ABSTRACT

In the ancient Chinese, a character (字) generally corresponds to a morpheme, as well as to a syllable. No notion of word (词) has significantly been noticed.

However, in the modern Chinese, most lexical items are bisyllabic. In the 1950s, prompted by the desire to introduce an alphabetic writing system, word-hood became the centre of many discussions.

Linguists attempted to define the word-hood in Chinese. Among these, the semantic approach, the phonological approach, the morphological approach and the approach by multiple criteria have been adopted but failed. These approaches are carefully studied, presented and criticized. Improvements to these methods are also suggested (Chp.2 & Chp.3).

Past research shows that boundary between words and phrases in Chinese are difficult to define, hence exists the notion of 'Quasi-word'. The nature of 'Quasi-word' is discussed and its existence explained (Chp.4).

In this Academic Exercise, It is found that word in Chinese is not an unified construct throughout grammar. It should rather be defined as certain domains within which rules of different language components may apply. For this purpose, three notions of word shall be identified, namely the
morphological word, the syntactic word and the phonological word. These three notions of word are independent of one another, matching among themselves may not and need not be perfect. Methods and criteria, other than those proposed by past researchers, by which the three notions of word are defined, are formulated (Chp.4).

It concludes that the notion of word should be defined along different linguistic domains. Past research was unable to successfully define the word-hood in Chinese mainly because they failed to recognize this.