

## **The “Grand Ricci” published after fifty two years of work, and now the sequel!**

December 2001 saw the publication of the “Grand Ricci”, a giant Chinese-French dictionary, after more than fifty-two years of work.

Co-published by Desclée de Brower, this work contains 13,500 single characters and 300,000 Chinese expressions, spanning seven volumes and 9,000 pages. The Grand Ricci is an unparalleled publication: covering more than 3,000 years of history of the Chinese language; the origins of its script, and extending up to the most contemporary usage. Specialized vocabulary is organized into 180 branches of knowledge: astronomy, Buddhism, medicine, finance, etc.

Following the publication of the Petit Ricci in 1976 (6,000 characters and 50,000 expressions) and the Dictionnaire des Caractères Chinois (13,500 single characters) at the end of 1999, the Grand Ricci is the culmination of a joint effort by the Ricci Institutes of Paris and Taipei. More than 200 specialists helped prepare and edit this work, including some of the leading names in French sinology and Chinese lexicography. Public and private sponsors, including French and Taiwanese ministries, were instrumental in the preparation of this work.

### **The Dictionary story**

A Hungarian Jesuit whose name is known by all China watchers - Fr Laszlo Ladany (1914-1990), was the founder of "China News Analysis", a newsletter which, for decades, was the most insightful source on the Beijing regime. Another Hungarian Jesuit deserves the same fame as Fr Ladany. Fr Eugene Zsamar, who died in 1967, was the instigator of the most daring enterprise in Chinese lexicography attempted by foreigners during this century - an enterprise which started officially in Macao in 1949 and reached its fulfilment fifty two years later.

Fr Zsamar's dream was to gather a team capable of compiling an encyclopedic polyglot dictionary in five languages: Hungarian, English, French, Spanish and Latin. Although Jesuits had compiled numberless dictionaries during their 400 hundred years of presence in China, there was a need for a systematic work on every aspect of Chinese language and culture. The initial stage of the project was soon disrupted by the political chaos in China. Father Zsamar took refuge in Macau. In 1949, a French Jesuit Father Deltour joined him and enriched the basic research material with some 200 dictionaries or related works which he had brought with him. The first two language teams were Hungarian and French. During the autumn of 1951, the Spanish team was organized. Later on, at the request of Chinese seminaries, a Spanish Father and an Italian became engaged in

the compilation of the Latin section. The English team joined last of all, in 1952, when the team had already settled in Taichung, central Taiwan.

Father Zsamar had envisioned a dictionary that would cover the whole of Chinese history and culture. For this reason he selected as a reference all the material included in the three most well known Chinese dictionaries. Together, these three works included about 16,000 single characters and 180,000 compounds. It took two years to categorize all this basic information on cards. With the help of thirty collaborators, they added all the possible translations in French, German, Spanish and Hungarian. This work amounted to an inventory with two million entries. Soon, a French Jesuit, Fr Yves Raguin, succeeded Fr Zsamar, whose health was deteriorating, as director of the project. Fr Raguin was to continue in this capacity until 1996 (he died in December 1998).

Father Zsamar had calculated that, in order to achieve optimal efficiency, every member of the team could translate 300 items a day. This was easier said than done. Most of the characters and compounds had many meanings, some up to twenty and even more. The older dictionaries were consulted to enlarge the body of vocabulary in the field of natural sciences, Chinese literature and modern language. The proofreading took place on a rotating basis. As soon as the French bureau had finished its translation work, it was given to another bureau and if necessary corrections were suggested. Afterwards it was returned to the French bureau. The translation work was then followed by a further revision.

At the same time, the lexicographers were trying to secure funding from different foundations, mostly in the United States, with no success. Nobody wanted to invest money in a project which would end, almost certainly, in failure. Financial difficulties, deaths, the departure of many Jesuits towards other apostolic fields hampered considerably the completion of the project. Soon, the French section was the only one where a sizeable number of Jesuits and collaborators were able to continue the work. The English section was dissolved after the unexpected death of its leader, Father Thomas Carroll, an archeologist. Having heard that prehistoric artifacts had been found on Lamma Island in Hong Kong, he went there to explore on August 28, 1964. The next day the police found his body on the beach, near a cliff. Most probably he had died of sun stroke.

In 1964, Fr Raguin created the Taipei Ricci Institute, in order to give an institutional basis to the dictionary project and to include it in a broader range of research programmes. After a few years, other Ricci Institutes were created in Paris and San Francisco. During the seventies, medium-sized Chinese-French, Chinese-Spanish and Chinese-Hungarian dictionaries were published by authors of the Institutes, their material based on selections taken from the archives gathered over the years. However, it was the computer's coming of age which saved the whole

project, as it helped to organize and treat the data in a systematic way. It helped to make the data circulate between Taipei and Paris, where sinologists revised the material gathered by former generations of Jesuit scholars.

In December 1999, the etymologic part of the Dictionary was published in Paris - a Chinese-French dictionary of "single characters", i.e. of the ideograms which constitute the basis of the Chinese language. The study included approximately 13,500 characters, including 2,000 characters present at the origin of writing - the "oracular" inscriptions found on tortoise shells and oxen's shoulder blades (starting in 1500 BC) and the shapes engraved on bronze vessels (Chou dynasty.) The study then presented the successive meanings of the characters given in Classical Books. There exists no equivalent of this work in any European language.

But these 3,600 pages were only the prelude to the magnum opus, the "Grand Ricci", published at the end of 2001. Covering some 200 branches of knowledge (astronomy, aeronautics, chemistry, biology, finance, law, philosophy, art, literature...), the Grand Ricci contains all the single characters of the Ricci dictionary of single characters, and 300,000 compounds.

An association has been constituted in order to supervise the follow-up of the work: a shift to the pinyin romanization system, specialized lexicons, commercial contracts; maintenance of the database...

The Ricci Institutes and Association are now embarking on a CD-rom version. The CD-rom is indeed indispensable. It will enable:

- a reduced price, thereby ensuring that all persons interested in Chinese language and civilization can have access to the Grand Ricci;
- a much more practical tool (the paper version comprises 7 volumes and weighs 15 kilos);
- a presentation using pinyin romanization (or choice by the user of Wade or pinyin);
- the possibility to update the dictionary with the issuance of further releases through a data base and a proper interface.

A funding drive is now under way. Programming of the CD-rom has been launched in 2004.