

*On Difficult New Terms: The business of lexicography in Mao Era China**

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Abstract

Entries in Mao Era reference works today serve as windows into the world of words and meanings of a bygone era. Dictionaries and encyclopaedias, though, did not speak with one voice, even under Communist Party control. Lexicography and the question of who would get to publish on and explain the meaning of the ‘new terms’ and ‘new knowledge’ of ‘New China’ were subject to constant debates. Lexicographers, editors, and publishers specialized in the business of setting up categories and, together with readers and state censors, they policed them. Following on their heels, this article examines four moments in Mao Era lexicography, ranging from the early years of transition to Chinese Communist Party rule to the height of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Internal reports and letter exchanges on the production and circulation of single-volume encyclopaedic dictionaries show who contributed to encyclopaedic work, how it was controlled, and why control and censorship were often far from simple. Taking lexicography seriously as a component of the socialist information economy after 1949 sheds light on complex processes of knowledge transmission that defy simple models of socialist state propaganda.

Introduction

In June 1956, *Dushu Monthly*, a periodical on publishing in the People's Republic of China (PRC), featured a letter by someone named Ding

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Mingshi from Zhejiang Province. Ding, who worked in a bookstore in Cicheng City, wrote to urge state publishers to compile a reliable, up-to-date dictionary of political terms. Several of his customers had asked for official comprehensive reference works but had to be told that state publishers had issued no such volume. People's need for reference works that explained terms simply and correctly, he argued, was pressing at a time when everyone was trying hard to educate themselves and study theory. The only works available were single-volume dictionaries edited by private publishers after 1949. Despite the fact that these privately published dictionaries contained plenty of mistakes and ideological errors, customers searched for any available copy; finding such a dictionary was 'like finding a treasure (*ru huo zhi bao*)'. Ding was convinced that state publishers should quickly bring out a new dictionary. Acknowledging that it might take editors time to assemble materials, he proposed solutions to accelerate compilation. Several previous reference works by state publishers on specialist topics such as philosophy and party history could be mined for sources. Publishers should also look to state periodicals with regular columns on 'explaining terms (*mingci jieshi*)'. These sources and a carefully appointed compilation team, Ding believed, should enable a state publisher to issue a first draft swiftly. This could then be circulated widely, providing the much-needed study support and any revisions could be published later as supplements.¹

Dushu Monthly's editors wanted readers to notice the letter. It covered the bottom half of a page and was typeset in a black frame. The image of readers seeking state-sponsored dictionaries was compelling criticism from below.² That being said, a magazine filled with literary criticism had a limited readership nationally. Records also do not suggest that thousands of urban readers swarmed en masse into bookstores in 1956 demanding dictionaries. Still, Ding's letter recalls a complex history of dictionary compilation and circulation—one in which private publishers played an important role, state publishers were trying to keep apace, dedicated bookstore clerks worried about the quality of reading materials on their shelves, and customers went

¹ 'Qing kuai chuban youguan zhengzhi lilun de mingci cidian' ['Please quickly publish a dictionary on political and theoretical terms'], *Dushu Yuebao*, vol. 6, 1956, p. 19.

² For similar examples of early People's Republic of China readers' letters and the issue of 'criticism from below', see K. Gerth, 'Compromising with consumerism in socialist China: transnational flows and internal tensions in "socialist advertising"', *Past and Present*, vol. 218, Supp. 8, 2013, pp. 221–2.

looking for anything that promised to explain the meaning of the words and terms that surrounded them in daily life. Encyclopaedic dictionaries were silent mediators of language and meaning; they had a market and enjoyed a sizeable and mostly urban readership during the early decades of Chinese Communist Party rule.

Until today, the entries in Mao Era reference works serve as windows into the world of words and meanings of a bygone era. Dictionaries and encyclopaedias, though, did not speak with one voice, even under Communist Party control. Lexicography and the question of who would get to publish on and explain the meaning of the words and terms of 'New China' were subject to constant debates. 'Setting up categories and policing them,' Robert Darnton writes, 'is ... serious business.'³ Lexicographers, editors, and publishers specialized in this business of setting up categories and, together with readers and state censors, they policed them. Following on their heels, as far as possible, shows how this diverse network of people made sense of the emerging socialist world and how they thought one should understand the changing 'conceptual grids' of the People's Republic of China's 'new society'.⁴ Their discussions, letter exchanges, and reports contribute to explaining the economy of information under Mao, how it was controlled, and why control and censorship were far from simple.

Customers of New China's bookstores could purchase a multitude of different kinds of reference works. Single-volume encyclopaedic dictionaries on 'new terms' (*xin mingci*) and 'new knowledge' (*xin zhishi*) and later handbooks for newspaper readers, both the focus of this article, occupied a special position among the available reference works. Neither succinct dictionary nor elaborate encyclopaedia, they 'broke down the information into much smaller units and presented terse summaries of key factual information and/or conceptual definitions by combining the functions of a dictionary and an encyclopaedia'.⁵ Encyclopaedic dictionaries promised readers help as they rearranged their 'mental furniture', telling them how to understand that which they did not know and how to unlearn and

³ R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Basic Books, New York, 1984, p. 193.

⁴ B. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009, p. 3, discusses the 'conceptual grid' during imperial times.

⁵ M. Doleželová-Velingerová and R. Wagner, 'Introduction', in *Chinese Encyclopaedias of New Global Knowledge, 1870–1930: Changing Ways of Thought*, M. Doleželová-Velingerová and R. Wagner (eds), Springer, Heidelberg, 2014, p. 5.

relearn that which they thought they knew. These volumes were supposed to be consulted in conjunction with propaganda materials, new textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and theoretical works. This made them attractive to readers who looked for handy explanations to information they came across in their daily lives. Lexicographers who compiled entries took, or at least claimed to take, their ‘new terms’ and ‘new knowledge’ directly from the columns of local and national newspapers, magazines, policy announcements, political speeches, theoretical works, current affairs reports, and contemporary popular culture.⁶ Production consequently differed from the compilation of a multi-volume encyclopaedia. Revisions were turned over more quickly and terms were included that could spark controversy about whether they should feature in any respectable reference work. In a climate in which the political control of cultural production became more coordinated by the month, and mere factual errors in lexicography could be construed to reflect editors’ ideological leanings, explaining new terms was a risky business and continuous supervision, essential.⁷

Conceptual and political histories of language in the People’s Republic of China have richly illustrated how the Chinese Communist Party-controlled state manipulated language through powerful institutions such as the central Propaganda Department, the national Publishing Administration, and the Ministry of Culture, and how this, in turn, affected political processes and social change.⁸

⁶ This article’s use of terms such as ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’ follows Ann M. Blair, who differentiates between data, information, and knowledge. Data, she writes, ‘requires further processing before it can be meaningful’, whereas knowledge ‘implies an individual knower’. ‘Information’, conversely, ‘typically takes the form of discrete and small-sized items that have been removed from their original contexts and made available as “morsels” ready to be rearticulated’. Cf. A. M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2011, p. 2.

⁷ The changing political climate of cultural production and publishing in the early 1950s is discussed in N. Volland, ‘Cultural entrepreneurship in the twilight: the Shanghai Book Trade Association, 1945–57’, in *The Business of Culture: Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900–65*, C. Rea and N. Volland (eds), University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2015, pp. 234–58. For an institutional history of People’s Republic of China private publishing, see Zhu Jinping, *1949–1956 Zhongguo gongchandang dui siying chubanye de gaizao* [*The CCP’s Transformation of the Private Publishing Industry, 1949–1956*], Zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, Beijing, 2008.

⁸ ‘Conceptual history’ here is understood according to the definition provided by R. Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M., 2006, pp. 9–102. On language politics in the People’s Republic of China, see P. Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rhythm, Metaphor*,

Studies of propaganda and political communication have described the production cycles of state publishing and have traced the dissemination of information and its reception by different audiences across China. Increasingly, scholars have broken down the binary between state and society, highlighting how mid-level cultural producers—writers, artists, editors, and publishers—carved a space for themselves in the new state, working with state authorities and also continuing production patterns developed in the first half of the twentieth century. Lexicography and the production as well as circulation of single-volume encyclopaedic dictionaries are a small but important puzzle piece in this larger history of post-1949 language, epistemology, taxonomy, and politics.⁹

This article explores four moments in Mao Era lexicographical work. Between 1949 and 1951, Shanghai's many small private publishers brought to the market a flurry of reference works, including encyclopaedic dictionaries. State authorities, still setting up office, had to find ways to contend with this lexicographical jumble, always championing their responsibility to protect the innocent and gullible reading 'masses'. One encyclopaedic dictionary, Chunming Bookstore's *Dictionary of New Terms*, eventually became a reference bestseller of the early 1950s. Its particular trajectory tells us much about editorial process and the history of a privately published reference work that enjoyed state patronage at a time when state publishers would not bring to the market a comparable

Politics, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013; E. J. Perry and Li Xun, 'Revolutionary rudeness: the language of Red Guards and rebel workers in China's cultural revolution', in *Twentieth Century China: New Approaches*, J. Wasserstrom (ed.), Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 221–36; G. Peterson, *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949–95*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1997; M. Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Case Studies*, University of British Columbia, Berkeley, 1992; M. Schoenhals, *Talk about a Revolution: Red Guards, Government Cadres and the Language of Political Discourse*, Working Paper Series on Language and Politics in Modern China No. 1, East Asian Studies Center Indiana University, Bloomington, 1993; M. Schoenhals, 'Demonizing discourse in Mao Zedong's China: people vs non-people', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 8, no. 3–4, 2007, pp. 465–82; N. Volland, 'The control of the media in the People's Republic of China', Ph.D. thesis, University of Heidelberg, 2003; R. Wagner, *Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose*, Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992; Ji Fengyuan, *Linguistic Engineering, Language and Politics in Mao's China*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2003.

⁹ A similar point has been made by Siu-yao Lee, 'Defining correctness: the tale of the contemporary Chinese dictionary', *Modern China*, vol. 40, 2014, pp. 426–50. Following an insightful introduction to the dictionary's post-49 history, Lee focuses mostly on its post-1978 development.

volume, despite customer demand. By the early 1960s, lexicographers commissioned by state authorities busily tried to revise and publish a new edition of the single-volume encyclopaedic *Dictionary of New Knowledge*. Publication eventually was aborted during the printing process and letters written by its editor show why state compilation was so difficult. Starting in 1965 and published until 1969, the People's Liberation Army's *Newspaper Readers' Handbook* quickly rose to prominence, achieving in structure and content what Chunming's *Dictionary of New Terms* had once provided and the failed *Dictionary of New Knowledge* had aspired to. The problem as it transpired in the late 1960s was no longer how to ensure state control in general, but who of the many different agents of 'the state' would get to commission prints and control production of a volume ostensibly marked for 'internal reference' only. These four moments are not linked in one causal chain. They are loosely related by their shared engagement with a taxonomic idea, a lexicographical project, an epistemological challenge, and an editorial problem, all of which focused on meeting readers' needs, adhering to political demands, and solving the dilemmas of a desire for stable meanings in unstable times.

Commercial mavericks: early encyclopaedic dictionaries

Years before a People's Republic of China seemed a likely outcome of two decades of war with Japan and civil war, urban readers across the country consulted encyclopaedic dictionaries as a regular part of everyday life.¹⁰ The market for reference works flourished in Republican China and Shanghai became the centre for their commercial publishers.¹¹ Everyday encyclopaedic dictionaries abounded on the shelves of the city's many bookstores. Works such as the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of New Knowledge* (*Xin wenhua cishu*), published in 1923 by the Commercial Press, or volumes such as

¹⁰ Hong Shaohua, *Renlei zhishi de xin gongju: Zhong Ri jindai baike quanshu yanjiu* [A New Tool of Human Knowledge: A Study of Early Modern Encyclopaedias in China and Japan], Beijing Tushuguan Chubanshe, Beijing, 1996; M. Lackner, I. Amelung, and J. Kurtz (eds), *New Terms for New Ideas: Western Knowledge and Lexical Change in Late Imperial China*, Brill, Leiden, 2001.

¹¹ For a study of Republican Era publishing, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999; C. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2004.

the 1934 *Completely Revised Everyday Cyclopedia* (*Chongbian riyong baike quanshu*) became staples in many urban households.¹² Many of these reference works combined elements from traditional Chinese reference works (*leishu*) with encyclopaedic patterns imported from Japan, Europe, and the United States of America. The Chinese tradition of reference works had encompassed a great variety of compendia, from governmental to philosophical, and had also included materials for everyday use.¹³ Many Republican lexicographers combined this with a political mission to educate readers in citizenship and help them establish a sense of national identity. Modernization models posited encyclopaedias as aids to the democratization of knowledge and declared that the goal of lexicography was to popularize new terminologies.¹⁴ Making knowledge accessible and helping readers deal with changing epistemologies—be they political or more quotidian—through publications thus had a long history in China, as did the attempt to make a profit from their sales.

Historians studying lexicography and encyclopaedias have argued that times of political or social transition spur encyclopaedic production.¹⁵ As Wagner and Doleželová-Verlingerová have illustrated, this holds true for twentieth-century China.¹⁶ In the transitions from late imperial to Republican China and the instabilities of the Beiyang and then Nationalist government, the market for reference works thrived. Publishers continued to make use of political instability from early 1949 on when Communist rule of China became probable. With most publishers still operating

¹² B. Mittler, 'China's "new" encyclopaedias and their readers', in Doleželová-Verlingerová and Wagner, *Chinese Encyclopaedias*; B. Mittler, 'Useful new knowledge for everyone to digest: the *Xin wenhua cishu*, 1923', in *Hidden Grammars of Transculturality: Shifting Powers of Encyclopedic Writing*, B. Mittler and M. Herren-Oesch (eds), Springer, Heidelberg, forthcoming.

¹³ Chen Pingyuan and M. M. Doleželová-Verlingerová (eds), *Jindai Zhongguo de baike cishu* [Early Modern Chinese Encyclopaedias], Beijing Daxue, Beijing, 2007; also C. J. Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007, p. 411; B. Elman, 'Collecting and classifying: Ming dynasty compendia and encyclopedias (*Leishu*)', in *Qu'était-ce qu'écrire une encyclopédie en Chine?*, F. Bretelle-Establet and K. Chemla (eds), Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, Paris, 2007.

¹⁴ Mittler, 'China's "new" encyclopaedias and their readers', p. 11, fn. 27.

¹⁵ See for example R. Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1770–1800*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1979; I. Prodöhl, *Die Politik des Wissens: Allgemeine deutsche Enzyklopädien zwischen 1928 und 1958*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 2011.

¹⁶ Doleželová-Verlingerová and Wagner, 'Introduction', pp. 15–16.

from Shanghai, the city's takeover by the People's Liberation Army in May that year was an important moment in the history of lexicography. Within a couple of months following the transition to Chinese Communist Party rule, several commercially operating and privately owned bookstores seized on the opportunity to accompany the 'new society' heralded by propaganda with the publication of reference works that explained this society's new terms. The economy of information in the transition to socialism soon included single-volume encyclopaedic dictionaries (*cidian*), character dictionaries (*zidian*), multi-lingual reference works, specialist encyclopaedias on medicine, science, and culture, as well as reprints and translations of Soviet encyclopaedic materials in smaller leaflets and large compendia. 'How to' guides were equally popular, covering the broad spectrum of topics from report writing to newspaper reading, letter composition, and other topics. And propaganda materials designed specifically for the national mass campaigns of New Democracy were ubiquitous.

Single-volume encyclopaedic dictionaries varied greatly in size and circulation. Next to the popular 600-pages-strong *Dictionary of New Terms* (*Xin mingci cidian*), published by Chunming Bookstore from 1949 to 1955 and discussed in the next section, customers could also purchase Dadi Bookstore's 1,500-page *Comprehensive Dictionary of New Terms* (*Xin mingci zonghe da cidian*), published from July 1950 to January 1951. Slightly thinner, but still substantial, was Beixin Bookstore's *Newly Edited New Knowledge Dictionary* (*Xin zhishi cidian xin bian*) and *Sequel to the New Knowledge Dictionary* (*Xin zhishi cidian xubian*) published from 1949 to early 1953 at a combined print-run of about 120,000 volumes. Here, somewhat confusing for the reader, the *Sequel* was supposed to be read and purchased in conjunction with the *Newly Edited* edition. These dictionaries could be placed in an office or on a bookshelf at home. For readers desiring a convenient dictionary, the Guangyi Bookstore offered its 550-page, pocket-sized *People's Study Dictionary*, which was issued in three editions at 90,000 copies from 1951 to 1953. Less successfully, but still enjoying sizeable local circulation, were Longwen Bookstore's *Study Dictionary of New Terms* (*Xin mingci xuexi cidian*), published in early 1950, and Shoudu Press's *Little Study Dictionary of Culture* (*Wenhua xuexi xiao cidian*), published with 10,000 copies in June 1953. Though published from Shanghai, most of these dictionaries were sent to and sold by affiliated bookstores in China's metropolitan centres and provincial capitals.

The new Communist authorities condoned and even encouraged the publication of these dictionaries. The majority of publishers compiling encyclopaedic dictionaries had existing links with left-wing writers, former Chinese Communist Party underground agents, or had operated undercover publishing materials in support of the Chinese Communist Party. Their business status as private publishers was therefore at first not a major impediment; rather, it symbolized independence from the now deposed Nationalist regime. Private publishers of encyclopaedic dictionaries were permitted to contribute to the construction and liberation of the country, though they now operated under the increasing control of the municipal publishing offices.¹⁷

Between 1949 and 1950, these publishers had a crucial advantage over newly established state publishers. Editors had completed drafts for the major encyclopaedic dictionaries that would dominate the markets in the first two years after 1949—with some even in the process of typesetting—by the time the People's Liberation Army marched into Shanghai in May. It merely took a few weeks of revisions and these dictionaries could go into print. Some entries pertinent to China under Nationalist rule had to be deleted, entries on Communist China had to be included, and some interpretations of existing terms had to be changed to suit a new political agenda. Most publishers, however, presumed that they should prioritize quick production over revisions in order to get new works to the bookstores as soon as possible. Revisions could always be published in future editions or circulated as addenda after publication. The early print-runs of many encyclopaedic dictionaries thus contained many typographical and factual errors in addition to errors that publishing officials would soon come to see as ideologically wrong.

Critics quickly picked up on the typographical and factual mistakes of these first print-runs and used them to launch a wider ideological attack on the genre of privately published encyclopaedic dictionaries as a whole. Criticisms were both internal and public. Publishing authorities, for instance, would investigate publishers by sending officials to the bookstores to survey stocks and question editors. Publishers and editors had to write regular reports and self-criticisms and submit these to the publishing office. At the same time, articles and readers' letters in newspapers and magazines publicly criticized

¹⁷ The takeover of the municipal publishing industry is discussed in Volland, 'Cultural entrepreneurship'.

dictionaries, dealing with individual faulty entries one by one. Here, publishers and editors would compose public self-criticisms and apologies to be reprinted a few days later. This dual system of internal and public criticism was useful in different ways. Public criticism usually called for dictionaries to be either thoroughly revised or, better still, prohibited altogether. Censorship equated with public opinion and this portrayed publishing authorities as responsive to the will of the people. Internal investigations, in turn, increased state surveillance of publishers and subjected them to closer circuits of state control. They also granted state publishing authorities greater flexibility in dealing with publishers on an individual case-by-case basis.

The case of Beixin Press's *New Knowledge Dictionary* shows how this process of criticism worked.¹⁸ The first edition of the *New Knowledge Dictionary* was published in 1935. It was revised and sold after April 1949 in anticipation of Communist takeover. The brothers Li Xiaofeng and Li Zhiyun owned Beixin Press, a May Fourth publisher that grew out of the Beijing University New Tide Society. In the decades after moving to Shanghai in 1927, Beixin became a well-known left-wing press, supported by famous writers such as Lu Xun, and soon operated on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party underground. In 1949, its editors felt confident that they had much to contribute to a China under Chinese Communist Party rule and thus widely advertised their new encyclopaedic dictionary hot off the printing press.

Despite its pedigree, the national publishing authorities soon investigated the *New Knowledge Dictionary*. Beixin's editors had revised the dictionary twice following its 1949 publication. In February 1950, however, the central publishing administration produced a list of five pages itemizing 22 errors in individual entries of the latest 1949 edition.¹⁹ These ranged from errors of fact to misrepresentations of political knowledge. An entry on 'Free China', for instance, associated

¹⁸ Beixin Press during the Republican Era is discussed in Cai Shuliu, 'Beixin shuju jianshi' ['A concise history of Beixin Press'], *Chuban Shiliao* [Historical Materials on Publishing], vol. 2, 1991, pp. 91–2; Ling Shiao, 'Culture, commerce and connections: the inner dynamics of new culture publishing in the post-May fourth period', in *From Woodblocks to the Internet: Chinese Publishing and Print Culture in Transition, circa 1800 to 2008*, C. Brokaw and C. A. Reed (eds), Brill, Leiden, 2010, pp. 213–48.

¹⁹ Hu Yuzhi, 'Guanyu chuli Beixin shuju chuban "Xin zhishi cidian" yi shu de zhishi', 15 March 1950, Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA hereafter), B1-1-1904-2 to 3. The directive is also reprinted in Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo and Zhongyang dang'anguan (eds), *Chuban shiliao* [Historical Materials on Publishing], vol. 2, Zhongguo

this term with China under Nationalist rule during the Sino-Japanese War.²⁰ Publishing officials considered this entry dangerous because the same term was now being used by the Nationalist government in exile on Taiwan as a claim to continued rule of mainland China. They also took offence with an entry on the Nationalist Habeas Corpus Act of 1935 granting right of appeal to those sentenced under Nationalist law. The entry had stated ‘This is a law to protect the people’s basic freedoms’ and explained that people or their representatives could file an appeal within 24 hours of a judgment if there was doubt about whether they had committed the crimes of which they were accused.²¹ Publishing officials criticized that ‘if it (the legislation) is introduced in this way it suggests that the Guomindang still protects people’s basic freedoms’.²² The ministry’s list was thus a basis for revision, but also an itemization of entries that could be interpreted to betray the counter-revolutionary leanings of their editors.

In a general report to its Shanghai colleagues, with copies sent to Beijing and Guangzhou, Hu Yuzhi (1896–1986), the head of the Publishing Administration, candidly expressed his opinion about the *New Knowledge Dictionary* as a whole. ‘Many parts of the dictionary,’ Hu wrote, ‘distort facts and oppose people’s democracy.’²³ He worried that the dictionary’s wide circulation would only increase what he described as a ‘deception’ of readers through misinformation.²⁴ These concerns were not unfounded. The dictionary was widely sold across the country, in bookshops in Beijing, Changsha, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Kaifeng, Luoyang, and Shanghai.²⁵ Hu ordered that the dictionary’s distribution and sale should stop immediately, copies should be confiscated, and the paper recycled and resold as new paper. This solution would serve the administration in two ways. Recycling the dictionary would destroy remaining copies, thus preventing any further circulation, and it would be a convenient way to produce more paper to alleviate paper shortages.

Shuji Chubanshe, Beijing, 1996, p. 100. The reprint states that the report was lost, but it can be found in the SMA archival file.

²⁰ SMA B1-1-1904-004 and ‘Fu: Guanyu “Xin zhishi cidian” yi shu de yanjiu baogao’, March 1950, SMA B1-1-1904-4. *Xin zhishi cidian* [*New Knowledge Dictionary*], Beixin Shuju, Shanghai, 1949, p. 425.

²¹ SMA B1-1-1904-004. *Xin zhishi cidian* (1949), p. 571.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hu Yuzhi, ‘Guanyu chuli Beixin shuju chuban “Xin zhishi cidian” yi shu de zhishi’.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ SMA B1-1-1904-4.

Within a couple of weeks, officials of the Shanghai municipal publishing office investigated Beixin and its editor-in-chief Li Xiaofeng (1897–1971). In response to the investigation, Li wrote a self-criticism explaining the dictionary and press's trajectory and promised quick revisions.²⁶ The publishing authorities attributed errors in the dictionary to the business's commercial nature and editors' profit-driven thinking. Li, conversely, blamed errors on the previous Nationalist government and argued that these were holdovers from previous editions of the dictionary that had to contain these faulty entries in order to satisfy Guomintang authorities and keep the bookstore in operation. In short, Li presented the errors as a remnant of the need to collaborate with the ruling regime—a remnant that the editorial team had been unable to revise in time for the first print-run.

Public criticism soon followed. In April, an article in *People's Daily* by Zhang Wang and Wang Cheng accused several dictionaries and their publishers of being out for making a quick commercial profit while providing customers with a poorly edited volume that misled rather than informed them.²⁷ The *New Knowledge Dictionary* in particular was said to be guilty of presenting the Guomintang government as reasonable and democratic, thus asserting a pre-liberation orthodoxy and proliferating American imperialist ideology. Factual errors, however, were not the dominant problem. The mostly accurate information provided in entries no longer conformed to the political epistemologies of their time. Editors were not merely expected to correct factual errors, but to rethink comprehensively what was worth knowing.

The documents do not indicate how successful the attempt to recall copies of the criticized 1949 editions was. It is also unclear how many copies were actually destroyed or whether they were instead locked up in the Beixin bookstore's storage facility.²⁸ Just because censors and critics poured over this edition, moreover, Beixin was not barred from producing reference works. Publishing officials differentiated between this faulty edition, criticism of the publisher for carelessly distributing the dictionary, and the dictionary's production more generally. Indeed,

²⁶ 'Guanyu "Xin zhishi de baogao"', 10 March 1950, SMA B1-1-1904-15 to 19.

²⁷ *Renmin ribao*, 5 April 1950, p. 5.

²⁸ The wide availability of this dictionary online today would indicate at least that censorship mostly worked for copies in bookstores, but not those already sold, and that quite a few copies were already sold by then.

Hu Yuzhi advised his Shanghai colleagues to wait for the publisher to submit a thoroughly revised edition and, if acceptable, issue a new sales permit.²⁹ Li and his colleagues must have successfully obtained a new license for the *New Knowledge Dictionary*. Ruefully acknowledging media criticism and pledging to have undergone thorough revisions, they continued their lexicographical work for at least three more years following the 1950 episode. The *New Knowledge Dictionary*, with at least 120,000 copies published until 1953, became one of the major encyclopaedic dictionaries of the early 1950s.

Not all privately published encyclopaedic dictionaries fared as well. During the first half of 1951, the central government sponsored calls for the ‘purification’ of Chinese grammar, text structure, and vocabulary. Expressions and written language were supposed to be standardized and aligned with the official language of the party-state.³⁰ Private publishers were generally circumspect because they published for profit. Critics maintained that this inevitably had to lead them, to a greater or lesser extent, to favour quick publication over purity of language, thus only serving to confuse readers most of whom did not know how to differentiate between publishers and how to identify faulty editions.³¹

The blanket accusation that many private publishers minded only profit and worked unprofessionally concealed a larger issue about what would actually constitute ‘new terms’ and ‘new knowledge’. One *People’s Daily* article published in August 1951, for instance, argued that many ‘new term’ encyclopaedic dictionaries really had no new terms to offer, adding that ‘these publications follow trends, vie to be the first, and are manufactured in a rough and shoddy way’.³² In the case of less popular volumes, the issue of identifying ‘new terms’ worth writing about often spelt the end to entire lexicographical projects. Some editors of encyclopaedic dictionaries were accused publicly of freely inventing ‘new terms’. Dadi Bookstore’s *Comprehensive Dictionary*

²⁹ ‘Guanyu chuli Beixin shuju chuban “Xin zhishi cidian” yi shu de zhishi’, 15 March 1950, SMA B1-1-1904-2.

³⁰ Lü Shuxiang and Zhu Dexi, *Yufa xiuci jianghua [Lectures on Grammar and Rhetoric]*, Kaiming Shudian, Shanghai, 1951; on national attempts to purify the Chinese language, see R. Wagner, ‘Zhonggong 1940–1953 jianli zhengyu, zhengwen de zhengce dalüe’, in *Wenyi lilun yu tongshu wenhua*, Peng Xiaoyan (ed.), Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhi yanjiusuo chouben, Taipei, 1999; N. Volland, ‘A linguistic enclave: translation and language policies in the early People’s Republic of China’, *Modern China*, vol. 35, 2009, p. 470.

³¹ *Renmin ribao*, 16 August 1951, p. 3, and 25 June 1951, p. 6.

³² *Renmin ribao*, 25 August 1951, p. 3.

of *New Terms*, only published for one year, was severely criticized for entries on terms such as ‘American planes invading our airspace repeatedly (*Meiji lüci qin women lingkong*)’ or on ‘Foreign Minister Zhou [Enlai]’s stern announcement (*Zhou Waizhang yanzheng shengming*)’.³³ Critics argued that these could hardly be labelled phrases. Dadi’s editors had confused propaganda slogans with new terms; the mere repetition of certain slogans did not make them terms.³⁴

Public concern was channelled against privately published encyclopaedic dictionaries and their editors in 1950 and 1951 allowing municipal publishing authorities to shut some publications down and instruct some publishers to revise and reprint. Such public criticism, however, also drew readers’ attention to the fact that state publishers were not yet involved in publishing encyclopaedic dictionaries. If the existing reference works of this kind were harmful to ‘new society’ and people were told to beware, where were the new authoritative reliable volumes? Readers’ letters noted this absence and passionate attacks on private publishers had to concede, in a side note, that new state-owned publishers had, as yet, little with which to replace the popular *New Knowledge Dictionary* and *Dictionary of New Terms*. Translations of the authoritative Soviet encyclopaedias only partially solved the problem because they did not cover the domestic information private publishers addressed and readers wanted. People had need of an accessible encyclopaedic dictionary of new terms and available materials sold out quickly.³⁵

New democratic bestseller: Chunming Press’s *Dictionary of New Terms*

Of all the single-volume encyclopaedic dictionaries published in the early 1950s, the *Dictionary of New Terms* stands out for its wide circulation, broad popularity, and comparative longevity. Print and sales figures alone made the *Dictionary of New Terms* a bestseller among early People’s Republic of China reference works. Between September 1949 and July 1955, the Chunming Bookstore, renamed Chunming Press in late 1951, commissioned 44 print-runs, which amounted to 465,000 copies published and distributed to bookstores in cities

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Renmin ribao*, 11 March 1951, p. 5.

³⁵ *Renmin ribao*, 25 June 1951, p. 6.

across the country. During this time, the dictionary appeared in six editions, each with substantial new revisions.³⁶ Compared to most encyclopaedic dictionaries published shortly after the Communist takeover, the *Dictionary of New Terms* sustained regular publication for a long time and circulated widely. According to Chunming's own statistics, based on evaluations of readers' letters, the dictionary mainly circulated in East, South, and North China, with some readership in North-West, South-West, and North-East China, and very limited readership in Inner Mongolia and Tibet. Most readers were state officials, military personnel, schoolteachers and students, or workers.³⁷ Unlike other publishers that transferred their businesses to joint state–private ownership, Chunming remained a private publisher until 1956 when sales were stopped and bookstores were told to take the dictionary off their shelves. Records of this dictionary's history show how private lexicography worked under state surveillance and condonation, although the dictionary's trajectory cannot be taken as broadly representative precisely because it was one of the few dictionaries to remain in print for so long.

The *Dictionary of New Terms* was Chunming's flagship publication after 1949. Before the late 1940s, the bookstore was not known

³⁶ Based on information provided in copies of the dictionary's last edition, Chunming issued the following print-runs between 1949 and 1955: 1st edn, first published September 1949, printed five times with a total of 32,000 copies; 2nd edn, first published June 1950, printed 14 times with a total of 95,200 copies; 3rd edn, first published June 1951, printed three times with a total of 38,000 copies; 4th edn, first published January 1952, printed nine times with a total of 29,800 copies; 5th edn, first published April 1953, printed seven times with a total of 120,000 copies; 6th edn, first published November 1954, printed six times with a total of 50,000 copies. Each volume had around 600–700 pages and approximately 1,900,000 characters in total. Cf. *Xin mingci cidian* [*Dictionary of New Terms*], Chunming Chubanshe, Shanghai, 1954.

³⁷ 'Gaiban xuyan' ['Preface to the revised edition'], *Xin mingci cidian* (1954), pp. 1–2. The precise statistics as provided in the preface are: 1. Dissemination of the dictionary calculated by origin of readers' letters: East China, 35.1 per cent; South China, 23.7 per cent; North China, 13 per cent; North-West China, 8.1 per cent; South-West China, 5.8 per cent; North-East China, 5 per cent; Inner Mongolia and Tibet, 0.7 per cent; Korean frontline, 0.7 per cent; percentage of letters that did not specify: 7.9 per cent. 2. Class status of readers writing letters: State officials, 26.6 per cent; Military service and army, 19.3 per cent; School teachers and students, 19 per cent; Industry workers, 4.2 per cent; Peasants, bank/hospital/mass organization workers, 30.09 per cent. The evident problem with these statistics is that the editors do neither specify how many letters were submitted nor when exactly they were received. This information can thus only serve as a rough estimate and also as an indication of how the editors wished readers to perceive of the dictionary's circulation.

as a publisher of reference works.³⁸ Founded by the book trader Chen Zhaochun from Jiangsu Province, the bookstore started out as an alleyway press and shop with 28 employees off Shanghai's Fuzhou Road in 1932. It published lucrative novels and knight-errant fiction.³⁹ In the late 1930s, Chen's son, Chen Guanying, took over business operations and published romance novels and some materials decried as 'pornographic'. During the Sino-Japanese War, operations continued; cheap, low-quality entertainment sold well. In 1947, Chen wished to make the business more respectable and recruited Hu Jitao as editor-in-chief. Hu only joined the bookstore after the publication of pornographic materials was stopped. Kong Lingjing, another left-wing writer, joined the editorial board around the same time to edit its new literary collectanea. Kong had close links to the Chinese Communist Party underground; Mao Dun, Minister of Culture after 1949, was his brother-in-law. Together, the new editorial board arranged a deal with the Chinese National Association for Literature and Arts to publish works by well-known left-wing writers.⁴⁰

The bookstore enjoyed excellent patronage, at least with an eye to eventual political change. Chen, though, was worried by these affiliations and eventually dismissed Kong. It was during this time that Hu Jitao was having the first edition of the *Dictionary of New Terms* typeset for publication. But Chen stopped all new publications, fearing severe criticism and paper rationing by the Guomindang authorities.⁴¹ Shortly after Shanghai was 'liberated', Chen escaped to Taiwan, taking with him parts of the bookstore's capital and a range of books. In Taipei, he set up the 'Taipei Branch of the Chunming Bookstore'. Left with few assets, so the official narrative goes, the bookshop employees in Shanghai organized a shop committee to manage routine work with Chen Zhaochun, the founder of Chunming, as sole registered shareholder of the bookstore.⁴² The

³⁸ Yu Zilin, 'Wo suo zhidao de Chunming shudian' ['The Chunming Bookstore I knew'], *Chuban shiliao*, vol. 4, 2011, pp. 34-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* The series was called 'Collected Works on Contemporary Writers' and included works by Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, Ding Ling, Ba Jin, Lao She, and Hu Feng.

⁴¹ Yu, 'Wo suo zhidao de Chunming shudian', p. 36.

⁴² Chen Zhaochun remained in the city but declined to take over management operations. He is listed as sole shareholder on the Chunming Bookstore's registration documents with the Shanghai Book Trade Association between 1950 and 1951, 'Shanghai shi shuye tongye gonghui choubeihui huiyuan dengji diaocha biao', 1 August 1950 and October 1951, SMA S313-4-5-29 to 33.

shop committee selected the *Dictionary of New Terms* as one of the first publications to go to press. It was supposed to facilitate the transition to socialism in Shanghai and other 'liberated areas', and send the message that the bookstore wished to cooperate with the new socialist government.⁴³

Hu Jitao's *Dictionary of New Terms* quickly became the bookstore's main source of income. By August 1950, Chunming's registration documents with the Shanghai Book Trade Association stated a monthly sales turnover of about 3,000 volumes.⁴⁴ Dictionaries were lucrative business. Though remaining a private publisher, the structural changes of the Shanghai publishing world affected Chunming as well. In late 1950, the bookstore was made a shareholder work unit of the Tonglian Bookstore (*Tonglian shudian*) together with 62 other private publishers.⁴⁵ Tonglian coordinated distribution of the *Dictionary of New Terms*. Meanwhile, Hu compiled extensive revisions of the dictionary's first edition. Publication of the first edition had been rushed and work on the second edition began almost immediately after the first print-run went out in September 1949, with revised editions published in June 1950 and June 1951.

As in the case of the Beixin Press, the *Dictionary of New Terms* underwent public criticism starting in 1950. The same *People's Daily* article that attacked Beixin Press in 1950 also discussed Hu's dictionary.⁴⁶ Though formally correct, Wang and Zhang thought several entries were confusing. Hu had included an entry on Rockefeller's charity contributions in pre-1949 Beijing stating that Rockefeller, the 'American Petroleum King', made generous charity donations to people and hospitals in Beijing. Could this not be read as an invitation for the Chinese people to feel indebted to an 'imperialist oppressor' and to try and repay the 'big monopolizing capitalist'? Entries such as these presented facts and interpretations as 'objective' and 'beneficial knowledge' but really only benefited the

⁴³ Yu, 'Wo suo zhidao de Chunming shudian', p. 37.

⁴⁴ Chunming Bookstore was registered as a publisher of 'popular reading matters', cf. 'Huadong diqu gong-si ying tushu chubanye minglu' ['List of public and private book publishers in the East China Region'], in Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo and Zhongyang dang'anguan, *Chuban shiliao* [*Historical Materials on Publishing*], vol. 3, Zhongguo Shuji Chubanshe, Beijing, 1996, p. 522.

⁴⁵ 'Chunming Bookstore/Press' ['Chunming Shudian/Chubanshe'], in *Jinxiandai Shanghai chubanye yinxiang ji* [*Collection of Impressions of Modern and Contemporary Shanghai's Publishing Industry*], Xuelin Chubanshe, Shanghai, 1993, pp. 286–7; see also, Yu, 'Wo suo zhidao de Chunming shudian', p. 38.

⁴⁶ *Renmin ribao*, 5 April 1950, p. 5.

continued 'imperialist project' to deceive the Chinese people.⁴⁷ Entries on the commemoration day for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 or Buddhist festivities had no relevance to life under socialism. Particularly outrageous were entries that mislead readers with wrong knowledge based on rumour and superstition. Hu had included an entry on a new 'perfect weapon' that the United States of America military and the 'imperialist warmongers' had allegedly obtained. Citing 'rumours', the entry stated that this new-style weapon only needed a millilitre of poison in order to exterminate 20 million people. Readers, Wang and Zhang believed, should not tolerate editors who introduced imperialist blackmail as scientific knowledge in dictionaries for the socialist masses.

Hu responded in writing in the *People's Daily* several weeks later. Thanking readers for their comments, he explained that a new edition of the dictionary was already underway.⁴⁸ Criticism did not abate. A year later, in 1951, a report at the first national publishing administration's conference in 1951 mentioned Hu's dictionary as part of a wider criticism on private publishers' encyclopaedic dictionaries.⁴⁹ In June that year, a reader's letter in Tianjin's *Dagongbao's* nationally influential 'Reading and Publishing' column listed the dictionary's faulty entries and explained these as epistemological errors that derived from editors' poor ideological training. Hu submitted a lengthy self-criticism to the Shanghai publishing office, explaining that old, unrevised versions of the dictionary were accidentally being distributed for sale.⁵⁰ He blamed the dynamics of publishing and economic constraints, yet he did not explain why the copies had not been recalled. Economic profit mattered and Hu could not afford to recall volumes if not forced by publishing authorities. It seemed better to issue a self-criticism and refer to the difficulties of producing a satisfactory dictionary given the constant progress and development of society than to recall voluntarily.⁵¹

Hu was removed from his post sometime in the early summer of 1951. Kong Lingjing returned as editor-in-chief. Chunming Bookstore

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Renmin ribao*, 6 May 1950, p. 4.

⁴⁹ 'Wei tigao chubanwu de zhiliang er douzheng' ['Struggle to raise the quality of published materials'], in Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo and Zhongyang dang'anguan, *Chuban shiliao*, p. 227.

⁵⁰ Chunming shudian baogao, 6 June 1951, SMA B1-1-1904-35 to 36.

⁵¹ Chunming shudian baogao, 2 June 1951, SMA B1-1-1904-37 to 40.

was re-registered as Chunming Publisher and a fourth revised edition of the dictionary came out in January 1952. By then, 165,000 copies of the first three editions had sold and circulated, most of which could not be recalled. The editorial transition from Hu to Kong symbolically severed ties between old and new editorial boards and old and new dictionary editions. If we are to believe Feng Zikai, the well-known artist and an expert on music, then Hu and his dictionary had a reputation among people working in the publishing field for a ‘specific working style’ that many disliked. Feng did not give many details in his letter to Kong, but he did mention that the many consecutive editions of the dictionary that Hu had brought to the market seemed remarkable not because they were thoroughly revised, but because so little seemed to change between editions making this a costly affair for readers and an unnecessary waste of printing paper.⁵²

When Kong took over the reins, he was therefore confronted with a colossal task. A new edition of the dictionary had to come to the market swiftly to try to eclipse previous versions. All sections should be scrutinized and revised. And new readers were needed to aid in this project. Kong asked Feng Zikai, for example, to look over the new and revised edition’s sub-section on ‘Art and Music’, which was part of the section on ‘Literature and Arts’. Having looked over the manuscript, Feng at first, in early August 1951, told Kong that ‘not only does it lack “new” words, but the “old” words are chaotic and unstructured’. Words that should be included were not, while words that readers did not need to know were. Explanations were ‘inappropriate’ and the only way to improve the section would be to revise it fundamentally.⁵³ One can speculate on how bad things really were for a few weeks later, in late August, and, seemingly overwhelmed with other tasks and weakened by health issues, Feng wrote again to Kong, this time to explain that the work of looking through books, collecting information, selecting appropriate information, and annotating entries really was terribly time-consuming. Feng now thought that there would be ‘no harm’ in printing the section as it was and then changing it later. After all, a section on ‘Arts and Music’ really was not so important.⁵⁴

⁵² Letter to Kong Lingjing dated 5 August 1951, *Zikai Shuxin (xia)* [*Zikai’s Letters*], vol. 3, Haitun Chubanshe, Beijing, 2013, pp. 254–5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Letter dated 31 August 1951, *Zikai Shuxin (xia)*, pp. 256–7.

How were the different editions of this encyclopaedic dictionary, which sold well before and after the change in editors, structured and why might this dictionary have enjoyed such popularity? Both editors sought to distinguish the *Dictionary of New Terms* from other volumes, stressing its authoritative presentation of 'new' information, terms, and knowledge. In 1949 and 1952, respectively, Hu and Kong emphasized that their editions responded to the arrival of a 'new age' (*xin shidai*).⁵⁵ New terminology, so both argued, was more important than ever before, as readers were trying to grapple with this new age and attempting to decipher new terms while reading newspapers, magazines, and books. Hu, in particular, emphasized readers' 'misery', as they felt lost, not knowing where to find explanations for the new terms that now marked their lives. Both editors maintained that their dictionaries were for the 'common reader' (*yiban duzhe*), reassuring readers who bothered to read the preface that the dictionary was for them and would provide a guide to the language of everyday socialism. At the same time, such statements could be read as an explanation to censors that the editors had tried their utmost. Both then explained that the terms selected for inclusion in the dictionary had been divided into three categories: completely new terms; part new and part old terms, which had acquired new meaning after political criticism; and old terms, which included commonly used terms that had not been abolished.⁵⁶ Both editors struggled with definitions of the 'new' and tried to follow the division between 'new' and 'old' society, or 'pre-liberation' and 'post-liberation' China advocated by Chinese Communist Party publications. This mirrored ambiguous political language and amplified editors' inability to render clear definitions of what really was new about many of the terms they had selected.

Entries were divided into thematic sections. The *Dictionary of New Terms* specialized in geopolitical, institutional, technical, scientific, cultural, geographical, and biographical information.⁵⁷ In

⁵⁵ 'Bianji dayi' ['Guiding principles of the edition'], *Xin mingci cidian*, Chunming Shudian, Shanghai, 1949, and 'Bianji dayi' ['Guiding principles of the edition'], *Xin mingci cidian*, Chunming Chubanshe, Shanghai, 1952, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Kong took over the precise wording from Hu for this section and changed one term in the third category of 'old terms'. Hu had called those old terms included in the dictionary 'original' (*yuanyou*) whereas Kong used the phrase 'often seen' (*chang jian*).

⁵⁷ Both dictionaries were divided into ten sections. In 1949, these ten sections were entitled: 'international', 'politics', 'economics', 'society', 'philosophy', 'science', 'arts',

the dictionary's taxonomy, geopolitics and international relations took pride of place. Through this and the individual entries, readers' everyday lives became part of a geopolitical network.⁵⁸ Between 1949 and 1952, however, editorial teams substantially revised this section. In 1949, the section began with an entry on the United Nations, giving a neutral description of the organization's structure. In 1952, the revised entry situated the People's Republic of China in an emerging post-war world order alongside the growing Cold War and used polemical language that reinforced the division between the two ideological camps. In this edition, the first entry was on the World Peace Council (*Shijie baowei heping dahui*), a world congress directed by the Communist Information Bureau, the successor organization of the Comintern. The World Peace Council had raised the Stockholm Appeal in 1950 that had been widely propagated and signed across China.⁵⁹ The entry emphasized the council's condemnation of the atomic bomb and of United States of America's invasion of Korea. With the first entry, readers were placed in the socialist camp of the early Cold War and could read further entries on international socialist federations and mass organizations that followed the discussion of the World Peace Council. The United Nations only featured on page nine of the section and the revised entry now explained the 'imperialist' takeover of the United Nations through the United States of America government and ridiculed the 'Jiang Jieshi counterrevolutionary government' in the United Nations.⁶⁰ Knowledge of the terms to describe the socialist world, and its 'imperialist', 'capitalist', and 'warmongering' counterpart, was key to joining the socialist masses in China.

Domestic politics came second and were thus situated in the global geopolitical context. The 1949 section on politics began with an entry on communism, followed by socialism, New Democracy, internationalism, anarchism, syndicalism, and National Socialism.⁶¹

'geography', 'people', and 'commonly used terms'. In 1952, the order of sections had been slightly rearranged: 'international', 'politics', 'economics', 'history', 'geography', 'society', 'philosophy', 'science', 'literature and arts', and 'people'.

⁵⁸ M. Szonyi, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp. 1–12.

⁵⁹ H. Harrison, 'Popular responses to the atomic bomb in China, 1945–55', *Past and Present*, vol. 218, Supp. 8, 2013, pp. 106–10.

⁶⁰ *Xin mingci cidian* (1952), p. 9.

⁶¹ *Xin mingci cidian* (1949), p. 1002. The pages of the 1949 edition were not consecutively numbered; every new section began with a page 1. I have adopted the

The 1952 edition extended this list of information on important ideologies, starting with the entry on communism, followed by war communism, socialism, scientific socialism, utopian socialism, and National Socialism.⁶² The 1949 section on society began with an entry on the primitive man, followed by entries on ethnology and racial prejudice⁶³; the same section in 1952 began with a discussion of class, class character, class conflict, class contradictions, and the definitions of individual classes.⁶⁴ In the 1952 edition, Kong and his editorial team also tried to contextualize propaganda and socialist cultural production for their readers. A section on 'Literature and Arts' explained the class character of literature and arts, and described propaganda plays, operas, novels, newspapers, magazines, and important books; it discussed the aim of these works, how to read them, and how to include this knowledge in everyday cultural life.⁶⁵ Media and contents of state propaganda were thus contextualized for everyday consumption.

Selecting information sources was crucial and both Hu and Kong explained how entries had been compiled. Reliable sources were supposed to legitimize the dictionaries as part of the state's accredited chains of information transmission. In 1949, Hu explained that he had consulted national and international newspapers, magazines, and books published until summer 1949, shortly before the volume went into press. For the editions that followed after 1949, Hu's and Kong's editorial team had to consult many other sources such as propaganda pamphlets, films, radio broadcasts, posters, and cartoons. Terms now included political slogans and vocabulary from ongoing mass-mobilization campaigns. Kong conceded that these slogans did not technically count as 'terms', but argued that they were nonetheless crucial to political life in China. Yet slogans such as 'combining suppression and lenience (*zhenya yu kuanda xiang jiehe*)', a key slogan of the 1951 Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries were a challenge.⁶⁶ This particular slogan, though widely advocated, had led

numbering system of the 1952 dictionary, which means that a page number '1002' refers to section 1 of the dictionary and then the relevant page number within that section, here page 2.

⁶² *Xin mingci cidian* (1952), pp. 1001–3.

⁶³ *Xin mingci cidian* (1949), pp. 4001–3.

⁶⁴ *Xin mingci cidian* (1952), pp. 5001–2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ An analysis of how the phrase was incorporated into the campaign is provided in J. Strauss, 'Morality, coercion and state building by campaign in the early PRC:

to much confusion, as local cadres were unsure how much lenience was adequate and how to establish which counter-revolutionaries should be treated more harshly and for which reasons.⁶⁷

Canonizing slogans in a dictionary was a risk for editors. Inclusion of these terms was among the reasons why people bought the dictionary. Readers used these entries to make sense of propaganda posters and other materials in their neighbourhood and at work. Wanting to satisfy readers, Chunming's editors were more daring than state lexicographers and more willing to include ambiguous political slogans in their compilation of 'objective' knowledge. They knew that these slogans could change meaning by the time that a print-run was on the market and they also knew that state authorities might see this decision as yet another example of how private publishers acted irresponsibly, only to sell more copies.

This tension between the wishes of readers, editors, and censors manifested clearly in discussions about the dictionary's section on 'people' with its convenient biographical entries. The 1949 'People' section included entries on figures in military and politics across the spectrum of Cold War international politics, experts in academia, and people in literature and arts famous at home and internationally. After this first edition, editors expanded the section to include new entries on heroes, model workers, and reactionaries. Organized by stroke order, Mao Zedong only featured on page two of the section in 1949. Page one began with an entry on Yu Yifu, chairman of the people's government in Heilongjiang province.⁶⁸ In the 1953 edition, the author Ding Ling took pride of place and Mao appeared on page four.⁶⁹ Lexicographical order was a poor reflection of political hierarchy.

Biographies included the living and the dead, making this one of the most vulnerable sections of the entire dictionary. It also made it one of the most popular sections, for it gave context to unfamiliar names prominently featured in newspapers, on the radio, and elsewhere. Entries on living individuals were almost immediately out-dated. Entries on the dead could be subject to posthumous reinterpretation.⁷⁰

regime consolidation and after, 1949–1956', in *The History of the PRC (1949–1976)*, J. Strauss (ed.), The China Quarterly Special Issues New Series No. 7, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 50–1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ *Xin mingci cidian* (1949), p. 9001.

⁶⁹ *Xin mingci cidian* (1953), p. 9004.

⁷⁰ Most European dictionaries avoided this problem of dealing with 'live biographies'. As Madeleine Herren notes, 'Generally speaking, in European

The section was therefore a bone of contention. Publishing authorities would have preferred to expunge it entirely from the dictionary. In June 1950, the East China Military Commission's News and Publishing Bureau wrote to the Shanghai Municipal News and Publishing Office about this section. Chunming had requested the office to check some biographical entries before the second edition went into print and officials had detected several mistakes. They suggested deleting the section altogether in order to avoid having mistakes pop up as soon as the dictionary was published. By the time Hu Jitao was informed, the new edition of the dictionary had left the printers. Rather than recalling the volumes, he decided to issue addenda with revisions to all bookstores that had received copies for sale.⁷¹ Despite the advice from national level, the 'People' section remained in the dictionary until the 1954 edition. Even then, the 1954 edition retained many of the entries, now tucked away in thematic sections.

After the upheavals of the first two years, the dictionary remained popular and sold well.⁷² In September 1955, however, the Ministry of Culture took steps to shut production down. All sales were temporarily suspended. Officially, the Ministry decided to halt the publication because of mistakes in the seventh print-run of the 1954 edition. The problem lay not with entries on domestic issues, but with entries on foreign relations. These were crucial to an encyclopaedic dictionary on 'new knowledge', yet were as much subject to quick changes as biographical entries. In the case of the *Dictionary of New Terms*, attention fell on the entry on 'Yugoslavia'. But this was not a case of inflammatory information that had to be deleted; Tito found no mention in the entry, nor did the history of Yugoslavian socialism. The only reference to political affairs was a reference to the country as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and a brief mention that the Red Army had liberated the country in 1944.⁷³ What the

encyclopaedias, the admission price for a biographical article is death'. Cf. M. Herren, 'General knowledge and society: an accurate and popular view of the present improved state of human knowledge', in *Allgemeinwissen und Gesellschaft: Akten des internationalen Kongresses über Wissenstransfer und enzyklopädische Ordnungssysteme, vom 18. bis 21. September 2003 in Prangins*, P. Michel, M. Herren, and M. Ruesch (eds), Shaker, Aachen, 2007, 492, fn. 12.

⁷¹ Letter from the East China Military Commission's News and Publishing Bureau, 10 June 1950, SMA B1-1-1904-30.

⁷² In 1955 alone, 45,000 copies were printed in five print-runs between January and July. *Xin mingci cidian*, Chunming Chubanshe, Shanghai, 1955, front matter.

⁷³ *Xin mingci cidian* (1954), p. 6096.

Ministry of Culture objected to was the absence of information about Yugoslavian socialism, especially now that the People's Republic of China and Yugoslavia had assumed diplomatic relations following Nikita Khrushchev's visit to Belgrade in May 1955. Entries on India, Burma, Cambodia, and Indonesia, too, were felt to be disruptive to diplomatic contacts. New knowledge was not merely supposed to be factually accurate; it had to adequately mirror the sentiments of its time—an impossible task for lexicography, especially when it came to explaining foreign affairs under Mao. Most entries it seems were scrutinized when their subject matter became the focus of current affairs, not as a matter of regular screening processes.

Kong wrote to the ministry offering revisions and addenda, and asked whether he would then—as before—be reissued a sales permit.⁷⁴ Ministry officials, in a letter sent in February 1956, argued that this was not merely about individual entries, but about the wealth of out-dated information, which did not merit a full revision; sales should be stopped and bookstores should take remaining copies off their shelves.⁷⁵ Shanghai publishing authorities were puzzled by this decision. They wrote to the Shanghai propaganda department to ask whether they could at least sell the remaining stocks and offered to remove the entire section on foreign affairs from all remaining copies—some 10,000 in total stored at the distributor and at the New China Bookstore warehouse.⁷⁶ Pleading their case, they wrote: 'This book still has many entries which continue to be of value as references, readers demand such volumes and branches [of the bookstore] have written to demand continued supply. At present we lack a suitable dictionary that can replace it.'⁷⁷

Shortly after, the press was dissolved and Chunming staff transferred to the new Shanghai Culture Press. The press brought together staff from many formerly private publishers, including Beixin Press's Li Xiaofeng, who became one of the deputy directors of the editorial department. Although it had closed Chunming, the Ministry of Culture conceded that one should consider compiling a new dictionary on the existing blueprint of the *Dictionary of New Terms*.

⁷⁴ 'Qingshi dui Chunming ban "Xin mingci cidian" de chuli yijian', 12 November 1955, SMA B167-1-148-7.

⁷⁵ 'Fu "Xin mingci cidian" kefou xiuzheng zai ban wenti', March 1956, SMA B167-1-148-13.

⁷⁶ 'Shanghai shi renmin weiyuanhui chuban shiye guanlichu baogao' (n.d.), SMA B167-1-148-17.

⁷⁷ SMA B167-1-148-17 to 18.

Publishers such as Chunming had left a material legacy and a gap that state authorities now had to contend with.

State lexicographers' dilemmas: the *Dictionary of New Knowledge*

For several years, publishing authorities had skirted around the problem of compiling encyclopaedic dictionaries. They allowed private publishers to issue reference works and encouraged state publishers to market pamphlet-sized translations from the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia.⁷⁸ As the confrontations between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union worsened, party and state officials grew increasingly suspicious of these reference works. Around the same time, in 1957, Mao Zedong directed a group of lexicographers to begin work on a revision of the multi-volume *Cihai* (*Sea of Words*) as a Chinese counterpart to the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*.⁷⁹ The *Cihai* compilation team was given a period of five years to edit the first full draft, though the project would end up taking decades to complete.⁸⁰ In the meantime, in 1958, New Knowledge Press issued a new single-volume encyclopaedic dictionary called the *Dictionary of New Knowledge* (*Xin zhishi cidian*). The dictionary's first and, as far as I have been able to establish, only print-run was substantial, at 230,000 volumes.⁸¹ In the preface, the editors emphasized that the dictionary was compiled in little more than a year, and compilation had been rushed so as to

⁷⁸ On translations of Soviet encyclopaedic knowledge, see N. Volland, 'Globalizing knowledge in socialist China: a transnational perspective on knowledge production in the PRC, 1949–1960', unpublished paper, cited with the author's permission.

⁷⁹ The *Cihai* was first published by Commercial Press in 1936. This article cannot discuss how the wide circulation of the *Cihai* affected popular interpretation of terms after 1949, but it is highly likely that plenty of people and even libraries continued to own copies and that these were consulted for reference. Robert Culp has worked extensively on the history of the *Cihai* in Republican China and on the institutional dynamics of the *Cihai*'s compilation process in the late 1950s and early 1960s: R. Culp, 'Culture work: industrial capitalism and socialist cultural production in Mao-Era China', unpublished paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) annual meeting 2014, cited with the author's permission.

⁸⁰ 'Zonggong Shanghai shiwei guanyu xiugai Cihai wenti de yijian he qingshi' ['An opinion and request for instructions by the Chinese Communist Party Shanghai municipal committee on the subject of *Cihai* revisions'], in *Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo and Zhongyang dang'anguan, Chuban shiliao*, pp. 420–1.

⁸¹ The Central Publishing Administration classified the New Knowledge Press as a 'local publisher' (*difang chubanshe*). Cf. 'Quanguo chubanshe mingdan (neibu ziliao)' ['List of publishers nationwide (internal materials)'], in *Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo and Zhongyang dang'anguan, Chuban shiliao*, p. 320.

meet readers' urgent demands for a comprehensive encyclopaedic dictionary.⁸² Due to time pressure, it had made extensive use of entries from the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*.⁸³ By the time the *Dictionary of New Knowledge* was published, however, the Great Leap Forward was underway and the Sino–Soviet split was gradually manifesting. In 1959, the dictionary was slated for further revisions.

Compromises were less easy to reach and errors more difficult to legitimize in a volume that was supposed to be state-sanctioned and authoritative. Revising the *Dictionary of New Knowledge* became more difficult with every year. Sino–Soviet relations deteriorated, the Great Leap Forward provoked shifts in domestic leadership, and political terms changed so fast that state publishers were under pressure to keep up. Though the revised *Dictionary of New Knowledge* was never published, letter exchanges between the revision team's editor, Hang Wei, and the Shanghai publishing office's party cell give us insight into a failed revision and tell us much about the relationship between state lexicographers and party officials as well as the process of composing and revising entries.⁸⁴ Hang Wei was the vice editor-in-chief of the *Cihai* compilation team; as such, he provided a link between the large multi-year encyclopaedic project and this smaller revision of a single-volume encyclopaedic dictionary that was supposed to sustain readers until the revised *Cihai* became available. But, as the compilation of the *Cihai* was delayed by political changes, so was the *Dictionary of New Knowledge*.

Terms relating to People's Republic of China foreign relations were once again a problem. In mid-February 1962, responding to developments in Sino–Soviet relations, Hang wrote to the party cell, suggesting either to delete or revise several entries on Sino–Soviet relations. The 1958 edition had included references to the Declaration of Peace (*Heping xuanyan*) issued at the November 1957 'Meeting on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution'. The declaration advocated those Soviet principles of peaceful co-existence, which the People's Republic of China national leadership had since renounced as revisionist. If these entries were retained, Hang opined that they should be

⁸² 'Qianyan' ['Foreword'], *Xin zhishi cidian*, Xin zhishi chuban she, Shanghai, 1958.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Madeleine Herren has called for studies of failed encyclopaedia projects. These are as important to our understanding of reference work compilation as those volumes that were successfully published. Michel and Herren, 'Unvorgreifliche Gedanken zu einer Theorie des Enzyklopädischen', p. 54.

accompanied by new entries on the 1960 Conference of World Communist and Workers' Parties—a meeting that precipitated the Sino–Soviet split and led to the Soviet Union recalling its experts from the People's Republic of China. Some entries, Hang thought, should be deleted altogether, such as references to 'Soviet models' and 'Soviet socialist labour models'. Entries that contained brief reference to specialist fertilizers invented in the Soviet Union should be kept, but the mentions deleted. Other entries were more difficult. What, for instance, should be done about the entry on Moscow's 'Red Square'? Hang thought it should go.⁸⁵

Terms relating to China's domestic politics and society also caused difficulties, though Hang did not elaborate on these as candidly. Rather than reworking numerous entries on contemporary individuals in literature and sciences, Hang argued that such entries should not feature at all. Given that this had been one of the popular features of encyclopaedic dictionaries of 'new terms' since 1949, the decision favoured political security over readers' needs or indeed the dictionary's claim to present 'new knowledge'. Following the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Great Leap Forward, no biography was safe to include.⁸⁶ As private publishers before them, state lexicographers had to decide whether to include political terms and slogans coined by national leadership. The editing team was unsure, for instance, about the phrases 'walking on two legs' (*liang tiao tui zoulu*), a slogan of Great Leap Forward propaganda that advocated simultaneous reliance on industry and agriculture; or the phrase 'three fixed targets and one reward' (*san bao yi jiang*), a slogan that prepared the grounds for the People's Commune Movement in rural China during the late 1950s.⁸⁷ Hang thought it safest to delete these, as he considered them 'unstable terms' (*bu wending de cimu*).⁸⁸ But he had decided that editors could not make this decision on their own and referred the matter to the publishing office's party cell as well as the municipal Party

⁸⁵ Letter from Hang Wei to the Publishing Office's Party Cell, 17 February 1962, SMA B167-1-550-2 to 3, and Letter from Hang Wei to the Publishing Office's Party Cell, copied to the Municipal Party Propaganda Bureau (n.d.) 1962, SMA B167-1-550-8.

⁸⁶ SMA B167-1-550-2 to 3.

⁸⁷ On such slogans, see also Kwok-sing Li (ed.), *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China*, Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1995.

⁸⁸ SMA B167-1-550-8.

Propaganda Bureau, with ample excuses that the editorial team's ideological training was simply insufficient to render a decision.

Combing through the entries of a dictionary with more than 1,500 pages and 2 million characters was painstakingly difficult. Some of the entries that had been cleared for publication in 1961 or early 1962 could suddenly pose renewed difficulties. Revisions were to be completed by August 1962 to allow seconded editors to return to the *Cihai* team in September, but the project was delayed. When Hang was about to send the revised draft to the printers, a new problem emerged. The People's Republic of China was now engaged in a military border dispute with the Indian government. Once again, Hang wrote the party cell for guidance on the entries relating to India.⁸⁹

His detailed list of sources illustrates the wealth of materials available to state lexicographers. It also tells us much about the selection of statistics and terms. First, Hang had to reassess the Republic of India's surface area. His research had produced conflicting statistics. The original entry in the *Dictionary of New Knowledge* stated that the surface area was 2,940,000 square kilometres. Domestic sources including the 1953 *World Knowledge Handbook* (*Shijie zhishi shouce*), the 1959 *World Knowledge Dictionary* (*Shijie zhishi cidian*), and middle school geography handbooks agreed with this estimate. The *World Geography* book published by the North East People's Government Education Department, however, gave a conflicting number of 3,560,000 square kilometres. International sources such as volume 18 of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* published during a peaceful phase of Sino-Soviet relations in 1953 also gave 2,940,000 square kilometres but newer Soviet sources such as volume 4 of the *Small Soviet Encyclopaedia* (*Sulian xiao baike quanshu*) published after 1958 or the *Collection of World Maps* (*Shijie ditu ji*) estimated 3,280,000 or 3,260,000 square kilometres. East German sources, notably the two-volume *Lexikon in Zwei Bänden, A bis Z* of 1958,⁹⁰ also cited 3,280,000 square kilometres, while the 1957 *Encyclopaedia of Indonesia* estimated 2,949,530 square kilometres. United Kingdom, United States of America, and Japanese encyclopaedias estimated between 3,040,000 and 3,280,000 square kilometres. The only resource Hang could not consult was Indian publications. The partition of India was

⁸⁹ Letter from Hang Wei to the Publishing Office's Party Cell, copied to the Municipal Party Propaganda Bureau, 21 November 1962, SMA B167-1-550-15 to 16.

⁹⁰ *Lexikon in Zwei Bänden A-Z*, Volkseigener Verlag Enzyklopädie, Leipzig, 1958.

also a problem. The original entry had referred to 'divided India', which Hang now thought was a term that should be avoided, referring instead to the construction of India and Pakistan. The response from the party cell was clear: India's surface area was 2,940,000 square kilometres. India could not be larger than originally estimated because that would have gravely affected readers looking to understand the Sino-Indian border disputes and would have presented the People's Republic of China as weaker than earlier publications of the 1950s had stated. A 'divided India', moreover, was unacceptable; Pakistan was an important ally and should be considered an independent nation, not a second India waiting to be reunited.⁹¹ These may have been small details but, in the larger context of Sino-Indian disputes, they could be of utmost political import.

Contingencies, such as sudden changes in political alliances, could influence lexicography even more than questions of basic ideological interpretation. Publication of the dictionary was indefinitely halted that winter because of this. With the India entry resolved, the manuscript went to the printers. By mid-December, more than a quarter of the copies had been printed on several thousand pages of paper. As he surveyed the paper moulds, Hang found several other errors and had the printers halt the machines. The publishing office's party cell would have to decide what to do. Hang presented them with several options. Printing could either continue or the project could be abandoned. If the dictionary were to be printed, one could check all entries again and have a revised manuscript printed anew. Alternatively, all those parts that had not yet been printed could be thoroughly scanned for any mistakes, whereas those parts that had already been printed should be carefully checked for major political mistakes. If such mistakes were detected, then those paper sheets could be replaced. Hang preferred the last solution, scanning for major mistakes and not discarding printed pages. He argued that he had scrutinized the whole manuscript several times and so had another editor from the *Cihai* compilation team. More experts had screened the manuscript throughout 1962. Cadres from the Shanghai municipal party committee's organization department had signed off, and several entries relating to governmental affairs had been passed on to central government ministries for approval. Hang thought that there should really not be many further problems with the manuscript.⁹²

⁹¹ SMA B167-1-550-15 to 16.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Financial considerations, however, were equally important. Lexicography was expensive and had to make a profit at some point. In this, Chinese state lexicography did not differ much from other lexicographical projects globally.⁹³ The three-year revision of the *Dictionary of New Knowledge* had cost 45,000 yuan. If production of the dictionary were stopped altogether, all of the expenditure would be lost. Hang argued that this would be a significant loss in light of the *Cihai* editorial team's delay in bringing out the revised version of the *Cihai*. Originally scheduled to take five years, from 1957 to 1962, it had become clear that compilation of the new *Cihai* would take significantly longer and would incur considerable costs, estimated at 1.5 million yuan.⁹⁴ Political circumstances were changing more quickly than compilation teams for either of the dictionaries could accommodate for in writing entries, which made this a lengthy and costly process. Since the *Cihai* editorial team was unable to publish anything, Hang worried that there would be no further source of revenue to replace the anticipated income from sales of the now halted *Dictionary of New Knowledge*. It was therefore unclear who would pay for the lost funds if publication were abandoned. He argued that the most sensible solution would be to replace only the sheets with faulty entries and proceed with printing the dictionaries. Then the financial losses would be minimal and could perhaps be compensated for by a surplus of revenue from the sale of the new dictionary. Tellingly, his report concluded that, while the option of thorough revision was preferable, the expected financial losses would be so significant as to warrant a practical decision.⁹⁵ Ideological considerations could be traded for financial stability.

The revised *Dictionary of New Knowledge* was never published. Despite repeated attempts to rewrite entries and overcome difficulties, the work of state-commissioned lexicographers such as Hang was repeatedly disrupted by a succession of changes in the information the dictionary was supposed to canonize. In the end, it appears that the party cell decided it was safer to abandon the project entirely. The *Cihai* compilation team issued an official 'draft' of the new *Cihai* for wider internal circulation in 1965, but they fought the

⁹³ Herren, 'General knowledge and society', p. 492.

⁹⁴ SMA B167-1-762.

⁹⁵ Letter from Hang Wei to the Publishing Office's Party Cell, copied to the Municipal Party Propaganda Bureau, 25 December 1962, SMA B167-1-550-24 to 25.

same difficulties. Because that editorial team was much larger and could coordinate closely with national propaganda figureheads such as Zhou Yang, Kang Sheng, and Hu Qiaomu, the Shanghai publishing authorities repeatedly looked to this editorial team whenever something was unclear. However, proximity to national leadership did not provide authoritative guidance. The ambiguity of terms and their political volatility, which private publishers had despaired of, also drove discussions in editorial board meetings of national leaders with *Cihai* editorial members.⁹⁶ As the discussions about the multi-volume *Cihai* continued, albeit delayed and fragmented by the onset of the Cultural Revolution, another single-volume reference work made its appearance, commissioned and spearheaded by the military's publishing sector.

Out of bounds: the Cultural Revolution's *Newspaper Readers' Handbook*

In their afterword to the third edition, published in spring 1969, the editors of the *Newspaper Readers' Handbook* told readers in no uncertain terms that this was not an 'all-encompassing encyclopaedia'.⁹⁷ It was a 'political reference work' and, for this reason, it avoided the false calls for 'knowledge' and 'objectivity' made by the 'agents' of Liu Shaoqi. Despite such affirmations, the sizeable handbook, with more than 1,000 pages and taxonomy strongly reminiscent of the 1950s encyclopaedic dictionaries, certainly looked encyclopaedic.

It had, however, not started out that way. When the People's Liberation Daily Press first edited and published the *Handbook* in November 1965, it was pocket-sized, with some 378 pages. Covered in red plastic, it closely resembled its more famous sibling, the *Quotations from Chairman Mao*.⁹⁸ Like the *Quotations*, it was not available for purchase in bookstores but circulated within the

⁹⁶ On *Cihai* revisions, see Kang Sheng, 'Zhou Yang tongzhi jiejian "Cihai" zhengqiu yijian gongzuo zu de tanhua jilu' (n.d.), January 1962, SMA B167-1-550 and the file SMA B167-1-762.

⁹⁷ 'Jidian shuoming' ['A few explanations'], 30 May 1969, *Dubao Shouce* [*Newspaper Readers' Handbook*], 3rd edn, 1969, p. 1011.

⁹⁸ The production history of the *Quotations*, more commonly known as the 'Little Red Book', is discussed in D. Leese, 'A single spark: origins and spread of the Little Red Book in China', in *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, A. C. Cook (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 23–42.

People's Liberation Army apparatus and later non-military work units as internal reference material.⁹⁹ The newspaper handbook format had been common for years. Throughout the 1950s, national and regional newspapers published handbooks as guides for their readers, sold on the open book market. *Guangming Daily's* edition appeared in 1951, following on the heels of a similar handbook published by *Changjiang Daily* in 1950.¹⁰⁰ Towards the late 1950s, state-owned people's press branches assumed this task, issuing their own updated handbooks.¹⁰¹ Such handbooks were not as detailed as thick encyclopaedic dictionaries, but they did the trick for everyday newspaper and periodical reading.

Despite the outward likeness to the 'Little Red Book', Liberation Daily's *Newspaper Readers' Handbook* was not yet part of the cult to venerate Mao. Written to help 'work units conduct current political affairs education', it opened with a section on 'China's Geography, Population, Ethnic Groups', followed by sections on the 'Chinese Communist Party', 'National Leadership Organs', 'China's People's Liberation Army', 'Democratic Parties and Mass Organisations', 'Sino-Foreign Relations', 'Revolutionary Heroes and Collectives', and, last but not least, a section on 'Common Knowledge and Terms' subdivided into history, politics, philosophy, foreign affairs, and so on. Readers looked in vain for a special entry on Mao or on any other national leadership figure. At the end of the handbook, they could though find lists of international news agencies, a chronology of China's imperial dynasties, and conversion tables for international metrics and foreign-currency exchange rates. This format proved popular, and reprints were commissioned across the country, including one by the Chinese Communist Party National Defence Industry's Political Department in summer 1966, on which Red Guard Rebel Troupes across the country then based their reprints.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ The stamp 'internal reference only' is not added to the front matter of the handbook until the 1968 version, but the early volumes contained no back matter indicating price or circulation, which suggests that they were not circulated for open sale.

¹⁰⁰ *Guangming Ribao bianjishuo* [Guangming Daily Editorial Office], *Dubao Shouce* [*Newspaper Readers' Handbook*], Guangming Ribao She, Beijing, 1951; *Changjiang Ribao She* [Changjiang Daily Agency], *Dubao Shouce* [*Newspaper Readers' Handbook*], Xinhua Shudian Zhongnan Zongfendian, Wuhan, 1950.

¹⁰¹ Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe [Zhejiang People's Press], *Dubao Shouce* [*Newspaper Readers' Handbook*], Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, Hangzhou, 1957.

¹⁰² Reprints were clearly marked. They, moreover, replicated the foreword of the original edition but omitted the invitation to send in letters with revision suggestions.

As the Mao Cult grew to enormous proportions, so did the second edition of the *Handbook*. In December 1968, with ritual study of Mao Zedong Thought at a high point, the committee of the Nanjing University Red Guard Congress revised the handbook. It was now 680 pages strong, no longer pocket-sized, but as large as a regular single-volume encyclopaedia at 24 *kai* (approximately 17 by 19 centimetres) and clearly marked for 'internal reference'.¹⁰³ China's geography, population, and ethnic groups were replaced by a more than 30-page-strong entry on the 'great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander, great helmsman' Chairman Mao, followed by biographies of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin at four to six pages, respectively. After this came an explanation of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought, followed by sections on the Chinese Communist Party, post-liberation political movements, the Cultural Revolution, the People's Liberation Army, revolutionary heroes, collectives and other people, and then all the sections of the original 1965 handbook. Entries were extensively annotated with quotations from the Chairman.

Pre-Cultural Revolution encyclopaedic dictionaries had emphasized the desire for information stability. Lexicographers then tried their best to make entries waterproof. Entire print-projects were cancelled for this reason, as publishers worried about the longevity of dictionaries compared to other reading matters. The editors of the 1968 *Newspaper Readers' Handbook*, by contrast, who explained that they edited the handbook being 'filled with supreme loyalty to our highest supreme commander Chairman Mao', stressed that the handbook should be quickly revised and reprinted. To keep abreast of developments, revise, and reprint was to show one's loyalty to the Chairman.¹⁰⁴ And so they did. The next edition, with some 300 more pages, came out only four months later and was dated to the last day of the Ninth Party Congress, 24 April 1969. 'Sub-cults' had developed under the umbrella of the Mao Cult and found representation in the handbook. Mao's entry, now a page stronger at 33 pages, was followed by an entry on 'Chairman Mao's closest comrade-in-arms, our respected and beloved vice commander, Lin Biao', who was given 18 pages. Then came Zhou Enlai, with slightly more than nine pages,

¹⁰³ Hongdaihui Nanjing daxue weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dubao Shouce* [*Newspaper Readers' Handbook*], 2nd edn, 26 December 1968 (n.p.).

¹⁰⁴ 'Zaiban qianyan' ['Foreword to the second edition'], in *Dubao Shouce*, Hongdaihui Nanjing daxue weiyuanhui (ed.).

Chen Boda, at eight pages, Kang Sheng, at seven pages, and last in the section on the ‘headquarters’ Jiang Qing, who, however, was allotted ten pages of biographical entry, probably to make up for her coming in last.¹⁰⁵ The section on the Cultural Revolution swelled from 45 to some 120 pages and, although the Ninth Party Congress had barely concluded, the new edition already featured a section discussing the content and identifying for readers the most crucial quotations by the Chairman and by his ‘comrade-in-arms’ that one should henceforth know to employ.

This was the volume that readers were told was not an ‘encyclopaedia’, but which bore all the imprints of that genre. Lengthy narrative entries explained core concepts and words. Readers could find in and between the pages the political taxonomy of the Cultural Revolution, as it stood in the moment of 1969. Despite the editors’ insistence that this knowledge was all but stable, for stability of knowledge was a marker of Liu Shaoqi’s agents, it provided more stability of ‘new’ political knowledge of a ‘new era’ than any other available volume, not least because it bore the approving imprint ‘for internal reference’ and because it originated with the highest echelons of state authority. Hardly surprising, then, that people wanted copies, even if these were difficult to come by. When the third edition came out, the handbook gave an official print-run of 171,000 copies. The actual print-run was probably much higher, as documents suggest that, for each authorized copy, there were many more unauthorized ones. The handbook was a successful state-published encyclopaedic dictionary, yet who among the millions of people working for this disaggregate ‘Chinese state’ decided on reprints was not entirely clear.

As word spread about this encyclopaedic handbook, and demand outstripped supply, local state agents took it upon themselves to try and find quick remedies. This was the situation in Shanghai in 1969. In late September, officials at the Zhejiang Province Mao Zedong Works Publishing Office notified their colleagues in the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee’s Mao Zedong Works Print and Distribution Office that they had only recently uncovered a regional scheme to reprint, without authorization, the *Handbook*.¹⁰⁶ In a printing

¹⁰⁵ On the formation of ‘sub-cults’ see D. Leese, *Mao Cult*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 179.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from the Zhejiang Province Mao Zedong Works Publishing Office to the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee’s Mao Zedong Works Print and Distribution Office, 25 September 1969, SMA B244-3-151-218.

press in Jiaxing county, inspectors had found some 50,000 copies, of which 25,000 copies were slated for delivery to Shanghai's Jiangnan Shipyard. In another printing press in Tongxiang county, an additional 12,400 copies of the handbook awaited transport to the three work factories working under the Shanghai Construction Engineering Office. Having dutifully sealed off the shipments until further notice, the Zhejiang Office now asked for instructions from their Shanghai colleagues on what they should do with these copies.

Investigations into the Shanghai work units ensued and officials at the factories wrote up reports trying to explain why they had commissioned reprints, why they had failed to apply for authorization, and where they had managed to procure all the necessary materials and production support. From the pages of these reports emerged the picture of an efficient personal network of local state agents, often made up of individual personal contacts, who, in cooperation, could accrue everything necessary for a sizeable print-run of several 10,000 copies. How exactly did they manage this?

In late May 1969, comrades in the Shipyard's Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team heard about the *Handbook* and that it had been revised twice. Rumour also had it that the teachers and students in the Nanjing Red Guard Congress who had written up the new edition had presented it to the members of the Ninth National Party Congress. With such a pedigree, the *Handbook* seemed to contain few 'problems' with regard to 'political principle' and promised to be reliable. A few comrades then contacted friends and relatives in Nanjing, trying to procure a copy in a local bookstore. When that was not possible, they borrowed a copy from someone. With copy in hand, they went to the factory's political propaganda group and asked them for help in producing more copies to give to workers so that they could 'relate to national affairs' and 'raise their political consciousness and promote work'.¹⁰⁷ Cadres at the propaganda group decided that there was indeed a 'great need' for such a volume. As the investigation report admitted, they then proceeded to 'privately and without authorization' reprint, thus not paying 'attention to the interests of the party and the collective'.¹⁰⁸

One of the Shanghai Tobacco Presses helped produce the collotype from the borrowed book. Two large batches of paper were procured

¹⁰⁷ 'Jiangnan zaochuanhang geming weiyuanhui—fanyin "dubao shouce" jiancha shu', 7 October 1969, SMA B244-3-151-219.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Selfishness as the antonym to loyalty is discussed in Leese, *Mao Cult*, p. 187.

from paper mills in which members of the propaganda group had personal contacts. Some of this was leftover writing paper, and one of the batches had gone into the printing statistics for another volume yet had actually never been used. At this point, the Shipyard officials still planned to publish only 3,000 or 4,000 copies. Then they happened to meet a representative of the Employees' Representative Union of the Jiaxing printing plant that would eventually print the copies. He had planned to reprint the *Handbook* in a scheme with the East China Chemical Engineering Company, but, when he heard that the Shipyard officials already had a collotype, he decided to publish with them and in return help them with contacts. As the scheme went on, more people became involved—procuring not only the collotype and paper, but also plastic for the book covers. The Employees' Representative Union wanted some 20,000 copies. The printing press asked for 5,000. Then the Shipyard officials decided that they had better err on the side of caution and print more rather than less, which brought their count up to 25,000 and thus to the 50,000 copies that the Zhejiang inspectors sealed off in the Jiaxing printing plant.¹⁰⁹

This, the Shanghai Mao Zedong Works Print and Distribution office wrote, was not 'politics in command', but 'profit in command'—a damning indictment at the time that called for a mass criticism session.¹¹⁰ Unauthorized reprints brought unchecked 'political errors' and some 'wrong historical facts' into circulation, and the reprint of internal materials 'divulged party and state secrets'.¹¹¹ Selection of materials for reprint was part of the problem. The Shipyard officials had gotten hold of a third edition. The reprint of the Shanghai Concrete Manufacturing Company, discovered by the Zhejiang Office around the same time, conversely, was based on the second edition and therefore out-dated.¹¹² Volumes looked official and even had the portrait badge of Mao attached to the red plastic cover—after the company managed to procure 10,000 badges through a friend at another company.¹¹³ Yet they were dated to the summer of

¹⁰⁹ SMA B244-151-219, and 'Youguan "dubao shouce" fanyin de jingguo qingkuang', 7 October 1969, SMA B244-151-221.

¹¹⁰ Letter from the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee's Mao Zedong Works Print and Distribution Office to the Municipal Revolutionary Committee, 4 November 1969, SMA B244-3-151-212 to 213.

¹¹¹ SMA B244-3-151-218.

¹¹² 'Guanyu wuju suoshu sange danwei zai Zhejiang "dubao shouce" deng diaocha qingkuang he chuli yijian', 25 October 1969, SMA B244-3-151-224.

¹¹³ SMA B244-3-151-212 to 213.

1969, giving the appearance that this was a third edition. Other reprints suggest that editing was involved. In one volume edited in June 1969 by the Red Guards of the New Hangzhou University, the entry on the Ninth Party Congress was severely truncated, the biographies on Mao, Lin, Zhou, Jiang Qing, and others were dropped entirely, and the section on ‘People’ was reduced to a section on ‘Counterrevolutionaries’.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Many entries in the *Handbook* were of course swiftly out of step with political developments. No new edition followed. By the mid-1970s, other lexicographical projects, including work for the *Cihai*, were making progress again. In the meantime, some readers took it into their own hands to fix errors in the handbook, crossing out sections or cutting entire entries out with scissors. When Lin Biao fell from grace, his biographical entry and any quotations were expunged. Chen Boda disappeared from many copies. Some handbook owners even deleted, in later years, the vicious entries on victims of the Cultural Revolution such as Peng Zhen, Luo Ruiqing, and Lu Dingyi. Compared to the different editions of encyclopaedic dictionaries of the 1950s consulted for this article, which showed very few, if any, signs of corrections and alterations, these were common across copies of the *Handbook*. Policing words and their meanings had become everyone’s task.

A myriad of copies of all of these encyclopaedic dictionaries can be found on markets and for sale online today. People kept their reference works. This was the final and most difficult-to-resolve conundrum of lexicography: the shelf life of a dictionary far outstrips that of most other publications. As some memoirs recount, Chunming’s *Dictionary of New Terms*, for example, was a readers’ favourite even after the Cultural Revolution.¹¹⁵ Encyclopaedic dictionaries were products of the ‘lexicographical business’ of their time, but such memoir snippets suggest that they shaped information in the People’s Republic of China long after publication ceased, adding, year after year, more—and often undesired—variety to the world of knowledge under socialism.

¹¹⁴ Hongweibing xin Hangzhou daxue [Red Guards of the New Hangzhou University] (ed.), *Dubao Shouce* [*Newspaper Readers’ Handbook*], n.p., Hangzhou, 1969.

¹¹⁵ He Yueming, ‘Jianchi qiu suo zhenli de xinsheng jilu’, *Dushu zhaji*, vol. 9, 1989, p. 33.

The smaller story of single-volume encyclopaedic dictionaries raises larger questions about the control of information, political discourse, and knowledge under Communist rule. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the new publishing authorities did successfully increase state control of the country's publishing industry. By 1953, publishing was effectively coordinated through the New China Bookstore and centralized distribution outlets. Large new state publishers were in operation and many private publishers were merged in joint state–privately owned enterprises. Remaining private publishers, as the history of Chunming Press showed, could be permitted to continue operations, but they were subjected to increasing state control, paper rationing, and censorship.¹¹⁶ State authorities controlled the creation of official terms that became central to participating in public life in 'liberated' China. Controlling their interpretation, dissemination, and long-term circulation, however, was much more difficult.

The propaganda ideal, of workers and peasants reading official newspapers, state directives, Mao's works, or the *Quotations*, discussing their content, absorbing their ideas, and then living their life accordingly obscures an entire publishing branch—among private, state, and military publishing sectors—devoted solely to making sense of said documents. Encyclopaedic dictionaries assumed a role in the explanation, contextualization, and thus interpretation of the terms of life in socialist China. From the early days of Chinese Communist Party rule, such reference works were players in the creation of a new epistemology for New China and they were incorporated into chains of propaganda and information transmission for those who consulted their entries or, not uncommon, read them from cover to cover.

It was perhaps not accidental that private publishers pioneered socialist lexicography about 'new terms' and 'new knowledge' at a scale situated between small handbooks and large multi-volume compendia. They had the experience and a network of intellectuals, many of whom had a May Fourth inspired dedication to educate and relay knowledge. Devoted urban customers trusted and bought their publications. Finally, they did not have to clear publications in a long process of communication, confirmation, and control at different levels of the publishing and censorship hierarchy. The price for this flexibility was the continuous possibility of being criticized and having the publishing

¹¹⁶ Volland, 'The control of the media', pp. 227–86.

license revoked. This served state publishing authorities well at first. It was easier to criticize private publishers, but let some of them continue their work to serve customer demands, rather than taking on these lexicographical projects and dealing with the drawn-out process of developing stable meanings for ‘new terms’ at a time when words and their meanings swiftly changed.

By the late 1950s, this was no longer possible, and the example of the *Dictionary of New Knowledge* illustrates some of the difficulties of state lexicography. New terms became more difficult to explain and canonize in dictionary format because propaganda promises increasingly diverged from people’s lived experiences. Entries on diplomatic relations made this most obvious, but concealed behind these discussions were terminological and epistemological dilemmas that were more comprehensive and more difficult to resolve. The editors of the *Handbook* then turned this logic upside down and, by adopting this format and avoiding the label ‘encyclopaedia’, they circumvented the problem of knowledge stability. This was all about changing and flexible knowledge. Soon, however, they too expanded again and again to correct, embellish, and expand meanings, falling prey to the same dilemmas that their predecessors had faced. They called for continuous revisions, but those who tried to help reprinting and even editing the *Handbook*, were sharply criticized for selfish and ‘private’ actions, bringing us unintentionally full circle back to the dichotomy of ‘private’ versus ‘state’ lexicography that had already marked discussions of the early 1950s. Encyclopaedic compilation was a difficult process at all times, and certainly for any state attempting to do so, but, under a socialist or authoritarian regime, the gap between state claims to knowledge canonization and the simultaneous inability to provide a definitive set of knowledge to be canonized was particularly severe.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ B. Kassof, ‘A book of socialism: Stalinist culture and the first edition of the “Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia”’, *Kritika*, vol. 6, 2004, pp. 55–95.