

# Major Issues in Compiling Multilingual Kanji Dictionaries

by Jack Halpern

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## Abstract

To satisfy the urgent need for high-quality Japanese study materials in non-English languages, The CJK Dictionary Institute has embarked on a project to create a series of foreign language editions of *The Kodansha Kanji Learner's Dictionary (KKLD)*, a popular kanji learner's dictionary that has become a standard reference work in Japanese language education. *The Kanji Learner's Dictionary Series (KLD)* is an ongoing project to translate a subset of *KKLD* into some of the major languages of the world.

Kanji dictionaries traditionally suffer from shortcomings rarely seen in works of other major languages. These include archaic headwords and senses, an overly prescriptive approach, user-unfriendly design, and inadequate sense ordering.

The aim of this presentation is to examine several key issues in pedagogical lexicography both from the lexicographer's and from the kanji learner's points of view, focusing on compilation and design innovations that increase learner usability. Based on the author's several decades of experience in compiling learner's dictionaries and in studying 15 languages (fluent in ten), this presentation focuses on several key issues that directly impact the pedagogical efficacy of kanji dictionaries.

Firstly, sense division and sense ordering must take into account the complex interlingual equivalences between the source language and target language. For logographic systems like Chinese and Japanese, **logico-semantic ordering** that strikes an optimal balance between the principles of meaning structure and equivalence structure achieves the highest pedagogical benefit, while frequency-based and chronological ordering may be counterproductive.

Secondly, Chinese characters form a network of interrelated parts that function as an integrated system. That is, single characters are combined to generate numerous compounds from a stock of basic components. Of special benefit to learners is an entry structure that allows them to grasp the *logographic characteristics* of each character and the **interrelatedness between senses**. This presentation describes compilation techniques for presenting senses in a manner that makes the **semantic transparency** and **morphological productivity** of each character clear.

Thirdly, a valuable feature is the **core meaning**, a concise keyword that defines the most dominant meaning of each character. The core meanings are followed by accurate **character meanings** that clearly show how a few thousand basic building blocks are combined to form countless compound words. The compounds are grouped around the core meaning in a logically structured manner that allows them to be perceived as an integrated unit.

Fourthly, the **System of Kanji Indexing by Patterns** (SKIP) enables users to locate characters as quickly and as accurately as in alphabetical dictionaries. Since the system is quickly mastered and easily used, SKIP can be used as a convenient lookup tool by learners at all levels.

Thanks to these features, Japanese learners around the globe have quick access, in their own language, to a wealth of information on kanji that is linguistically accurate, easy to use, and carefully adapted to their practical needs.

# The Kanji Learner's Dictionary Series

Editor-in-Chief Jack Halpern  
The CJK Dictionary Institute

## The KLD Series

Millions of people are learning Japanese in some 15,000 schools and institutes around the world. Although the number of such learners in non-English-speaking countries has been growing rapidly – far outpacing growth in Anglophone countries – these learners often rely on kanji dictionaries and other learning materials written in English rather than in their native language.

小 ▶ **PEQUENO**  
ショウ ちい(さい) こ- お- ㊦ ささ

0002	小	Jōyō-1	S3-3-0	C0034
1-1-2	42	F0035	㊦0007	U5C0F

1 2 3

COMPOSTOS

① [também prefixo] [sentido original] (menor em tamanho, extensão ou quantidade) **PEQUENO, pouco, menor, curto, minúsculo, miniatura, diminuto**

小国 しょうこく pequena nação, potência menor

小説 しょうせつ romance, história, narrativa de ficção

小額 しょうがく pequena soma (de dinheiro)

小アジア しょうあじあ

Portuguese Edition

小 ▶ **KECIL**  
ショウ ちい(さい) こ- お- ㊦ ささ

0002	小	Jōyō-1	S3-3-0	C0034
1-1-2	42	F0035	㊦0007	U5C0F

1 2 3

KATA MAJEMUK

① [juga awalan] [makna asal] (kurang dalam ukuran, tingkat, atau kuantitas) **KECIL, sedikit, minor, pendek, mungil, miniatur, renik**

小国 しょうこく negara kecil

小説 しょうせつ novel, cerita, fiksi

小額 しょうがく nilai yang kecil (untuk mata uang)

小アジア しょうあじあ Asia Kecil

小規模 しょうきぼ skala kecil

小東京 しょうとうきょう Tokyo kecil, miniatur

Indonesian Edition

To satisfy the urgent need for high-quality Japanese study materials in non-English languages, **The CJK Dictionary Institute** has embarked on a project to create a series of foreign language editions of **The Kodansha Kanji Learner's Dictionary**, the most successful kanji learner's dictionary ever published. The **Kanji Learner's Dictionary Series**, or KLD Series for short, offers this standard reference work in the major languages of the world, with particular focus on languages used in countries that have a large number of Japanese language learners.

# Jack Halpern

**Jack Halpern** (春遍雀來), CEO of **The CJK Dictionary Institute**, is a lexicographer by profession. For sixteen years was engaged in the compilation of the *New Japanese-English Character Dictionary*, and as a research fellow at Showa Women's University (Tokyo), he was editor-in-chief of several kanji dictionaries for learners, which have become standard reference works.



Jack Halpern, who has lived in Japan over 40 years, was born in Germany and has lived in six countries including France, Brazil, Japan and the United States. An avid polyglot who specializes in Japanese and Chinese lexicography, he has studied 15 languages (speaks nine fluently) and has devoted several decades to the study of linguistics and lexicography.

Jack Halpern has published over twenty books and dozens of articles and academic papers, mostly on the Japanese writing system and CJK information processing, has given over 600 public lectures on Japanese language and culture, and has presented several dozen papers at international conferences.

On a lighter note, Jack Halpern loves the sport of unicycling. Founder and long-time president of the International Unicycling Federation, he has promoted the sport worldwide and is a director of the Japan Unicycling Association. Currently, his passion is playing the quena and improving his Chinese, Esperanto and Arabic.

## The CJK Dictionary Institute



The CJK Dictionary Institute, Inc. specializes in Chinese, Japanese and Korean lexicography. CJKI is headed by Jack Halpern, editor-in-chief of the *New Japanese-English Character Dictionary* and various other dictionaries that have become standard reference works for studying Japanese. CJKI is one of the world's prime sources for CJK and Arabic dictionary data, and is contributing to CJK information processing technology with its high-quality lexical resources.

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