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“All the aids which a beginner needs”: James Summers’ (1828-1891) research on Chinese grammar

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Chapter 7. Classifiers²²⁹

Classifiers are a special word class in Chinese, which was noticed by Western scholars from the beginning of their research on Chinese. This chapter is dedicated to classifiers, with a focus on Summers' terminology for this category, his ideas towards their semantic and syntactic functions, and the source and influence of his ideas.

7.1 A general introduction to “classifiers”

In Mandarin, numerals cannot be placed before nouns directly. For example, **yī píngguǒ**—蘋果 ‘one apple’ and **yī miàn**—麵 ‘one noodle’ are ungrammatical. Some element needs to intervene,²³⁰ so expressions *yí ge píngguǒ* 一個蘋果 ‘an apple’ and *yì wǎn miàn* 一碗麵 ‘a bowl of noodles’ are thus formed. These intervening elements, which are placed between numerals and nouns, are collectively referred to as *liàngcí* 量詞 in Chinese (Hé Jié 2008, p. 7) and are generally translated as “classifiers” in publications in English. However, this class of elements can be subdivided into measure expressions²³¹ and sortal classifiers.²³²

Measure expressions exist in all languages (Croft 1994, pp. 151–152; Wáng Lì 2004 [1956], p. 272; Zhang 2007, p. 49; Her and Hsieh 2010, p. 528; Cheng and Sybesma 2015, p. 1523). They “create units” and “provide a measure for counting” (Croft 1994, p. 151, p. 162). Measure expressions are further subdivided into measures, containers, aggregates, and so on (Li and Thompson 1981, p. 107; Sybesma 2017a, p. 621). Some examples of such measure expressions in Chinese include: *jīn* 斤 ‘pound’ in *liǎng jīn niúròu* 兩斤牛肉 ‘two pounds of beef’; *píng* 瓶 ‘bottle’ in *yì píng shuǐ* 一瓶水 ‘a bottle of water’; and *qún* 群 ‘flock’ in *yì qún yáng* 一群羊 ‘a flock of sheep’. Sortal classifiers designate the natural unit of count nouns and reveal the inherent and permanent features of the objects to which the nouns refer (Croft 1994, p. 163; Allan 1977, p. 114, p. 304; Del. Gobbo 2014, p. 28). For example, *ge* 個 in *yí ge píngguǒ* 一個蘋果 ‘an apple’ refers to the natural unit of apples. This is a fundamental difference

²²⁹ A modified version of this chapter has been translated into Chinese and accepted by *International History of Chinese Language*.

²³⁰ For a possible explanation, see Sybesma (2007, p. 240).

²³¹ Different scholars use different terms to refer to “measure expressions”, for example, numeral pseudo-classifiers (Croft 1994, p. 152), mass-classifiers/massifiers (Cheng and Sybesma 1998, p. 3) and measure words (Chappell and Peyraube 2014, p. 123). Here the term “measure expressions” is adopted from Cheng and Sybesma (2014).

²³² “Sortal classifiers” have different appellations, for example, count classifiers (Cheng and Sybesma 1998, p. 3), count-noun classifiers (Zhang 2007) and classifiers (Chappell and Peyraube 2014, p. 122). In this section, the term “sortal classifier” is adopted from Cheng and Sybesma (2014).

between sortal classifiers and measure expressions. While the former mentioned the unit that is part of the semantic denotation of the noun, the latter creates the unit for counting or measuring, as the above examples attest (Croft 1994, p. 151, p. 163).

The term “classifier” reveals one of the functions of sortal classifiers, i.e., to classify nouns according to the inherent semantic meaning of nouns, as mentioned above (Sybesma 2017a, p. 622). Generally, the criteria of classification include the material, shape, consistency, and size of the objects to which nouns refer (Allan 1977, pp. 297–298; Aikhenvald 2000, p. 2). When it comes to Chinese classifiers, the following features play a role:

1. physical shape—for example, the classifier *zhāng* 張 is used for things that have flat surfaces, like *sān zhāng zhuōzi* 三張桌子 ‘three tables’;
2. natural attributes—for example, the classifier *zhī* 隻 is generally used for animals, like *yì zhī niǎo* 一隻鳥 ‘a bird’;
3. cultural attributes—for instance, the classifier *jiàn* 件 can be used for clothes, as in *liǎng jiàn máoyī* 兩件毛衣 ‘two jumpers’;
4. functional attributes—for example, *bǎ* 把 is used for things which have handles, like *yì bǎ dāo* 一把刀 ‘a knife’.²³³

Among the above, the object’s physical shape and functional attributes are the main criteria in Mandarin (Cheng and Sybesma 2015, p. 1524).

Furthermore, classifiers can help disambiguate ambiguous nouns because each classifier designates a different unit. For example, the noun *kè* 課 has two lexical meanings, namely ‘lesson’ and ‘course’. Yet in *yì jié kè* 一節課 ‘a (CL- segment) lesson’ and *yì mén kè* 一門課 ‘a (CL- subject) course’, the respective meanings of *kè* are clear.²³⁴

In some languages, there is a general classifier, which can substitute most of the specific classifiers (Aikhenvald 2000, p. 98). In Mandarin, *ge* is often taken as the general classifier. *Ge* can collocate with different types of nouns, such as those that refer to human beings or that do not have specific classifiers of their own (Myers 2000, p. 197, p. 199; Crisma, Marten and Sybesma 2011, p. 286, p. 289; Cheng and Sybesma 2015, p. 1524). Therefore, *ge* is both the sortal classifier for some nouns, such as *rén* 人 ‘man’, and the general classifier. As the general classifier, it is also often used by “default”. In other words, when grammar requires the presence

²³³ These different classes are summarized by Sybesma (2017a, p. 622), and the individual examples are from Lǚ Shūxiāng (1999, p. 653, p. 676, p. 299, p. 52).

²³⁴ This paragraph is based on Allan (1977, p. 290), Zhang (2007, pp. 52–53) and Del. Gobbo (2014, pp. 40–42).

of a classifier and one does not know which classifier to choose, one goes with *ge* (Erbaugh 1986, p. 406; 2002, p. 61; 2006, p. 44; Sybesma 2007, p. 241; Sybesma 2017a, p. 621). What has also been observed is that when a noun appears for the first time, a specific classifier is used and when it reappears in the same context, *ge* may be used as a substitute (Erbaugh 2002, p. 47; 2006, p. 44; Cheng and Sybesma 2015, p. 1524).

To conclude, sortal classifiers (insofar as they are distinguished from measure expressions) have a very close relationship with both nouns and numerals. On the one hand, they classify nouns via the lexical meaning of the nouns, which is their semantic function. On the other hand, grammatically, they are obligatory when nouns appear together with numerals, demonstratives, e.g., *zhè* 这 ‘this’, or certain quantifiers, e.g., *zhěng* 整 ‘whole’ (Allan 1977, p. 286; Li and Thompson 1981, p. 104; Del. Gobbo 2014, p. 26). Sortal classifiers generally occur contiguously to numerals, demonstratives, and quantifiers (Grinevald 2004, p. 1019).

7.2 Summers’ research on the Chinese classifiers

Summers’ term for measure expressions and sortal classifiers is “appositive”. He wrote about these elements in his *Lecture*, *Handbook*, *Rudiments* and *Repository*²³⁵. He also briefly introduced the Japanese classifiers in the second volume of his *Repository* (Summers 1967 [1864b], pp. 151–158).

7.2.1 Classifier, appositive and noun

In this section, I explain why Summers employed the term “appositive” and analyse the function of cataloguing the classifiers in his works.

7.2.1.1 Why “appositive”?

Summers stated that there are too many homophones in Chinese, implying that they lead to ambiguity in the vernacular. Several syllables are hence combined to form larger and distinct words. As shown above, he divided nouns into three types according to their morphological structure, namely monosyllabic primitives, derivatives formed by primitives and formatives, and compounds formed by compositing primitives (cf. Chapter 5). The corresponding noun and the element now termed “classifier” form one nominal compound, according to Summers:

To obviate [ambiguity], when speaking, the Chinese unite words of a similar meaning to strengthen and determine each other, and give

²³⁵ For articles in *Repository*, cf. 1967 [1865a] (pp. 401–408) and 1967 [1864b] (pp. 151–158).

clearness to their idea. They also have a class of formatives, and another of classifiers,²³⁶ by which they give a definiteness to the word they employ. (1853a, p. 19)

This quotation indicates that Summers advocated that Chinese classifiers have their own meaning, related to the meaning of the corresponding nouns.

He further argued that classifiers and nouns are in an “appositional relation”. Detailed examples and analysis of the “appositional relation” in his works can be found in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. Here, only two quotations are given for clarification:

- a. Here one syllable explains the other, and means the same thing; the syllables are in apposition. (1864a, p. 49)
- b. The appositional relation, when synonymes or words conveying accessory notions are joined together. (1863a, p. 41)

Summers argued that classifiers share very similar meanings with their nouns, and therefore should be referred to as “appositives” (1863a, p. 47; 1864a, pp. 49–50). He mentioned—but did not adopt—the terms “classifier”, “numeral” (1864a, pp. 49–50), and “numerative” (1863a, p. 47). His logic seems to be that these terms do not reveal the role that they play in the compounds they thus form (1864a, p. 50).²³⁷ When he delivered his inaugural address (i.e., 1853a), Summers employed the term “classifier” (1853a, p. 19, p. 25), which revealed that his own opinion on the relationship between these elements and nouns had not yet matured. Ten years later, with the publication of his *Handbook*, “appositive” became the only term that he advocated using. Consequently, I use “appositive” from now on in the discussion of Summers’ works.

7.2.1.2 Classifying nouns

Summers distinguished different types of appositional relationships.²³⁸ Appositives and their nouns are “specific and generic terms”, in which the appositive is the generic term and the noun with which it is associated is the specific term (1864a, p. 50). Moreover, in his *Handbook*, he provided a “List of appositives, with the nouns and classes of nouns to which they are united in composition” (1863a, p. 47, emphasis added). Summers alluded to the fact that one of the

²³⁶ This is one of the few cases when Summers employed the term “classifier” instead of “appositive”.

²³⁷ The original text reads: “none of these terms seem quite appropriate, and the designation appositive is here applied to them, as being more in accordance with the part which they play in compounds” (1864a, p. 50).

²³⁸ For example, he said: “this apposition may vary. The syllables may hold the following relations: they may be, (1) a repetition, (2) synonymes, (3) specific and generic terms, (4) the commencement of a series” (*Rudiments*, p. 49).

functions of appositives is to classify nouns.

In his *Handbook*, Summers provided two lists of appositives, including sixteen most and thirty-two less frequently used ones, though in *Rudiments*, only the former sixteen are listed. In the list of the sixteen frequently used appositives, he stated that *ge* is the most common, and that it can be used with almost all objects, men and things (1863a, p. 47; 1864a, p. 50). He also stated that *tiáo* 條 is used “with long things”, *zhī* 隻 “with names of *animals, ships, and things that move*”, *zuò* 座 for “of things *fixed* in a place” and *bǎ* 把 for “things that may be held” (1863a, pp. 47–48). These describe the shape, natural attribution, and function of their respective nouns. He made no explicit reference, however, to a system of classifying nouns according to these criteria; nor did he describe these criteria clearly. That the lack of analytic perspective of theoretical linguistic treatises, along with the many examples he provided, especially considering their frequency, demonstrates that Summers’ works contain features of didactic manuals.

When introducing the appositives, Summers compared them to measure expressions in German, English and other European languages, for example, *cup* in *cup of wine* or *glas* [sic] in *ein glas Wein* (1863a, p. 47; 1967 [1864b], p. 156). Summers wrote:

- a. Many measures of time, space, weight, &c., are used as appositives...e.g. 一擔米 [*yí dàn mǐ*] ‘a picul of rice’. (1863a, p. 115)
- b. Besides the above, many words are used as appositives, especially such words as express quantity of any kind, a collection or a class of objects. (1863a, p. 49)

This implies that for Summers the term “appositive” is a general term, which encompasses both “classifiers” and “measure expressions” as defined above. Summers stated that “the Chinese, in conversation, extend the use of such words to every object; they say, for example, ‘one handle fan’ for *a fan*, ‘one length road’ for *a road*” (1863a, p. 47). On the one hand, Summers suggested that Chinese people use appositives more extensively, applying them to every noun; on the other hand, he implied that appositives are not unique to Chinese or strange to Europeans. His method of explaining serves to limit potential alienation of the Chinese language and makes it sound accessible to European beginners.

7.2.2 Appositives and numerals

For Summers, appositives are more closely connected to nouns than to numerals. In fact, the term “appositive” makes his attitude clear:

The Chinese noun [...] requires one such syllable appropriate to its signification, to stand in apposition, as it were, and to form and embody the whole word. (1864a, p. 50)

Appositives and their corresponding nouns form a nominal compound, as mentioned above, and this compound is then linked to a numeral, according to Summers. He said that “appositives always belong to the noun itself and not to the numeral” (1864a, p. 52). This shows that Summers was familiar with the claim that appositives belong to numerals (see Section 7.3), an idea with which he appeared to be at odds.

The position of appositives was illustrated by Summers as follows:

The measure of a thing, as regards number, is denoted by the numeral being placed before the noun, with the proper appositive between them, or by placing the numeral and the appositive after the noun, thus *sān-pǐ-mà* or *mà-sān-pǐ* is ‘three horses’. (1863a, p. 114)

Summers presented both the [Numeral- Classifier- Noun] order and the [Noun- Numeral- Classifier] order. In the entire Pre-Qin period (before 221 BC), the [Numeral- Classifier] units were generally placed after the noun (Wáng Lì 2004 [1956], pp. 279–280). This order still co-exists in certain contexts in Modern Mandarin, such as enumerations in shopping lists and recipes (as suggested by Rint Sybesma in personal communication). But generally, the [Numeral- Classifier- Noun] is more commonly used in Modern Mandarin. Furthermore, Summers mentioned that appositives can be placed after nouns directly without numerals to form “general terms”, for example, *mǎpǐ* 馬匹 ‘horses’ and *chuánzhī* 船隻 ‘ships’ (1864a, p. 52). He did not expound. Indeed, few such examples exist in Chinese. Besides numerals, Summers noted that demonstratives also require the presence of an appositive (1863a, p. 64).²³⁹

Another interesting argument of Summers is worth mentioning here:

The Chinese seem to consider the bare word as indicative of plurality or generality, for they distinguish the *plural* only in extraordinary cases, and where it is absolutely necessary to do so; but they constantly mark the *singular*, which is itself a proof that the simple word modified is plural in meaning. [...] To define clearly the singular, *yī* or *yī- kó*, ‘one’ must be used before the noun with the appositive; e. g. *yī- kó-jīn* [一個人], ‘a man;’ [...] When a numeral above *one* is used it is unnecessary

²³⁹ The original text reads: “[T]he appositives will be required after these [demonstratives]. e.g.- [...] *nā-kó-jīn* [那個人] ‘that man’”.

to denote the plural in any other way than by that numeral which is used; e. g. *sān jīn* [三人] ‘three men’, *sí chē-mà* [四隻馬] ‘four horses’.

(1864a, pp. 54–56)

Here, Summers argued that the plurality of nouns is unmarked and the singular is marked in Chinese. In other words, bare nouns denote “plurality and generality”. However, he did not delve into the topic any further.

To conclude, in Summers’ view, it is the noun that requires the presence of the appositive in order to form a composite noun, and the entire composite noun further combines with a numeral or a demonstrative. Therefore, he employed the term “appositive” and considered appositives as a type of content word (Chén Wēi 2016).²⁴⁰ In Summers’ view, appositives are used to classify nouns, to clarify the meaning of nouns and disambiguate homonymic nouns by adding their own meaning to nouns. The distinction between sortal classifiers and measure expressions is not relevant to Summers’ work; his “appositive” is used for both.

7.3 Summers’ precursors and Chinese classifiers

The early missionaries tended to employ the term “numeral” for classifiers, which can be traced back to the earliest extant Chinese grammar *Arte de la lengua Chio Chiu* from the early seventeenth century (Klötter 2011a, p. 74). Chappell and Peyraube attributed the tradition of using the term “numeral” to “the Spanish missionary linguistic tradition” since this was normally the term used by the early Spanish missionaries (2014, p. 126). As early as 1620/1621, classifiers were recorded as a special word class in Chinese with the name “specific numerals” (Gianninoto 2014a, p. 139; Chappell and Peyraube 2014, p. 124). This Spanish tradition was adopted by many sinologists whose works were referred to by Summers (for instance, Morrison 1815a, p. 37; Abel-Rémusat 1822, p. 50; Gonçalves 1829, p. 49 and Callery 1841, pars secunda, p. 42). Gonçalves (1829, p. 131) indicated that classifiers are a subcategory of numerals. This might be one of the reasons why the term “numeral” was employed by Gonçalves. The other reason might be that these scholars considered their grammatical function to be essential. For example, Morrison stated clearly that “they are used in numbering” (1815a, p. 37). Therefore “numeral” was the term he used, although he introduced these elements in the section on nouns.

Although Morrison himself insisted on the term “numeral” for these elements, he noted their strong connection with nouns. He stated that “the numeral has an allusion to some quality

²⁴⁰ There is another conclusion: Summers’ research did not include measure expressions used in the verbal domain (Chén Wēi 2016). However, verbal classifiers apparently are not Summers’ concern at all.

or circumstance of the noun” (1815a, p. 37). Williams subsequently claimed in his *Easy Lessons in Chinese* (1842a, p. 123) that in view of Morrison’s words these elements should be called “classifiers”. Moreover, he argued that the appellation “numerals” is easy to be confused with the real numerals.²⁴¹ The term “classifier”, as opposed to “numeral”, indicates that these scholars emphasised the connection between classifiers and nouns.

Several scholars used various terms to refer to the elements that are called “classifiers” today. For example, Bazin (1856, p. 22) claimed that they should be called “numeral particles” as they appear in between numerals and enumerated nouns. Furthermore, they avoid the ambiguity of homonymic nouns and clarify the meaning of the nouns. Hence, they can also be regarded as “substantive auxiliaries” (p. 21, p. 66). These scholars noted different features of these types of words and did not consider one feature to be more important than another. However, as mentioned above, Summers did not use terms like “classifier” and “numeral”, but “appositive” instead.

Schott (1857) is the one who adopted a term similar (in fact, identical) to “appositive” in a book that was highly praised by Summers (1863a, p. x). His term is “apposition”,²⁴² which is also based on the relation between appositions and their corresponding nouns in Schott’s point of view. He expounded on classifiers in the section ‘Noun to noun (*Nennwort zum Nennworte*)’. However, this explanation was all Schott has written about appositions. In the section ‘Allness, majority and proportions (*Allheit, mehrheit und zahlverhältnisse* [sic])’, he interpreted appositions from the aspect of numbers and even applied the appellation “numeralwort [sic]”. Schott also mentioned that they accompany the noun (pp. 154–155). He therefore equivocated on the term “apposition” or “numeralwort” and did not seem to have given these elements much thought. We know that Summers read Schott’s book. Summers effectively adopted his idea of the “apposition” and integrated it into a more consistent and elaborate framework as shown above. Compared to Schott, Summers’ point of view of classifiers is more mature.

7.3.1 Summers’ precursors’ research on classifiers and nouns

Abel-Rémusat argued that classifiers do not have a meaning of their own (1822, p. 50). However, most of the works that Summers referred to generally state that these elements have some meaning, and that their meaning is related to the noun with which they collocate (Morrison 1815a, p. 37; Williams 1842a, p. 124; Edkins 1853, p. 75). Some scholars further

²⁴¹ However, he sometimes also called them “numerals”, for example in 1842a (p. 16).

²⁴² The original text reads: “Apposition findet auch statt in ausdrücken wie: 一杯酒 *ī pei çièu* ein becher wein; 羣羊 *ī kiün jang* eine herde schafe” (p. 56).

argued that they modify and clarify the meaning of the noun (Bayer 1730, p. 47; Gützlaff 1842, p. 37; Bazin 1856, p. 66). In vernacular Chinese, these elements are thought to be used together with homonymic nouns for disambiguating purposes (Williams 1842a, p. 148; Endlicher 1845, p. 174; Bazin 1856, p. 21).²⁴³

Furthermore, many scholars pointed out the classifying function of classifiers, such as Marshman (1814, p. 500), Endlicher (1845, p. 175), Edkins (1853, p. 88) and Schott (1857, p. 154). Among them, Marshman (1814, p. 500) and Gützlaff (1842, p. 33) wrote that these types of elements express “generic” meaning.

Regarding the criteria of the classification of nouns, Edkins (1853, pp. 88–90) argued that the collocation of “numeral particles”²⁴⁴ with nouns follows conventions only, though sometimes one may find some semantic connection between them. Others, like Morrison, Marshman, and Endlicher, presented the criteria by listing classifiers and their corresponding nouns: for example, they classified nouns according to their physical shape²⁴⁵ and their

²⁴³ An interesting example is Williams, who emphasised that a certain noun can be used together with more than one classifier in order to express a different meaning. For example, he noted that “*yat chéung tí lí t’ò* 一張地理圖 expresses a map in a loose sheet, and *yat fuk tí lí t’ò* 一幅地理圖 denotes the same mounted and suspended on a wall; *Yat chik mún* 一隻門 means the leaf of a door, and *yat tò mún* 一度門 means a gateway or door, the passage” (1842a, p. 124). These nuances were not noted in Summers’ works.

²⁴⁴ This is the term Edkins employed to refer to classifiers (1857, p. 133). He also used “substantive auxiliaries” as the term (1853, 1862, 1857). Edkins’ (1857) analysis of “numeral particles” was very detailed. He had his own special way of presenting them and explaining their function. His logic was that nouns are classified according to their lexical meaning. These different classes of nouns can be used together with different numeral particles. Therefore, numeral particles are combined with already realized nominal classes. Their semantic function, according to Edkins, is not to classify nouns, but probably to serve as indicators of different nominal classes. Edkins divided “numeral particles” into four types (1857, pp. 120–121):

(1) “Distinctive numeral particles”, which are used together with “appellative nouns”. Appellative nouns are “the names of individual objects, organisms, genera, and species”, for instance, *hé* 河 ‘river’ and *dāo zi* 刀子 ‘knife’ (1857, p. 108). The “distinctive numeral particles” do not have any lexical meaning (1857, p. 120), for example, *jiàn* 件 and *zhī* 隻. Edkins mentioned that distinctive numeral particles “have no meaning of their own” (p. 120) and they cannot be translated into European words. This means that they do not have counterparts in European languages semantically;

(2) “Significant numerals” that are “applied to material nouns”. The so-called “material nouns are the names of substances”, as *zhǐ* 紙 ‘paper’ and *ròu* 肉 ‘flesh’. “They refer to the material of which individual objects are composed” (1857, p. 108). Significant numerals can be further divided into indefinite and definite quantities. The latter refers to measures and weights, while the former refers to expressions like “a piece of”. Edkins stated that the difference between “distinctive numeral particles” and “significant numerals” is that the latter can be translated and the former cannot (1857, p. 126);

(3) “Collectives” are “names of groups into which appellative nouns are formed”, for example, *duì* 對 ‘a pair’;

(4) *Kind* or *manner* numerals “are applied to appellative nouns in the same manner as collectives”, for example, *yàng* 樣 in *sān yàng zuòfǎ* 三樣做法 ‘three ways of doing it’;

(5) Numeral particles applied to verbs.

Edkins pointed out that “numeral particles” also exist in the verbal domain. However, his research did not influence Summers’ view of Chinese classifiers.

²⁴⁵ Such as: *zhāng* 張 in Morrison (1819, Part 2, Vol. 1, p. 17); *tiáo* 條 in Marshman (1814, p. 508) and Morrison (1815a, p. 56), and *tuán* 團 in Endlicher (1845, p. 179).

function.²⁴⁶ By contrast, scholars such as Williams and Gützlaff pointed out the connection between nouns and their associated classifiers (or “numerals” in Gützlaff’s terms) and clearly named the criteria:

- a. Each one is used to define and designate a certain class of objects, the members of which are supposed to have some quality or circumstance in common, as size, use, material, form, &c. (Williams 1842a, p. 123)
- b. Most of these terms are attached to nouns, to which they bear some relation, either in shape or quality. (Gützlaff 1842, p. 37)

Scholars like Morrison pointed out that it is the noun that decides which classifier to choose (1819, Part 2, Vol. 1, p. 31).²⁴⁷ Marshman (1814, p. 500) considered classifiers as part of a compound noun, which is identical to Summers’ view. For them, a classifier and a noun first form a compound before adding a numeral.

In addition, several scholars mentioned that *ge* 個 is generally used in front of nouns that denote “men” and “things” (Morrison 1815a, p. 49; Abel-Rémusat 1822, p. 116). They typically do not elaborate on this, but only state that it is more commonly used than any other classifier (Williams 1856, p. 167) and that it is used with nouns that do not have specific classifiers (Varo 2000 [1703], p. 95, p. 159; Gonçalves 1829, p. 131).

7.3.2 Summers’ precursors and the grammatical function of classifiers

With regard to the position of the classifier in a sentence, some of Summers’ precursors only mentioned that classifiers come after numerals. In principle, these scholars paid more attention to the connection between numerals and classifiers. Therefore, they tended to use “numerals” to refer to classifiers, like Varo (2000 [1703], p. 159). There were also scholars who only considered the relationship between nouns and classifiers and only mentioned that classifiers are placed before nouns. They therefore tended to use terms related to nouns to address classifiers; for instance, Marshman (1814, p. 500) used the term “generic particles” to indicate that they “[prefix] to certain substantives” and “[express] genus or kind”, and form a compound word together. However, most scholars stated that the position of classifiers is to be in between the numeral and the noun, for example, Edkins (1853, p. 192; 1857, p. 120) and Endlicher

²⁴⁶ For example, *bǎ* 把 in Morrison’s work (1819, Part 2, Vol. 1, p. 630) and *dīng* 頂 in Marshman’s book (1814, p. 509).

²⁴⁷ The original text reads: “[v]arious numerals are joined with [*zhè* 這 ‘this’] according to the Noun which follows”.

(1845, p. 175).

Some scholars emphasised that classifiers are required when enumerating, for example, Morrison (1815a, p. 37) and Prémare (1847, p. 30). Gützlaff (1842, p. 37) even argued that “where a strict enumeration of the subject is not required, the numerals are omitted”. Some scholars pointed out that classifiers collocate not only with numerals but also with demonstratives, for example, Varo (2000 [1703], p. 95), Morrison (1819, Part 2, Vol. 1, p. 31), Abel-Rémusat (1822, p. 116), Edkins (1857, p. 120) and Schott (1857, p. 154). So did Summers.

Just like Summers, some of his precursors mentioned the order [Noun- Numeral- Classifier], such as Morrison (1815a, p. 37), Abel-Rémusat (1822, p. 50) and Schott (1857, p. 155). Some of them pointed out that vernacular Chinese generally employs classifiers, while literary Chinese does not (Edkins 1853, p. 91; Schott 1857, p. 154).

Summers stated that classifiers can be placed after nouns directly without numerals. Edkins (1853, p. 76; 1857, p. 107) also pointed this out in his work, and argued that in this case, they and the nouns attach together to form a new noun, like *chuánzhī* 船隻 ‘boats’.²⁴⁸ However, Summers was the only one who mentioned explicitly that this kind of structure expresses genericity. Other works that Summers referred to do not mention this kind of structure.

Chinese nouns are not inflected and Marshman said that they express plurality in themselves: “[in] Chinese [...] nearly every substantive capable of suggesting a plural idea may be supposed to do so, unless restricted by the connection, or the addition of another character” (1814, p. 211). Marshman further explained how numerals are used to clarify the number. From a present-day point of view, his argument could be rephrased: grammatical number in Chinese is expressed in syntax, not in morphology. As mentioned above, Summers was also of the opinion that Chinese nouns denote either plurality or generality.²⁴⁹

The difference between measure expressions and sortal classifiers is not a relevant topic in most works to which Summers referred, although almost all scholars introduced Chinese classifiers by mentioning measure expressions of various European languages. They argued that the words that are used in between numerals and nouns in Chinese are similar to measure

²⁴⁸ Edkins also gave some examples which are not really of this type, for example, *bīngkuài* 冰塊 ‘piece of ice’ and *gāngtiáo* 鋼條 ‘steel spring’ (1853, p. 75). These two examples are not generic terms and the second elements in them seem to designate the shapes of the entire objects.

²⁴⁹ In his study of Cantonese, Williams (1842a) argued that classifiers have the function of individualization:

- a. They are used both in reckoning a large number, and in speaking of individuals, but express the sort of thing spoken of, and not the number of them (p. 123)
- b. [They are] being used whenever the sense requires any individuality (p. 123).

Scholars like Crisma, Marten and Sybesma (2011, p. 290) and Sybesma (2017a, p. 624) also stated that classifiers have this function in Cantonese.

expressions in European languages (Marshman 1814, p. 500; Morrison 1815a, p. 37; Gützlaff 1842, p. 33; Williams 1842a, p. 123; Edkins 1857, p. 120), just that they appear more extensively (Williams 1842a, p. 123). As mentioned above, Summers adopted this point of view as well. There were very few scholars who alluded to the differences between measure expression and sortal classifier, but Summers did not take their arguments into consideration.²⁵⁰

7.3.3 The arrangement of the presentation of classifiers by Summers' precursors

For didactic purposes, some scholars arranged their lists by placing the frequently used classifiers before the less commonly used ones, for example, Varo (2000 [1703]), Williams (1842a) and Gützlaff (1842). In this way, students could access and acquire those most frequently used first.

Besides presenting the commonly used classifiers with interpretations, Summers also listed thirty-two less-common classifiers without further explanation. For this he referred to *A Grammar of the Mandarin Dialect* (1857, p. 119–133) by Edkins (Summers 1863a, p. 48). This reveals that Summers was very familiar with and thought highly of Edkins' elaboration on those specific classifiers.

7.4 Summers' successors and Chinese classifiers

Classifiers are also discussed in Summers' successors' works, but many of them were not influenced by Summers.²⁵¹ Gabelentz (1881, p. 129) employed the similar term “apposition”,

²⁵⁰ One of them is Bazin (1856, p. 23), who simply stated that ‘[l]es collectifs’ and ‘les noms monosyllabiques des poids et des mesures’ are all “des substantifs auxiliaires”, which is the same as Edkins’ (Bazin 1856, p. 21). Bazin did not explain this any further. Another one who alluded to the difference is Edkins. In 1853, he singled out three classes of “auxiliary nouns”, namely, those which denote containers, measures and collectives (pp. 94–95), for example, *wǎn* 碗 ‘bowl’, *chǐ* 尺 ‘foot’ and *duì* 對 ‘pair’. He argued that they are all “auxiliary nouns”. In 1857, he stated that in vernacular Chinese, not only are there collectives, weights, and measures but also “certain words appropriated to appellative nouns”. For Edkins, measure expressions and classifiers both exist in Chinese, and they together belong to a bigger class, i.e., “substantive auxiliaries” in his own term. However, at times he himself was uncertain whether one unit is a measure or not. For instance, in his list “Measures”, he also included the classifier *ge* (1862, pp. 17–18). Although Rémusat also pointed out that the nature of the nouns decides which classifier to choose (1826, Vol. 2, p. 84, p. 233), in his examples, measure expressions are not separated from sortal classifiers, such as *liǎng chuàn niànzhū* 兩串念珠 ‘two chaplets’ (1826, Vol. 2, p. 84). The original text reads: “On sait que les Chinois ne se contentent pas de mettre un nom de nombre avec un substantif, mais qu'ils y joignent une particule qui varie suivant la nature de la chose nombrée” (1826, Vol. 2, p. 233) and “Les Chinois distinguent de plus les objets de différente nature qui peuvent se compter, par des particules ajoutées aux nombres” (1826, Vol. 2, p. 84).

The list of classifiers in the *Grammatica Sinica* by Martino Martini, which was published as early as 1653, does not contain any measure expressions (Chappell and Peyraube 2014, p. 125). It seems that the author was aware of the difference between classifiers and measure expressions. However, Summers did not refer to this book.

²⁵¹ Edkins' point of view of Chinese classifiers remained unchanged in the second edition of his two works, *A Grammar of the Chinese Colloquial Language* (1864a) and *Progressive Lessons* (1864b). Justus Doolittle (1824–1880) followed the Spanish tradition, using the term “numerals” to refer to classifiers. He only provided a list and

but instead of adapting it from Summers, he was more likely to have adopted it directly from Schott, as Schott's work was also referred to by Gabelentz (Gabelentz 1878, p. 620). Wade wrote that sometimes classifiers are placed directly after nouns like *mǎpǐ* 馬匹 and *chuánzhī* 船隻, which express *horses* or *ships* collectively (1867, Part VIII, Vol. 2, p. 105). The statement is very similar to Summers', and it is very likely to have been borrowed from him.

7.5 Summary

Summers took classifiers as a type of nominal element. He focused on the relationship between classifiers and nouns. For him, classifiers are appositions to nouns. They form a compound with a corresponding noun before collocating with a numeral. Therefore, he employed “appositive” as the term for classifiers, a method adopted from Schott's work (1857).

Just like many of his contemporaries, Summers stated that classifiers have a meaning of their own. They clarify the meaning of nouns and disambiguate homonymic nouns. He also discovered their function to classify nouns. Although Summers did not claim this so directly,

did not explain their grammatical features (1872, Vol. 1, p. 328).

Most of Summers' successors focused on the relationship between classifiers and nouns. For example, Douglas stated that classifiers are placed between numerals or demonstrative pronouns and nouns. The most important function of classifiers is to classify nouns. They are thus called “classifiers” by Douglas (1875, p. 32; 1904, p. 64). Wade (1867) called them “numerative nouns” and “associate (or attendant) nouns”. They appear before or after nouns and help to classify them (1867, Vol. 2, p. 105, p. 106). In an essay on the Hainan dialect written by Robert Swinhoe and published in *Phoenix*, classifiers were called “numertions” in accordance with the Spanish missionary tradition, and “classifier” was also probably adopted from Douglas's works (1870, p. 68; 1871, p. 116).

The only one who pointed out clearly the distinctive feature of classifiers is Douglas, who stated that classifiers “have a certain reference to the nature of the substantives to which they are attached” (1875, p. 32, emphasis added). Moreover, in the examples of classifiers that he gave, there is no measure expression. One of his examples is *kuài* 塊 ‘a piece of’ used “before dollars, bricks, stones, etc., e.g., *sān kuài yáng qián* 三塊洋錢 ‘Three dollars’, *liǎng kuài shí* 兩塊石 ‘Two stones’ (1904, pp. 5–6). *Kuài* is a special case. Sometimes it can be understood as sortal classifiers and measure expressions at the same time. For instance, *kuài* 塊 ‘piece’ in *yí kuài dàn gāo* 一塊蛋糕 ‘a piece of cake’ does not denote the natural unit but a created unit of the objects. It is used as a measure semantically. However, it can also show the shape of that portion and that portion is comparatively stable. This reveals the sortal-classifier-feature of *kuài* (Cheng 2012, p. 211; Del. Gobbo 2014, p. 31). But sometimes it is a classifier, as in the two examples Douglas gave, since it denotes the natural unit of the objects.

Doolittle argued that classifiers are a subcategory of numerals (1872, Vol. 1, pp. 328–329). Gabelentz (1881) and Douglas (1904) talked about classifiers when analyzing nouns. No one declared that classifiers are an independent part of speech. According to Tola (2018, p. 39), Tarleton Perry Crawford (1821–1902) is the first scholar who classified classifiers as an independent word class in his *Mandarin Grammar* (1869).

Wade (1867) also noted some interesting properties of classifiers. He seemed to allude to the fact that they have the function of individualizing one item from the whole. He said: “the true function of the attendant nouns is, apparently, to distinguish the generic from the specific (or the general from the particular). The noun *t'ien*, being ‘*huang t'ien*, Heaven, or *t'u*, being ‘*hou t'u*, Earth, are general designations incapable of subdivision into minor denominations; they have consequently no attendant nouns associated with them. Where the general designation [applies to what] is capable of subdivision into parts or items, the attendant noun is of use in numeration, in that it represents the item as distinguished from the total. [These attendant nouns, therefore, will be spoken henceforth as Numeratives]” (1867, Vol. 2, p. 106).

different criteria of classifying nouns were listed in his examples of the appositives, including physical shape, function, and other properties of the objects to which the nouns refer. These points of views were also suggested by many of his precursors.

The difference between measure expressions and sortal classifiers is not relevant to most of the works at that time. Summers and his contemporaries considered elements that are placed in between a numeral and a noun in a sentence in Chinese as an extension of expressions like ‘glass’ in ‘a glass of wine’, very likely for pedagogical purposes. Considering the way in which the classifiers were presented, both Summers and many other scholars sorted the classifiers by their frequency of usage. This decision likely resulted from pedagogical purposes of their publications.

Compared to his predecessors, Summers was the first to observe that classifiers could be placed directly after a noun to form general terms, which was later adopted by Wade (1867).