

The ordering systems used in Chinese reference works

Since the alphabet was only introduced to China during the 20th century, it should not be surprising that the organization of encyclopedias and language reference works in China presents itself differently from what users of occidental Lexica are used to. Most often used was one of three systems of ordering lemmas in reference works: firstly there was a system of logical groups of lemma belonging together, secondly there was a system ordering Chinese characters according to graphical elements analyzed beforehand and thirdly lexica were arranged according to the reading or pronunciation of a syllable.

The organization in logical groups is based on an epistemological framework generally accepted throughout society, and which is usually called an *ordo essendi*. Comparable to European encyclopedic works from the Middle Ages or Early Modern Times, the Chinese *ordo essendi* follows the same principle, while of course the epistemological base is different and so is the system of logic derived from it. This system is used in encyclopedic works most of all and it dates back to the thesaurus *Erya* from the late 3rd century BC.

The graph-analyzing method, derived in principle from the dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* from the 1st century AD groups lemmas according to semantic or pseudo-semantic elements of characters, thus according to recurring graphical elements that can be found in several characters. Historically misinterpreted as etymological roots, these graphical elements called «radicals» function as semantic markers for groups of words and they indicate a semantic field. This type of arrangement in dictionaries is most commonly used in China today, as it has several advantages.

The third system, created in the 5th century, groups characters according to their final or rhyme. This system was only created after cultural exchange with another civilization using written characters, because only then did the Chinese realize, that characters are not only carrier of meaning, but also of phonological information.

In my presentation I will introduce the three systems shortly and discuss their relative strength or weakness. As for the topic of sign language special attention should be paid to the dictionaries arranged according to «radicals», because these touch on the topic of semantic hyperonymie, because the semantical markers suggest a categorization of the world which is much more differentiated than the epistemological approach, but because the information is given in the character itself, it appears much less arbitrary than the *ordo essendi* of encyclopedias.