

Studies on Chinese Language and Linguistics in Italy

Edited by
Serena Zuccheri

Studi Interdisciplinari su Traduzione, Lingue e Culture

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Studi Interdisciplinari su Traduzione, Lingue e Culture

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PREFACE

Serena Zuccheri

The book *Studies on Chinese Language and Linguistics in Italy* gathers fourteen papers written by eighteen members of the AILC - Associazione Italiana di Linguistica Cinese (Italian Association of Chinese Linguistics). Founded in Rome on 19 June 2017, the Association was created by a group of young scholars who, in 2014, started a series of conferences known as the “Study Days on Chinese Linguistics”¹. This book, in fact, was conceived in 2021, after the Sixth Edition of the Study Days at the University of Bologna (Forlì campus) ended. Since one of the main AILC objectives is to develop exchange and collaboration among Italian and foreign scholars in Chinese linguistics, this volume aims to make the topics and the research fields covered by the members of the Association also known abroad. Thus, the contributions, which underwent double peer review, range from theoretical

¹ The last meeting (the Seventh Edition of the Study Days) was held in 2022 at the University of Bergamo.

to applied Chinese linguistics, presenting original research, methodological aspects, and results obtained in applied research, as well as the presentation of the state of the art related to specific topics and fields.

In my capacity, as the editor of this book, I would like to thank the Executive Committee of the Association for its support and the authors who enthusiastically participated in this publication project with their interesting and remarkable research. Finally, my gratitude goes to the Department of Interpreting and Translation at the University of Bologna, which encouraged the publication of this volume.

I sincerely hope this book can be a source of inspiration for other young scholars, just as the Study Days promoted by the AILC are for its members.

CHINESE LEXICOGRAPHY AND THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LEXICOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE

Chiara Bertulesi

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1. Introduction

The present paper is concerned with lexicography in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and, specifically, with how this field and its products can be studied from a scholarly perspective that can be referred to as Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse¹. With this term I shall refer to a rather young critical approach to the study of lexicographical works (and mainly of language dictionaries), which finds its principal theoretical assumptions in the fields of both metalexigraphy (and, specifically, of critical lexicography) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As I also discuss in Bertulesi (2022), the development of this approach is very much indebted to the research carried out in rather recent times

¹ Drawing from Rodríguez Barcia (2012), in Bertulesi (2022), I employ the Italian term 'Analisi critica del discorso lessicografico', i.e., 'Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse', which I shall also employ in this paper as a synonym to 'Critical Lexicographical Discourse Studies', proposed by Chen (2019).

by scholars such as Hornscheidt (2008), Rodríguez Barcia (2012, 2018) and Chen (2019), whose contributions have aimed to provide other researchers with what Hornscheidt (2008: 107) presented as a “a concrete research agenda for critical lexicographic research within critical discourse studies” or “a toolbox for critical lexicographic research”. A few years after Hornscheidt, Rodríguez Barcia (2012, 2018), as part of her discussion of ideological implications in Spanish dictionaries, proposed a similar analytical approach, employing the term ‘Análisis Crítico del Discurso Lexicográfico’ (i.e., Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse). In 2019, Chen also discussed a “discourse approach to critical lexicography”, proposing the use of the English term ‘Critical Lexicographical Discourse Studies’ to refer to this approach. Together with earlier research and scholarly literature that focus on the interrelation of language and lexicography with society, culture, ideology (and power), the research carried out by these scholars constituted the theoretical and methodological basis for the critical study of Chinese lexicography and, specifically, of the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* 现代汉语词典 (XHC), which is presented in Bertulesi (2022).

To discuss specific issues, and for the sake of clarity, in the present paper it is still necessary to provide some fundamental definitions and briefly outline elements that constitute an essential part of the theoretical and methodological framework of Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse. However, the main purpose of this paper is not to propose an in-depth discussion of the basic theoretical assumptions and methodological features of this approach: these have, in fact, already been largely discussed in the works cited above, including in Bertulesi (2022). On the contrary, the objective of the paper is to first provide an overview of this (rather young) analytical approach to metalexicography and, secondly, to connect these considerations to issues that regard the study of lexicographical works produced in the context of the PRC. To do so, in the sections that follow, I shall rely both on previous research carried out by other scholars as well as on my previous research, particularly with reference to the study of the XHC, which can be regarded as one of the most representative works of contemporary monolingual lexicographical discourse.

Based on these premises, the paper is structured as follows: Sections 2 and 3 present the theoretical background of Critical Analysis of Lexi-

cographical Discourse and the research carried out from this perspective. Section 4 focuses on lexicography in the context of the PRC; specifically, it is concerned with its relevance and on elements that, I argue, contribute to framing this field and the dictionaries produced in this context as interesting subjects for investigation from a critical perspective concerned with the relationship between lexicography and ideology. Section 5 briefly touches upon the issue of adopting paradigms of Critical Discourse Analysis in the study of Chinese (lexicographical) discourse. Finally, in Section 6 some concluding remarks with regards to the critical approach to lexicography discussed in this paper are outlined.

2. A critical approach to conducting research on dictionaries

As part of her discussion on the lexicographical treatment of ideologically loaded items in monolingual learners' dictionaries of English, Moon (2014) observed that:

In relation to lexicography, ideology is where dictionaries collide with the social world: it brings in impolite and polite aspects of language, taboo items, evaluative orientation, connotation, and cultural allusion; the sublexicons, of course, of semantic fields such as politics, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on; and above all the role of lexis, an unstable and mutable role, in naming and othering. (Moon 2014: 85)

Moon's words reflect what nowadays constitutes a commonly shared belief in metalexicography²: dictionaries are never neutral and, as such,

² Metalexicography is defined by Hartmann and James (2001: 93) as a "complex of activities concerned with the status of lexicography". Moreover, as stressed by Gouws (2020: 3), Wiegand *et al.* (2020: 322) see metalexicography as "the overarching theoretical domain of lexicography", thus encompassing different areas of dictionary research, including critical dictionary research (Gouws 2020: 3). Hornscheidt (2008: 107), discussing critical lexicographical research, points out that "Metalexicography, as a sub-discipline of linguistics, is concerned with the social and/or stately interests reflected in dictionaries".

they should never be regarded as objective containers of the words and meaning of a language (Moon 1989; Fishman 1995; Benson 2001). As the keywords ‘critical’, ‘lexicographical’ and ‘discourse’ suggest, the theoretical assumptions of the approach of Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse can be found in earlier research carried out by scholars concerned with the influence of culture and ideology on lexicographical activities and its products, as well as in Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical lexicography as a shared direction of research did not gain much scholarly attention until the 1990s (Chen 2019; Hornscheidt 2011). This does not mean, however, that the ideological nature of dictionaries and the ideological implications of lexicographical compilation had been ignored by scholars before that time (e.g., Beaujot 1989; Moon 1989). However, 1995 saw the publication of the volume *Cultures, Ideologies and the Dictionary*, edited by Kachru and Kahane. In his introduction to the volume (which constituted a collection of 37 papers “on selected Western and non-Western languages”), Kachru (1995), commenting on the ten different parts that constitute the volume, meaningfully stressed that:

These are, then, the ten heads of Rāvaṇa, presenting aspects of culture, ideology and power: a lexicographer has to encounter one or more of these in any serious lexicographical enterprise. And a discerning user of the dictionary has the responsibility to identify what type of power – e.g., ideological and cultural – a dictionary fosters. (Kachru 1995: lxxv)

One of the basic assumptions of the critical approach to lexicography that is discussed in this paper is that the dictionary constitutes a form of discourse, i.e., lexicographical discourse (Rodríguez Barcia 2012: 137; Benson 2001). As observed by Rodríguez Barcia, the conceptualisation of the dictionary as discourse is not new; this can be traced back in earlier research, as emerges, for instance, in the work by Dubois conducted in the 1970s, which established a relationship between dictionaries and discourse and, specifically, between dictionaries and pedagogical discourse (Rodríguez Barcia 2012: 137). This concept also acquires a particular significance in an influential work by Benson published in the early 2000s.

In presenting the theoretical assumptions of his research on ethnocentrism in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)³, Benson suggests that “dictionaries are best thought of as representations of language, which implies that the language as it is recorded in the dictionary is something other than a simple reflection of the language ‘as it is’” (Benson 2001: 23). Starting from the notion of lexicographical representation – that is, from the notion of the representation of language and its meaning as intrinsic to the compilation of a dictionary – the author incisively affirms that dictionaries constitute “a historically situated form of discourse through which certain linguistic communities have come to represent their languages to themselves and others” (Benson 2001: 24).

Following Fairclough (1989: 17), discourse is here defined as “language as social practice determined by social structures”. This conception of discourse, which is embedded in the tradition of Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, is also strictly connected to the idea that discourse “is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking the context into consideration” (Chen 2019: 376). Conceiving dictionaries as forms of representation of languages and as historically situated forms of discourse implies that the context in which the process of lexicographical compilation occurs cannot be ignored but, on the contrary, it should be taken into great consideration when approaching a critical analysis of a dictionary.

Finally, the interdependency between lexicography and context should be understood as bidirectional, or, to employ the words of Fishman (1995):

we must interpret dictionaries in context and see them as both resultant of and constructive of their contexts. Indeed, this is what we do with other cultural artifacts. We recognize them as reflections of their contexts but as more than reflections we recognize them as constituents of those contexts, contexts which we must try to

³ It is interesting to mention that Benson’s work is particularly concerned with the representation of China in the OED.

know by means of as many other artifacts and cultural behaviors as possible. (Fishman 1995: 34)

3. Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse: a brief overview

Those outlined in the previous section constitute some of the principal theoretical assumptions the approach of Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse draws from. This section aims to briefly present selected aspects of the research carried out in the field, by focusing on the linguistic and social contexts that have been studied by the scholars cited and, especially, to highlight common features that characterise their proposed analytical approach.

Starting from the assumptions that modern monolingual dictionaries “are regarded as an important (re)source for the construction, manifestation, and naturalization of public attitudes within society” and that the “publicly assumed function of dictionaries as sources of correct language usage has to be critically analysed” (Hornscheidt 2008: 107, 108), Hornscheidt focused on the issues of racism and colonialism which emerged from a set of monolingual dictionaries of Danish, German, and Swedish. In the author’s view, racism and colonialism constitute useful examples to show how specific meanings, that are constructed and presented as ‘neutral’ by the lexicographical definitions in the dictionaries are far from being neutral or even objective. They also contribute to the reproduction and naturalisation of “certain attitudes” (Hornscheidt 2008: 108) and, therefore, of certain meanings that characterise specific and often dominant worldviews. The toolbox for critical lexicographical research proposed by Hornscheidt involves different elements being scrutinised in the dictionary, proceeding from the macro to the micro-level, i.e., from dictionary prefaces, to meaning explanations and usage examples, to metalinguistic comments. For each of these elements, the author outlines a set of questions that aims to guide the researcher in the analysis of how certain meanings are constructed in the dictionary (Hornscheidt 2008).

Rodríguez Barcia’s research focuses on Spanish lexicography, which also serves as a starting point for the methodological and analytical proposal outlined in her 2012 article. Although in this contribution

she does not reference Hornscheidt's work⁴, the author also proposes a set of steps for the analysis of different elements of the dictionary, that belong to the introductory elements and the microstructure of the dictionary, i.e., the structure, features, and contexts of the lexicographical definitions, including labels of usage and metalinguistic comments⁵ (Rodríguez Barcia 2012: 147). Moreover, the author stresses the importance of studying the context of production of the dictionary, ranging from the institutional context to the more general historical context in which the compilation has taken place (Rodríguez Barcia 2012: 145)⁶.

Chen's works on the subject is particularly concerned with bilingual lexicography as a process of recontextualization, and the author specifically focuses on English lexicography and bilingual dictionaries in China (2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). In his 2019 paper titled "Towards a Discourse Approach to Critical Lexicography", the author provides a thorough discussion of the main features of the approach that he designates with the term 'Critical Lexicographical Discourse Studies' (CLDS), and provides an in-depth discussion of its theoretical assumptions and principles. Moreover, Chen devotes a consistent part of this contribution to methodology, thus systematising the elements that characterise the analytical framework and methods to carry out an analysis of dictionaries that relies on this approach. Specifically, after providing definitions of key concepts (i.e., 'critical', 'power', 'text', 'ideology', 'discourse'), the contribution focuses on defining what, in the dictionary, "becomes the target of critique" (Chen 2019: 372), thus outlining the fundamental principles of this approach. Moreover, with respect to the description of the theoretical framework, and similarly to Hornscheidt and Rodríguez Barcia, the author points to

⁴ The author does reference Hornscheidt (2008) with respect to critical lexicography in a later article (Rodríguez Barcia 2018: 198).

⁵ In the analysis of the definitions, the author suggests that a critical analysis concerned with issues of ideological nature also take into consideration the aspect of modality, i.e., the lexicographer's positioning with respect to the lexicographical text or definition (Rodríguez Barcia 2012: 149-150).

⁶ See also Rodríguez Barcia's contributions from 2016 and, in particular, 2018, in which the author describes critical lexicography as being related to the general framework of 'ethnolexicography'.

the importance of taking into consideration both the macro and the micro-levels in lexicographical research. In this respect, Chen (2019: 378-379) first outlines several “macro-level questions for critical lexicographical discourse studies”, questions that are mostly concerned with the role of dictionaries and lexicographers in society. From this perspective, the macro-level represented by the historical and social context of production of a lexicographical work is also assigned an important role in Chen’s research. Secondly, a set of micro-level questions are outlined, which are based on those put forward by Hornscheidt (2008) (Chen 2019: 379-380).

As acknowledged by Chen (2019: 367-368), the “systematic explanation of what CLDS is” found in his contribution from 2019 also constitutes the result of his previous research, within which feature case studies that concern English-Chinese bilingual lexicography and the often ideological implications of meaning recontextualization in these products. Specifically, Chen’s critical lexicographical research has focused on two editions (1975 and 2000) of the *Xin Yinghàn Cidiàn* 新英汉词典 (A New English-Chinese Dictionary) (Chen 2015; 2018), as well as on the bilingualised edition (English-Chinese) of the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* (Commercial Press 2004, 2011) (Chen 2017b). These case studies (which, due to space limits, cannot be further described here) provide interesting and valuable insights into the interplay between lexicography and ideology, insights that concern not only the relationship between English and Chinese (lexicography) in the PRC, but also the relevance that lexicography has acquired in specific historical moments and continues to acquire today in that specific national context⁷.

Finally, in my research (esp. Bertulesi 2022)⁸, I conducted a critical and diachronic study of the XHC and of selected entries from this authoritative monolingual dictionary of Modern Standard Chinese.

⁷ Moreover, a contribution by Ding (2021) was published in 2021, in which the author relies on the CLDS framework outlined by Chen (2019) to investigate the ‘Chineseness’ as is displayed, on different levels, in the first volume (2015) of *The Chinese-English Dictionary* (unabridged, 1st volume, Fudan University Press, 2015).

⁸ See also Bertulesi 2021a.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, in my study on the XHC I relied on many of the elements that constitute an essential part of the theoretical and analytical framework of Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse, as conceptualised and discussed by the scholars whose research I have (with no claim for exhaustiveness) presented in this section. In particular, the main purpose of the research was to investigate the ways in which the lexicographical discourse constructed by the XHC reflects, and at the same time, interacts with the political and social – and, therefore, ideological – context of compilation, also by adopting a diachronic perspective, which has involved the critical analysis of the prefaces and the selected entries in all the seven ‘official’ editions of this dictionary (1978, 1983, 1996, 2002, 2005, 2012, 2016) and in an earlier ‘trial edition’ distributed in 1973. In this respect, my research has also looked at the interplay between the official dominant political discourse and the lexicographical discourse constructed by the XHC.

Due to space constraints, it is not possible to further present and discuss the results and considerations that emerged in previous research carried out from this perspective on lexicography in China (Chen 2015, 2017b, 2018, 2019; Bertulesi 2020, 2021a, 2022; Ding 2021). However, what also emerges from these studies is that dictionaries produced in the context of the PRC in different historical moments represent a fertile area of investigation also from the perspective of critical lexicographical research. Yet, to date, although metalexicographical research devoted to Chinese lexicography appears to be very rich (especially in the PRC), studies of this kind are still very limited in number.

4. The relevance of lexicography in the PRC

Contemporary Chinese lexicography rests on a rich tradition with a very long history, which is commonly regarded as dating back at least to the early centuries of the Chinese Empire, or even earlier (Chen 1982; Yong and Peng 2008; Casacchia and Gianninoto 2012; Bottéro *et al.* 2015)⁹. Contemporary lexicography in the PRC is a very dynam-

⁹ Some scholars mention the *Ĕryǎ* 尔雅 (*Approaching Elegance*, III century BC ca.?) as the first lexicographical work in China (e.g., Casacchia and Gianninoto

ic field which, especially in the past few decades, has produced a great amount of products designed to fulfil different linguistic and cultural needs (from monolingual to bilingual dictionaries, from general purpose to specialised dictionaries and encyclopaedias, from dictionaries of Standard Chinese to dialect dictionaries), many of which are acknowledged for their high quality, scientific standards and practicality. The significant growth in the number of lexicographical products published in the PRC (especially since the 1980s) has also been accompanied by the sustained development of the scholarly field of lexicography, as is demonstrated, among other things, by the creation of scholarly journals as the influential *Lexicographical Studies* (*Císhū yánjiū* 辞书研究, 1979), and the establishment of the Chinese Association of Lexicography (*Zhōngguó císhū xuéhuì* 中国辞书学会, 1992) (Klöter 2013: 884; Wei *et al.* 2014).

In introducing his overview of Chinese lexicography at the beginning of the 1990s, Creamer (1991) observed that:

At times lexicography and lexicographers have been at the forefront of nation-wide language reform movements, and at other times both have been ignored or dismissed as irrelevant. Some dictionaries have been included among the great books of China and others have been suppressed or destroyed. While some lexicographers have enjoyed privilege and fame at court or in the scholarly community, others, in the not too distant past, have been ignominiously dispatched to the countryside to “learn from the peasants”. (Creamer 1991: 2595)

Creamer’s words reference the importance attained by lexicography in China in specific historical moments, in which, far from remain-

2015: 27-34; Xue 1982: 152), while others (e.g., Bottéro *et al.* 2015) affirm that the Chinese lexicographical tradition goes back to the first century and mention the *Shuōwén jiězì* 说文解字 (*Explaining graphs and analyzing characters*, II century) as the “prototype of a Chinese dictionary” (Bottéro *et al.* 2015). However, in scholarly research on the subject, other works are sometimes mentioned as early instances of (proto-) lexicographical activities (see Creamer 1991: 2595). On the topic, see also Yong and Peng (2008), especially pp. 25-28 and 41-43.

ing confined within the borders of scholarly and linguistic discussions, issues involving dictionaries have intertwined with matters of social, political, and ideological nature. This is also particularly true with regards to the social and political context of the PRC, not only in the Maoist era, but also in more recent times (Bertulesi 2020, 2022; Lee 2014). Starting from this assumption and from examples that are related to the history of the XHC and of lexicography in the PRC, below I shall outline some selected elements that have characterised and, in some cases, continue to characterise this field and that, in my opinion, contribute to making dictionaries produced in this context potentially interesting subjects for investigation from the perspective of critical lexicography. In this respect, I am aware that the examples I draw from the history of the XHC do not of necessarily imply that all the dictionaries produced in the PRC were influenced by the same factors and discussions. However, given the central role that is commonly attributed to the XHC, both in the context of contemporary China and from a historical perspective, it seems reasonable to argue that this dictionary can still be seen as an authoritative ‘representative’ of lexicographical discourse in the PRC. Specifically, the sub-sections that follow focus on three elements: 1) lexicography and the standard language; 2) the scholarly debate on the ‘ideological character’ of dictionaries; 3) lexicographical planning.

4.1 Lexicography and the standard language

In his work on the XHC, Lee (2014) pointed out that dictionaries “can be highly political precisely because of two unique functions they perform in language standardization”, that is: a) “dictionaries define words, the most fundamental component of language” and, b) “they reflect the boundaries of ‘legitimate’ words” (Lee 2014: 428). With regards to the history of lexicography in the PRC, dictionaries, and especially monolingual dictionaries, were very quickly assigned a key role in the national endeavour towards language standardisation, which was officially promoted as part of the Communist Party’s agenda since the mid-1950s, and which constituted a key element of the wider project for the construction of the new nation (Luo and Lü 1956; Lee 2014; Bertulesi 2022: 43-54).

In this context, for example, the decision to start the compilation of a monolingual dictionary of the standard language, which would later

become the XHC, was formalised in 1956, when the State Council assigned to the Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (created in 1949)¹⁰ the task to compile a dictionary that would contribute to the promotion of the common language (*Pǔtōnghuà* 普通话) and to set and popularise its linguistic standards (Guowuyuan 1956; Lee 2014; Bertulesi 2022: 49-50). The political and ideological nature of certain projects for dictionary compilation became particularly striking in the era of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when some lexicographers even became the target of denunciation campaigns for the allegedly ‘reactionary’ contents of their dictionaries, and certain editorial teams were also put under the control of the “workers-peasants-soldiers propaganda teams” (Chen 2018: 492-493; Lee 2014; Bertulesi 2020, 2022: 57-65).

Although not comparable to what occurred during the Cultural Revolution, in more recent times, specific issues that concern dictionaries have continued to attract attention and draw criticisms from the public and the scholarly community (Chen and Zhao 2014). An interesting example of this is represented by what was defined as a “linguistic lawsuit” directed at the lexicographers of the sixth edition of the XHC soon after its publication in 2012 (Pellin 2014). This lawsuit targeted what was regarded as an excessive amount of neologisms and, particularly, the list of words “starting with Western letters” (*xī wénzì kāitóu de cíyǔ* 西文字开头的词语), such as NBA or *pos jī* POS 机, through which, according to the over one hundred people that signed the document containing the charges, the XHC was harming the Chinese language (Pellin 2014: 220). In this respect, it is interesting to observe that Chen and Zhao (2014: 189, 192), in a contribution on the importance of critical lexicography, have chosen to mention this case among the events involving dictionaries that have stirred reactions in society in contemporary China.

4.2 The scholarly debate on the ‘ideological character’ of dictionaries

From a critical perspective, another element of interest is represented by scholarly discussions regarding the ideological nature of diction-

¹⁰ In 1977, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was also established, and the Institute of Linguistics has, since then, been a part of this Academy.

aries and lexicographical compilation. For instance, as discussed in Bertulesi (2022), in the history of the XHC and, more in general, of lexicography in the PRC, compilers and scholars in the field have focused, in different moments, on the issues of the ‘ideological character’ (*sīxiǎngxìng* 思想性) or the ‘class character’ (*jiējìxìng* 阶级性) of the dictionary (e.g., He *et al.* 1960 [2004]; Min 1979)¹¹. To my knowledge and at least with regards to the XHC, the relevance explicitly attributed to the ‘ideological’ and ‘class character’ of lexicography has diminished from the early 1980s, and the scholarly debates concerning the ‘qualities’, or ‘character’ (*xìng* 性) of the dictionary have tended to focus mostly on other lexicographical features (Bertulesi 2022: 85-88). Recently, however, these issues have once again been at the centre of some contributions from lexicographers involved in compilation of the XHC, who, commenting on the revision carried out for the seventh edition of the dictionary (published in 2016), have focused on the importance of expressing the dominant ‘ideological positioning’ of the historical context in which compilation occurs (Tan 2018; Pan 2018; Wang 2019; Bertulesi 2022: 88-91)¹².

These examples and those presented in the previous sub-section with regards to the standard language suggest that, also in the contemporary Chinese context, language dictionaries continue to (often explicitly) represent potential sites for the definition and re-definition of meanings (Fairclough 1989; Benson 2001) and that, as such, deserve to be further investigated from a critical and discursive perspective.

4.3 Lexicographical planning

Another important element that characterises lexicography in the PRC is lexicographical planning, which has been actively promoted by the

¹¹ The contribution was originally published in 1960 in the journal *Zhōngguó Yǔwén* 中国语文 (*Studies of the Chinese Language*)

¹² For instance, Tan (2018) refers to the inclusion, in the 7th edition of the XHC, of new words, set phrases and usages emerged in the ‘Xi Jinping era’, while Wang (2019) comments on the revision of lexicographical examples carried out for this edition with the objective of expressing a ‘ideological character’ the reflects elements of the social and political life of contemporary China. See, for example, the comment on the revision of the usage example to the entry *xīhuà* 西化 ‘westernisation’ (Wang 2019: 635).

State since the 1970s, and contributes to showing how lexicographical activities are a field to which the country's political leadership has attached and continues to attach great importance.

Since 1975, relevant institutions of the PRC have issued three national plans for the compilation and publication of lexicographical works, adapting the number and the typology of the works included in the planning also to the linguistic and social needs of the different historical moments in which the plans were issued (Wei *et al.* 2014; Wei 2015; Bertulesi 2021b). Specifically, the first plan was issued in 1975, during a period generally considered as being characterised by strong political instability, and it outlined a list of 160 language dictionaries (monolingual and bilingual) to be published by 1985 (SPA 1975). The second plan lasted between 1988 and 2000, and provided for the compilation of 189 lexicographical works, among which featured not only language dictionaries, but also specialised dictionaries and encyclopaedias, which were deemed tools that could assist the wider project for economic reform and modernisation (SAPP 1989; Bertulesi 2021: 7-8). Finally, the latest plan was issued in 2013 and is expected to be implemented by 2025. It outlines the publication of 189 works, including both revisions and new projects (SAPPRFT 2013), which, following two revisions (2016 and 2017), reached 235 works. As shown by the research carried out by Wei *et al.* (2014) and Wei (2015), particularly with regards to the first two plans, the number of lexicographical works published in those phases was substantially higher than the number of those outlined in the documents, especially from the 1980s and even more the 1990s, when lexicography saw an unprecedented growth in the PRC (Wei *et al.* 2014; Wei 2015: 6).

Besides considerations on the vitality of this sector, lexicographical planning in China proves to be an interesting subject of research also from the perspective of critical lexicography, in that it highlights the relationship between this field and the interests that the State projects on it and its products. In this regard, as discussed in Bertulesi (2021b), the analysis of the documents introducing each national plan provides insights on “the ways in which the official political ideology participates in framing both the guiding principles and the objectives of lexicographical activities in the PRC” and on how reference works are presented as “tools in service of and influenced by not only cultur-

al, linguistic, and social needs, but also ideological and political needs” (Bertulesi 2021b: 3).

5. Some remarks on Critical Discourse Analysis and Chinese (lexicographical) discourse

As already mentioned, the critical approach to the analysis of lexicographical discourse discussed in this paper has also been inscribed within the well-established area of research of Critical Discourse Analysis, or Critical Discourse Studies. In this respect, an issue that has not been dealt with in the paper, but which appears to need further investigation, is related to the implications of adopting paradigms from Critical Discourse Analysis¹³ in the study of Chinese lexicographical discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis constitutes a rather wide, multi-faceted area of research that was developed in the West – and, specifically, in the European academia. It emerged from studies in Critical Linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s and became a more established approach especially in the 1990s (Wodak 2001). Since then, it has developed into multiple strands and often multidisciplinary approaches. As incisively pointed out by Van Dijk, “CDA is a – critical – perspective on doing scholarship: it is, so to speak, discourse analysis ‘with an attitude’”. It focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination” (Van Dijk 2001: 96). Several scholars have already discussed some of the implications of adopting Critical Discourse Analysis in the study of discourse(s) produced in the Chinese context (Cao 2014; Tian and Chilton 2014; Shi-xu 2014; Wei 2019; Chilton *et al.* 2012) and questions on whether it, as a perspective that has originated within the Western scholarly context and that places emphasis on aspects such as political commitment, can be applied to the Chinese context (Tian and Chilton 2014; Cao 2014). Among the different views on this topic, Tian and Chilton (2014) argue that Critical Discourse

¹³ See also Wei (2019) for a discussion on Critical Discourse Analysis and Chinese discourse. Moreover, on this topic, Chilton *et al.* (2012) also provide insightful considerations concerning the conceptualisation of the concepts of ‘critical’ and ‘critique’ in the West and in the Chinese context.

Analysis “needs some tailoring and appropriating when being applied in China” (Tian and Chilton 2014: 197). Tian (2008) thus proposed a “wider angle critical perspective of CDA”, which focuses more on socio-political transformation and, specifically, “aims to understand the workings and functions of discourse in the socio-political transformations, that is, to understand how discourse works to construct and represent social realities in the complex of social context” (Tian and Chilton 2014: 198-199). Starting from these considerations and from the assumption that dictionaries constitute forms of discourse (which are nonetheless historically situated, Benson 2001), this “wider angle” critical perspective appears therefore to be particularly relevant also within the study of Chinese lexicography, and, specifically, with regards to the possibility of critically investigating lexicographical discourse (also in diachronic terms) in relation to the transformations that have characterised and continue to characterise the social and political context of the PRC¹⁴. This issue will, hopefully, be the subject for further discussions.

6. Concluding remarks

The present paper has outlined some of the defining features of the critical approach to the study of lexicographical discourse. Moreover, the field of lexicography in China has been taken into consideration with regards to this approach and by highlighting some of the elements that may contribute to framing this field as a particularly interesting subject for investigation from this scholarly and analytical perspective within metalexigraphy.

What hopefully emerges from this contribution is that the so-called Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse constitutes a (rather new) approach to the study of dictionaries and reference works and, from a more general perspective on the field of lexicography,

¹⁴ In this respect, some of the results concerning the analysis of the lexicographical treatment of selected entries from the XHC presented in Bertulesi (2022), as well as from the case studies from Chen (e.g., 2015, 2018) can be interpreted from this “wider angle critical perspective” on discourse and socio-political transformations.

an approach that can be adopted by (and adapted to) the study of different lexicographical and linguistic traditions, as well as research questions and objectives. In this respect, this should not be conceived as a ‘model’ to be applied to one’s own object of study, but rather as a “conceptual and analytical framework” that, “with its limitations” (Chen 2019: 384) can contribute to the systematisation of methods and principles of the area of research concerned with lexicography and ideology which, as mentioned, is not new. Specifically, it provides a set of questions and guidelines concerning what, in lexicographical discourse, deserves to be placed under scrutiny within a research concerned with the interplay between lexicography and ideology in society. Besides the theoretical assumptions, elements common to the frameworks proposed so far include: the importance of looking at context, both as a preliminary step (e.g., the historical, but also the institutional or editorial context in which the compilation of a dictionary has taken place) and also in analysing meanings as they are presented from lexicographical discourse, starting from the premise that discourse is context-dependent; the need to focus on different elements of the lexicographical work(s) that are being analysed, going from the macro to the micro-level, i.e., from prefaces and other introductory materials, to the wordlist, meaning explanations, usage examples and metalinguistic comments in the definitions. Other methodological choices should, instead, be based on the peculiarities of the subject of study, which could, for instance, determine very often different methods for the selection of the corpus of entries to be analysed, as well as different approaches with regards to synchronic vs. diachronic analysis.

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