ABSTRACT

This honours thesis explores the origin and development of the Chinese heterograph (Yi-Xing-Ci 异 形 词) and seeks to identify the problems it causes. The aim of this study is to examine how Chinese heterograph emerges and what steps can be taken to standardize it.

A small-scale survey was conducted to analyse the familiarity of local language users towards heterograph, followed by three illustrations to facilitate an in-depth analysis.

This study gains some significant results: Firstly, it reveals that Chinese heterograph emerges in various ways. The main causes are the usage of the variant form of the Chinese characters, the substitution of synonymous morphemes and homonymous morphemes, the inconsistency of translated lexicons, the adoption of Tong Jia Zi (通 假 字) and Gu Jin Zi (古今字). Secondly, there are several measurements that one can use to standardize Chinese heterograph. The principle of “common practice” should be taken into prior consideration, as well as the “accuracy of meaning”, “accuracy of pronunciation”, principle of “simplicity” and “serialization”.

Finally, the study concludes that Chinese heterograph, being an excrecence in the language must be properly dealt with. Its existence should be acknowledged and the work of standardization must continue.