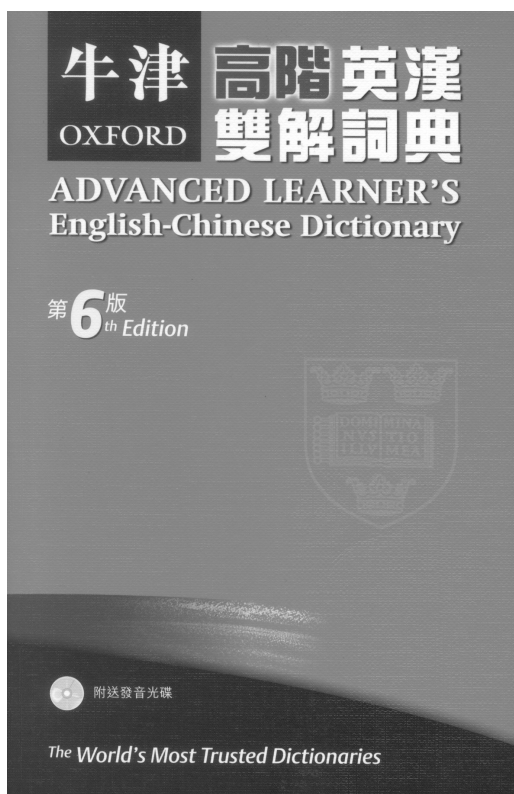
The English/Chinese edition of course can't afford such luxuries as two titles (one outside, one inside). It has needed to be specific straight away, in *two* languages, and not just any two but as it happens the two largest in the world: Chinese for sheer ethnic numbers, English for sheer global distribution. Indeed, such a combination makes it a remarkable addition to what many now simply call *The Advanced Learner's* – no need now even to add *Dictionary*.

What I would like to do here is tell, as concisely as possible, the intricate tale of the *O—ALD—CE*, and particularly how it began not in Oxford at all or even in Europe but in East Asia. The *ALD* in fact started out as an East Asian dictionary, even though the only language in its pages was English. The *OALECD* is a much later bilingual Chinese edition, based in Hong Kong (a territory with a complex biliterate and trilingual story of its own), and has served to strengthen even more the link between the dictionary and OUP on the one hand and East Asia on the other.

## Bilingualization

However, what came to be called the *(O)ALD(CE)* was created at a time, many decades ago, when the intention was *not* to be bilingual but to teach English *in English* to the non-English-using world. One couldn't add in every student's language for backup purposes, and as a result the EFL dictionary was born. However, this once revolutionary but later entirely routine idea deserves some cautious exploration, despite its continuing popularity. Of course, and intriguingly, the kind of bilingualization we find in the *OALECD* doesn't impede or prevent such an approach, but what it does provide is relief and reassurance along the way. In an *OALECD* kind of book one can both learn a language directly *in* that language and indirectly *through* reference to and comparison with one's mother tongue, as backup: in a serious sense, the best of both worlds.

Manifestly, Chinese is the language of the most populous nation on earth and English is the most widely used language in the world, and dictionaries that bring them together are important publications. The usual and most



obvious way to manage two such languages in one dictionary is to have two-way compartments (English/Chinese, Chinese/English), in whatever order seems appropriate. The *OALECD* however is not such a work. Instead, it is a means of providing a Chinese user first with English words and their definitions *then* with translations and illustrations, etc., in Chinese. In this format, English is specially highlighted as what Indians call a 'window on the world'. The assumption is that the presumed user already knows Chinese, yet foreign learners of Chinese, it seems to me, could also find this dictionary useful, beginning with English information they probably already know, with usage examples and the like, then adding the equivalents in Chinese. As such, it functions as a one-sided bilingual dictionary that may nonetheless serve reasonably advanced learners of both languages – all of which makes it a rather intriguing sub-genre. The focus ultimately is on learning English, but the book *can* be used as an aid to learning Chinese.

Indeed, if I were studying an *Oxford Dictionary of Current Chinese* (with built-in English backup) I suspect I would find it both useful and comforting (and presumably I'd get pinyin

on a letter to show that it should be pronounced in a particular way 讀音符號(標在字母上): *Canapé has an accent on the 'e'*. \*canapé 在 e 上面有尖音符號。

■ **verb** /æk'sent/ || æk'sent/ [VN] (rare) to emphasize a part of sth 着重; 強調; 突出: *The women accent their eyes with make-up.* 女性用化妝品來突出眼部。

■ **accent-ed** /'æksentɪd/ || 'æksentɪd/ **adj.** **1** spoken with a foreign accent 帶有異國口音的; 帶有他鄉腔調的: *He spoke heavily accented English.* 他說英語帶有濃重的異國口音。 **2** (technical 術語) spoken with particular emphasis 重讀的: *accented vowels/syllables* 重讀元音/音節 **3** (technical 術語) (of a letter of the alphabet 字母) written or printed with a special mark on it to show it should be pronounced in a particular way 帶有特定讀音符號的: *accented characters* 標有特定讀音符號的字符

■ **ac-cen-tu-ate** /ək'sentʃuət/ || ək'sentʃu,et/ **verb** [VN] to emphasize sth or make it more noticeable 着重; 強調; 使突出: *Her short hair accentuated her huge eyes.* 短髮使她的大眼睛更加突出。 ▶ **ac-cen-tu-ation** /ək'sentʃu'eɪʃn/ || ək'sentʃu'eɪʃn/ **noun** [U]

■ **ac-cept** /ək'sept/ || ək'sept/ **verb**  
OFFER/INVITATION 建議; 邀請 **1** to take willingly sth that is offered; to say 'yes' to an offer, invitation, etc. 收受; 接受(建議、邀請等): [V] *He asked me to marry him and I accepted.* 他向我求婚, 我答應了。 ◊ [VN] *Please accept our sincere apologies.* 請接受我們真誠的歉意。 ◊ *He is charged with accepting bribes from a firm of suppliers.* 他被控收受了一家供應商的賄賂。 ◊ *It was pouring with rain so I accepted his offer of a lift.* 天正下着瓢潑大雨, 所以我領了他的情, 搭了他的便車。 ◊ *She's decided not to accept the job.* 她決定不接受這項工作。 ◊ *She said she'd accept \$15 for it.* 她說她要 15 元才賣。

RECEIVE AS SUITABLE 認為合適而接受 **2** [VN] to receive sth as suitable or good enough (認為合適或足夠好而) 接受: *My article has been accepted for publication.* 我的文章已被採用準備發表。 ◊ *This machine only accepts coins.* 這台機器只接受硬幣。 ◊ *Will you accept a cheque?* 你收支票嗎?

AGREE 同意 **3** [VN] to agree to or approve of sth 同意; 認可: *They accepted the court's decision.* 他們接受法院的判決。 ◊ *He accepted all the changes we proposed.* 他同意我們提出的全部修改方案。 ◊ *She won't accept advice from anyone.* 她不會接受任何人的忠告。

RESPONSIBILITY 責任 **4** [VN] to admit that you are responsible or to blame for sth 承認, 承擔(責任等): *He accepts full responsibility for what happened.* 他承認對所發生的事負責。 ◊ *You have to accept the consequences of your actions.* 你得對你的行為後果負責。

BELIEVE 相信 **5 ~ sth (as sth)** to believe that sth is true 相信(某事屬實): [VN] *I don't accept his version of*

接受。 ◊ *He never really accepted her as his own child.* 他並沒有真正接納她為自己的親生女兒。

ALLOW SB TO JOIN 准許加入 **8 ~ sb (into sth)** | ~ **sb (as sth)** to allow sb to join an organization, attend an institution, use a service, etc. 接納, 接受(為成員、會員等): [VN] *The college he applied to has accepted him.* 他申請的那所學院錄取了他。 ◊ *She was disappointed not to be accepted into the club.* 她沒有獲准加入俱樂部, 感到失望。 ◊ *The landlord was willing to accept us as tenants.* 房東願意把房子租給我們住。 ◊ [VN to inf] *She was accepted to study music.* 她獲准學習音樂。

■ **ac-cept-able** /ək'septəbl/ || ək'septəbl/ **adj.** **1** agreed or approved of by most people in a society (社會上) 認同的, 認可的: *Children must learn socially acceptable behaviour.* 兒童必須學會社會上認可的行為舉止。 **2 ~ (to sb)** that sb agrees is satisfactory or allowed 令人滿意的; 可容許的: *We want a political solution that is acceptable to all parties.* 我們需要一個各方都可接受的政治解決方案。 ◊ *For this course a pass in English at grade B is acceptable.* 英語成績 B 級就可以學這門課程。 ◊ *Air pollution in the city had reached four times the acceptable levels.* 這座城市的空氣污染程度曾高達可接受標準的四倍。 **3** not very good but good enough 還可以的; 尚可的; 差強人意的: *The food was acceptable, but no more.* 食物還可以, 但說不上很好。 ◊ **not at ENOUGH** ▶ **ac-cept-abil-ity** /ək'septə'bɪləti/ || ək'septə'bɪləti/ **noun** [U] **ac-cept-ably** /-bɪli/ -bɪli/ **adv.**

■ **ac-cept-ance** /ək'septəns/ || ək'septəns/ **noun** **1** [U, C] the act of accepting a gift, an invitation, an offer, etc. 接受(禮物、邀請、建議等): *Please confirm your acceptance of this offer in writing.* 請書面確認你接受這項建議。 ◊ *He made a short acceptance speech/speech of acceptance.* 他簡短地作了一個接受提名的演講。 **2** [U] the act of agreeing with sth and approving of it 同意; 認可: *The new laws have gained widespread acceptance.* 新法律獲得廣泛贊同。 **3** [U] the process of allowing sb to join sth or be a member of a group 接納, 接受(為成員、會員等): *Your acceptance into the insurance plan is guaranteed.* 你參加保險計劃一事已有保證。 ◊ *Social acceptance is important for most young people.* 對大多數青年來說, 重要的是要為社會所接納。 **4** [U] willingness to accept an unpleasant or difficult situation 無怨接受(逆境、困境等); 逆來順受: *acceptance of death/suffering* 接受死亡/苦難

■ **ac-cess** /'ækses/ || 'ækses/ **noun, verb**

■ **noun** [U] **1 ~ (to sth)** a way of entering or reaching a place 通道; 通路; 入徑: *The only access to the farmhouse is across the fields.* 去那農舍的唯一通路是穿過田野。 ◊ *Disabled visitors are welcome; there is good wheelchair access to most facilities.* 歡迎殘疾人士參觀。

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### Part of a page from Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary (slightly reduced)

romanization plus characters in the main Chinese section, for easy A-Z reference). Such mother-tongue support is probably best when used as a supplement to classroom or other direct untranslated work in a foreign language. Once one became an intermediate student of Chinese one could, I imagine, use an English supplement of this kind successfully, and find it comforting. It seems to me therefore that this bilingualization of the original monolingual ALD is excellent in both principle and practice, and may even be useful for people learning Chinese. Indeed, more people worldwide are learning Chinese than ever before, and this book could well become a useful tool when they reach the upper intermediate learning stage.

However, I would like here to look behind and beyond such a possibility, intriguing as it is, because the ALD has a story of its own that is eminently worth recounting. That story has two distinct parts: first, in terms of developments centuries earlier, when higher education had begun to develop in the West, then in terms of how it developed in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century East Asia, so as (deliberately) not to be a bilingual dictionary.

### Cross-cultural gifts

The Latin name for a wordbook is *dictionary*, originally conceived as a book of *dictiones* ('expressions', 'words and phrases'). Over many centuries books with that name became

increasingly like the kind of thing we have today, most particularly in their use of alphabetic ordering, a radical development gradually introduced in medieval times. It is interesting to note in this regard that the *ALD* is published not by a commercial publisher but a university press whose existence dates from 16th-century England, when Oxford University received royal permission to produce 'all manner of books'. In the course of doing that OUP became 'globalized', with extensions in many parts of the world. However, the scholars who received that royal permit so long ago could never have imagined a gathering in China, to celebrate such books. For them, 'Cathay' was months away by sea, a bit like going to Mars. An English/Chinese dictionary was unimaginable when OUP came into existence.

Yet two important gifts had already reached England from Cathay, both crucial to dictionary making. The first was paper and the second printing: China's unintended gifts to the world. But there was also a third necessary gift, this time from a civilization lying between China and Europe: the world of Islam. In the 15th century, Christians in Europe were deeply impressed by education in Muslim North Africa, and especially by an institution of higher education called a *madrasah* (a word now often translated as 'school'). The Christians built their own first version of a *madrasah* in Palermo in Sicily, giving it the novel Latin name *universitas*, meaning, more or less, 'a place for everything', which was in effect the purpose of the Muslim *madrasah*.

A second *universitas* was opened shortly afterwards at Bologna, then a third in Paris, and a fourth in Oxford, then many more throughout Europe. By the 16th century, scholars in Oxford and elsewhere had begun to spread their knowledge wider still, and as part of this movement Oxford University Press came into being, and in due course, such institutions as Hong Kong University Press.

The shared language of European academics at the time of the founding of the universities was Latin, spoken in a wide range of accents at trans-European conferences, much as people now do worldwide in English. As European trade expanded and colonies were founded further and further from Europe, such languages as Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, and English travelled widely, interacted with other languages, and grew more influential. This situation led, among many other things, to an

international language-learning industry, which brings us back to our immediate concern, because the language that had the most success in this international linguistic, commercial, and political competition was English.

## Harold Palmer and Michael West

In the early 20th century, two Englishmen were working in East Asia, as a direct consequence of a long process of European commercial, imperial, and linguistic expansion. One was Harold E. Palmer in Tokyo in Japan and the other Michael West in Bengal in India, both teaching English and helping to invent (without knowing it) a subject or potpourri of subjects that began by mid-century to be called 'applied linguistics'. They were also pioneers in what is now increasingly called 'the English language industry'. At the time, however, neither had any significant contact with publishers, and publishers of educational books were not yet strongly aware of the growing and now vast educational complex known by such acronyms as ELT, EFL, ESL, and TESOL. Palmer was working directly for the government of Japan, as part of its semi-explicit policy of westernization, the aim being to make the English language accessible to the next generation of Japanese, and perhaps even to make it a language of Japan. Michael West, on the other hand, was working as an English language teacher within the British Empire, in Bengal in India.

Harold Palmer in Japan, was, I would argue, the grandfather of the *OALDCE*. He is, however, a forgotten grandfather, who could hardly have imagined that his teaching career in Japan would lead to one of the world's most successful dictionaries, both as a classic of its kind and a stimulus for intense competition among UK publishers of a whole sub-genre of dictionaries for ELT purposes. Michael West was equally influential, but his outlet was Longmans Green, which later became Longman, and is now part (in effect an imprint) of the Pearson Group, and is sometimes referred to nowadays as Pearson Longman. Both men were key figures in formulating the ground rules for teaching English as a foreign or second language (TEFL, TESL), largely in opposition to the traditional grammar-translation method. Their radical approach became over the next fifty years both a key aspect of TEFL/TESL in UK-based teaching systems and an influence on TESOL in US-based systems.

## Hornby, Gatenby, and Wakefield

Among Palmer's colleagues and successors in Tokyo were three men who happened all to have Yorkshire names: A. S. Hornby, E. V. Gatenby, and H. Wakefield. If one drives from Edinburgh in Scotland through northern England towards London, on the A1, one passes through Yorkshire, and on the way south might notice separate sign-posts to three particular towns: first Hornby, then Gatenby, then Wakefield – which is why, whenever I make this journey, I find myself thinking of ELT, the *OALD*, and Japan.

Palmer left Japan in 1936, and in the following year Albert Sidney Hornby and his colleagues began work on an English-only dictionary for Japanese (and by implication other foreign) learners that would provide not only definitions but also information on syntax and idioms. This work, completed in 1940, published in 1942 by Kaitakusha in war-time Tokyo, with the English title the *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary*. Hornby and his colleagues had left Japan in 1939. I do not know what happened to Gatenby and Wakefield, but when Hornby returned to the UK, he joined the British Council, and after the war became editor of the now world-renowned *English Language Teaching Journal (ELTJ)*.

The war with Japan ended in 1945, and, after due negotiation, the Kaitakusha dictionary was re-issued by Oxford University Press in 1948, for worldwide distribution, as *A Learner's Dictionary of Current English (LDCE)* by Hornby, Gatenby, and Wakefield. In later editions Hornby's name alone appeared, either on the cover or, more usually, the title page, complemented when it became appropriate by the name of any up-dating or entirely new editor, as with Jonathan Crowther's in the fifth edition, 1995, and Sally Wehmeier's in the sixth in 2000, with Michael Ashby's as phonetics editor. The dictionary has been an immense and uncontested success, ranking to my mind alongside *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* and indeed the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* as an institution of the language with immense worldwide influence and appeal. In all of this, however, the primary purpose of the book has been to facilitate a high-level use of English worldwide, through a 1st edition in 1948, a 2nd in 1963, a 3rd in 1974, a 4th in 1989, a 5th

in 1995, and 6th in 2000, and without the mediation of any learner's mother tongue.

There have been several notable side-effects to the creation of the original Hornby *et al.* and its adoption by Oxford. One was internal to OUP: the creation of successive editions and associated ELT dictionaries, including the Chinese bilingualized edition (of which I was unaware until recently). Another was the sincerest form of flattery by other publishers: such 'clones' as *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (which never, however, made use of the West name) and such variations on the advanced-learners theme as *Collins COBUILD*, with its whole-sentence speak-directly-to-the-user definitions. All such dictionaries lie at the heart of the vast British empire of ELT publishing.

I am frankly in awe of the amount of work and the many skills and requirements that have been needed to create the successive editions of the Chinese *ALD* bilingualization. The list of its editions includes: five in Orthodox (Traditional Chinese) Characters (1970, 1984, 1994, 1999, 2002); two using Simplified Characters (1990, 1997); two using Simplified Character editions for mainland China, produced by the Commercial Press in Beijing (1990, 1997, and with a new words supplement 2002); and two in Taiwan Orthodox using Traditional Chinese Characters, by the publishers Tung Hwa/TH (1970, 1984). The intricacy and range of such versions tends, I suspect, to boggle the Western mind.

Much of my professional life has been spent creating works of reference, and I know all too well the time, the effort, the detail, and the unrelenting drive for accuracy needed to make them useful – indeed, simply to *make* them. Both the English-language and Chinese-language traditions are central to the history of this particular global book or, more properly, this set or series of books. I am by no means saying this to keep Oxford University Press happy, although I like them to be happy. I'm saying it because, in my personal and professional opinion, this is a profoundly powerful lexicographic achievement, in which East Asia has played a crucial role. It is an Oxford tradition that ranks, in my opinion, second only to the creation and continuation of the great *OED* itself. And in a real sense, the tradition of the *ALD* is as much an Asian as a European creation. ■