SUMMARY

This eight-chapter thesis attempts to provide a comprehensive study of "liangci", or the Chinese Classifier (refer to as CL hereinafter) on three fundamental aspects: the history, the grammar and the rhetoric. Other pertaining areas were also dealt with in depth wherever necessary.

To date, extensive research of its kind has been found lacking. Articles on CL increasingly emerged in a scattered manner in the mid-seventies. They mainly address problems on the more prominent grammatical phenomena and followed by discussion on cognitive semantics. These articles basically focus on the nominal classifier. The present study, initially based on these diverse pieces of work, aims at extending the scope of research as well as discarding the prejudice against the verbal classifier, in an effort to reach a rather more convincing analysis.

In a close examination of the historical evolution, the study attests the emergence of the nominal classifier in the early medieval, and that of the verbal classifier in the middle medieval, all of which attained full grammatical status by the late medieval. With particular reference to the word order, the study explores, against popular assertion, that the present order of "Q-CL-N" (Q as Quantifier, N as noun) is not merely a displacement from the initial "N-Q-CL". As for the verbal classifier, it originated from the order "V-(N)-NUM-N" (where V is verb, NUM is numeral). This is significant in the development of the nature and functions of the CL both in grammar and rhetoric.

In unveiling the subtle grammatical intricacies of the CL, the study delves into the following segments. At the morphological level, issues investigated include bound features, reduplication, the internal structure of the CL and compounding of the CL with members of other grammatical classes. At the syntactic level, issues discussed include the restriction posed by CL and its impact on certain
sentence constructions, the positions of CL and their analyses, infixation in CL phrases, and the CL as a referential device. Inter- as well as intra-lingua comparison is used as support to the findings. The findings from contrastive analysis conclude that the CL should be treated as an independent grammatical class in Mandarin Chinese. It has distinctive features of its own.

However, the CL is more than just a grammatical obligatory element as in other classifier languages. Rhetorically, it plays an essential role from right at the beginning. In exploring this, the study employs semantic analysis to survey the collocations and syntagmatic flow of meaning resulting from the association of the CL and the noun. The findings shed lights on the choice and application of the CL to the noun that such variation is not based on the inherent characteristics of the noun or simply idiomatic, but more often than not, reflecting the perceptions of the individual user, cultural or otherwise.

The study also tactfully deals with dialectal comparison, an area that researchers have yet to pay further attention. It shows the different evolution of CL in Mandarin Chinese and in Southern dialects which possibly preserve certain obsolete usages of the archaic Chinese or literary expression.

Last but not least, the CL at the grammatical level is apparently developing in the direction towards simplicity, but not at the direction in favour of replacement by "ge". The study illustrates that "ge" is genuinely not a general classifier or "elixir" for simplifying the use of classifiers as commonly regarded. At the rhetorical level, the usage of CL is highly variable and flexible within semantic limits. In other words, one should not overlook or underestimate the worthy and fascinating stylistic features of the CL.