

Cultural Images
In English Proverbs
An English-Chinese
Dictionary

英语谚语
文化意象词典

(英汉对照)

艾朝阳◎编著

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内 容 提 要

本词典共收录了 4 000 多条英语谚语,通过英汉对照的方式进行编排。本词典中大量的同义谚语和反义谚语立意新颖独特,内容丰富有趣,从正反两个方面诠释英语谚语的表象内容和深刻内涵。英语谚语的汉语译文突出中华优秀传统文化意象,让读者体验西方文化精髓的同时品味中华优秀传统文化之神韵。本词典适合英语专业工作者及广大英语、汉语自学者使用,也可作为英语教师的教学参考用书。

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– Preface –

The Chinese English learners are frequently annoyed by the fact that they enjoy a low efficiency of English learning, with the deficiency of English reading and comprehension and the poor production of English, both oral and written. With scores of years' ESL teaching, the author finds a lot of explanations for that, among which are that the ESL learners often read the lines of signs and symbols, instead of the cultures between the lines, that they often produce the linguistic signs/symbols by following some rules and regulations instead of visualizing the conceptions, and that they don't have a rich storage of patterns which agree phonetically, formally, and semantically, unify form and taste, and harmonize thinking and expressing. Under these circumstances, what they have expressed does not correspond to, or even goes contrary to, what they have expected to express, and what they have expressed looks awkward and dull. Here are some examples. When they are asked to express “乱七八糟”, they find no new words because “乱” is “mess” in English, and “七八” is “seven and eight” in English. But they all find difficulty in giving

the holistic expression for “乱七八糟”. Some learners who can use “as messy as seven and eight”, are really good at English, but they are far from learning English well because this expression is much too far away from a native speaker's. To take “天有不测风云,人有旦夕祸福” as another example, some ESL learners feel at a loss for a moment and then put it this way: “The heaven has unpredictable wind and cloud, and the man has sudden accidents and happiness”, which sounds somewhat awkward. Another example in case can be found in expressing “把握时机”. Many ESL learners find no difficulty in putting it into English, as those with some basic knowledge of English can put it this way: “grasp the opportunity” or “grasp the chance”. But these expressions are not culturally insightful, lacking in wits or humor. All the approaches above to English production are to do sign-matching instead of doing cultural-image-matching.

Then what is a cultural image? The people of any nation, whatever language they may speak, have to eat, dress, live and communicate, which are daily activities, and have to experience love and hatred, happiness and sadness, anger and pains. All these daily activities and experiences are what they speak of everyday, and in turn become the sources of their languages for them to resort to

and the means by which they express themselves. In using language, they tend to express something abstract by means of live objects and articles, to inspire the unknown by means of the known or something easy to know. A cultural image is such an information carrier and a cultural symbol, and embodies the objective articles and the metaphors, symbolizing the feelings, the emotions, and the thoughts, capturing associations, and signifying the culture and history of the nation that speak that language. Cultural images take varieties of forms. They can be plants, or real animals, or animals in imagination or in myths or an idiom. They can be adjectives, or a metaphor carrier, or even a particular number. In a word, a cultural image is an embodiment of a figure or a character, an object or an article, an event or a behavior and an ideology, agreed on by a language community.

But how are cultural images related to proverbs? As is known to all, the proverbs, inspiring rich and philosophical thinking in plainest language with simple articles and objects, people and characters, events and behaviors, and even ideologies, are the gems, sublimating the language of the nation; and the diamonds, sparkling the wisdom of this nation, and are actually the treasures of their folk culture. In this perspective proverbs are cultural images them-

selves, and they also imply by means of cultural images, characterizing a nation's values and feelings.

Generally speaking, cultural images can be characterized as being universal, different and absent. Cultural images can be universal, since Chinese culture and English culture surprisingly share some cultural images in proverbs, in that any nation, whatever language they may speak, have to eat, dress, house and communicate, which are the daily and universal human activities, and have to universally experience love and hatred, happiness and sadness, anger and pains. Chinese and English share the cultural image "iron", as is seen in Chinese idiom or proverb "趁热打铁" and in English proverb "Strike while the iron is hot". Though cultural images can be universal, they are most often different. In describing "being boastful", Chinese uses "Ox or bull or Cow" as the cultural image as in the idiom "吹牛" (talk OX or bull or cow), while the English has "horse" (马) as the cultural image as in the idiom "talk horse" (吹马). Though they employ different cultural images, they indicate the same conception. But there is another case, where some cultural images in one language find no equivalents in another language. This way there are some cultural absences, as there are no substitutions for some cultural images. Sun Wukong (Monkey King) is a

cultural image in Chinese culture, who is popular with Chinese people who sympathize with the hero and identify with the value of being daring, kind, smart with occult power. Though it is popular in Chinese culture, Sun Wukong finds no equivalent in English proverbs, which are the concentrated minutiae of the English culture, enjoying the cultural images of their own. There is a cultural absence in English Culture for the Chinese cultural image "Sun Wukong".

Our observations show that the Chinese ESL learners know little about the English cultural images because of the Absence of Cultural Images, or the Universality of cultural images, or the Difference of cultural images. By referring to the difficult situation of using English mentioned in the very beginning of this preface, we may find the difference between the two cultural images "seven" (七) and "eight" (八). In English culture, "six" and "seven" often come together. "Seven and Eight" in English does not correspond to the Chinese "七八". We can find the English expressions like "at sixes and sevens", or "what a messy", or "be messy", indicating the Chinese "乱七八糟". In English culture, "seven" also symbolizes time, and can be found in the following examples:

A fool may ask more questions in an hour than a wise

man can answer in seven years.

Turn your tongue seven times before talking.

The year's at the spring, and day's at the morn;
morning's at seven.

One lie needs seven lies to wait upon it.

Keep a thing seven years and you will find a use for it.

(Please refer to this dictionary for their Chinese translation.)

In expressing “天有不测风云,人有旦夕祸福”, “seven” can be employed as is seen in the English proverb “It chances in an hour, that happens not seven years.” The English cultural image “family” can also be used as in the English proverb “Accidents will happen in the best regulated families”. The English cultural image “night” or “ship” can also be found in the English proverbs “Misfortunes also come at night.” and “There is many a ship between the cup and the lip.” to indicate the same. To take the Chinese “把握时机” as another example, we can make its English expressions more lively and more culturally appealing by looking for some cultural images in English culture. The cultural image “horn” can help us: “Remove the horns from the bull as soon as possible”. As sailing is essential in the life of westerners, sail is an appropriate cultural image for “把握时机” as in “Hoist sail (your sail) when (while)

the wind is fair.” Another cultural image “hay(干草)” can also be found in “Make hay while the sun shines.” to indicate this idea. More examples can be found in “Mend your sails when it is fine weather.” and “Men must sail while the wind serves.” But actually some Chinese ESL learners have not much knowledge about the differences between the English and Chinese cultural images, which makes their English learning more difficult. However, ignorance of the universality of cultural images can also lead to the difficulty of English learning. In expressing “天有不测风云,人有旦夕祸福”, we understand that the changeable weather is a universal cultural image in both English and Chinese culture. We can say “The weather is unpredictable.” or “The weather is changeable.” to express uncertainty and changeability. But another English cultural image “anticipate” can make the expression more interesting: “That which one least anticipates soonest come to pass.” Iron (铁) can be universal in both English and Chinese culture, as in the example above “趁热打铁” and “Strike while the iron is hot”, both indicating “把握时机”.

Then how can the Chinese ESL learners overcome the difficulties in English learning? We suggest that learning cultural images is an effective way, and English proverbs help us a lot in improving the awareness of cultural images. The

English proverbs are cultural images actually, rich in concrete English Cultural Images, and contain expressions that are real, idiomatic, lively, and classic. According to cognitive psychology, a lot of English cultural images are the prototypes of English expressions, originating English vocabulary. Learning English proverbs helps ESL learners familiarize with the daily activities of the native English speakers, such as eating, dressing, living and communicating, and helps them effectively improve their English learning, because they can sense and grasp the rules and characteristics of the English language more easily, which leads to cultural imports & exports and cultural cultivation.

To this end, this dictionary, titled “Cultural Images in English Proverbs: An English-Chinese Dictionary,” will try to help ESL learners. The proverbs headed by the 24 cultural images such as dog, horse and fish etc. , amount to more than two hundred, which take up 8% of the proverbs in this dictionary, and they are also indexes of the prototypes of the English culture. By referring to the Chinese translation of the English proverbs, the readers can experience not only the differences of different cultural images but also the universalities of different cultural images. It is great entertainment to dip into one or two proverbs, not to mention to work hard learning them. A proverb a day

keeps the teacher away where an apple a day keeps the doctor away. It helps the learners appreciate the varieties of expressions which share the same theme, and thus helps the learners memorize a certain amount of words and familiarize with a lot of core vocabularies, and then improve their reading comprehension, and oral and written productivity as well. It helps cultivate good English sense and construct English thinking modes. The Birds Nest of The 2008 Beijing Olympics is a cultural image, representing the theme of "One world, One dream" because birds in a nest agree, which is a simple and plain English proverb.

This dictionary finds its readers among the English teachers, students, and among other ESL learners, in addition to the native English speakers who are learning Chinese or interested in Chinese culture, because it serves as a tool and a reference book. It contains more than 4 000 English proverbs, edited by means of Contrasting between English and Chinese, which is apparent in look, and convenient in use. Generally it is featured as follows:

1. Easy to search. This dictionary is classified and indexed by the key word of the English proverb. By referring to the key word, it is easy enough to find the relevant proverb(s). There are some repetitions when a proverb has two or more than two key words, which makes it easy to

find the relevant proverbs just on one page.

2. Easy to memorize. The English proverbs are characterized by cultural images, which abstract the conceptions and complex feelings by means of concrete and simple objects or entities, namely the animals, plants, and others. In English proverbs, the most frequently used cultural images are animals, such as dog, horse, bird, cat, ass, fish, and sheep, etc. Rarely can we find easier cultural images like the animals above for a longer memory, and the images in this dictionary mostly consist of the core cultural images in English culture.

3. Easy to inspire. Wisdom is easy to sparkle in face of differences, while easy to bear fruit in embracing the resonance of individuals. It is easy to inspire in reading this book because it is innovatively and interestingly compiled in a contrast of synonymous proverbs and antonymous proverbs in the most possible way, helps the reader understand the fundamental meaning of the English proverbs both literally and freely, and inspires them into the emotional experience and cultural awareness. The Chinese translation of the English proverbs makes its way into the traditional Chinese cultural images so as for the readers to appreciate the magic of traditional Chinese culture while appreciating the kernel of English culture, which is inspiring

and edifying. The Chinese translation of the proverb in an entry basically and generally covers that of the synonymous proverbs. Some Chinese translation of the synonymous English proverbs keeps the original English cultural images for further comparison of two different cultural images.

4. Easy to read. All the readers find it easy to read and understand this book and in turn benefit from the English proverbs, be it the specialized English experts, English teachers, or the general ESL learners, or the foreign friends interested in Chinese and Chinese culture.

Hereby the author is much obliged to the friends who have provided help. In working on this dictionary the author referred to some web pages and books, with some anonymous, which I am also indebted to.

This book is far from perfect though the author tries to make it so. Criticism, suggestions and questions are always much appreciated!

Ai Zhaoyang
At Tianma Mountain
November 2008

- 序 -

许多学习英语的中国人常感到英语学习效率不高,英语阅读理解不到位,英语口头表达和书面表达不地道。原因是多方面的。笔者在几十年的英语教学实践中,发现英语学习者往往看到的是语言符号,而不是语言背后的文化;他们表达的是一定规则下语言符号的集合,而不是意义的形象化和具体化;他们脑子里缺少音形义相统一、基本句型与趣味性相统一、思维与表达相统一的基本模式。结果导致两种情况:一是想要表达的与实际表达的脱节,甚至南辕北辙,二是所表达的过于机械,缺乏生动性。例如,用英语表达“乱七八糟”,他们发现“七”和“八”不是生词,“乱”可以用英文单词“mess”,可真要表示“乱七八糟”就有点犯难了。有些人能把它表达为“as messy as seven and eight”,说明英语水平已经相当不错,但与英语实际地道的表达相差太大。又如,要表达“天有不测风云,人有旦夕祸福”,一般来说,英语学习者会感到不知所措。如果翻译为“The heaven has unpredictable wind and cloud, and the man has sudden accidents and happiness”,就会给人以不伦不类的感觉。再如,要用英语表达“把握时机”,许多的汉语为母语的英语学习者并不会感到太难,稍有英语基础的都可以有“grasp the opportunity”、“grasp the chance”等诸如此类的表达。但是,这样的表达

缺少文化内涵,缺乏幽默与机智。不难看出,上面这些表达都是符号对符号,单词对单词,而不是文化意象的对应。

什么是文化意象?任何民族,无论他们操哪种语言,都离不开吃穿住行的日常行为,离不开喜怒哀乐以及爱与恨的情感体验。这一切正是该民族日常语言表达的内容,也是他们借以表达思想的手段和源泉。在人类语言中,人们常常用具体的事物表现抽象的概念,以已知和易知来启迪未知和不易知。文化意象就是这样的一种信息载体和文化符号,既包含了客观物象,又蕴藏了丰富的思想感情,既有丰富的寓意,又给人以深远的联想,还体现了该民族的历史和文化。文化意象有多种表现形式。它或许是一种植物,或是一种现实中的动物,或是一种传说中的动物,也可以是典故,还可以是形容词、喻体,甚至可以是某个特殊的数字。总之,文化意象是语言共同体的集体意向在具体的人物、事物、事件、理念和行为上的体现,是该民族对语言符号的集体要约与指向。

那么,文化意象与谚语有什么关系?众所周知,谚语是一个民族文化的精华,是该民族精炼语言的典范,是该民族智慧的火花,也是民间文化的瑰宝。它用最简单最朴实的话语以及最具体最简单的物象、人物、行为、事件和理念表达丰富的哲理。可见,谚语不仅本身是一种文化意象,而且也借助各种具体的文化意象来表现更为深刻的内涵,尤其能够反映各民族自身的情感体验和价值观。

总体上,文化意象有三个特征:共通性、差异性和缺失性。首先,文化意象具有共通性。我们发现汉语文化和英语文化

中都在谚语中可以找到许多惊人一致的文化意象。可能是因为所有的民族都离不开吃穿住行以及爱与恨的基本的人类行为。例如,汉语中有“趁热打铁”的说法。而英语谚语也有类似的说法,如“Strike while the iron is hot”。但是,文化意象更多地体现为差异性。例如,汉语说“吹牛(bull)”,英语说“吹马(horse)”,意象不同,却表达相同的意义。文化意象的差异性具有错位的特征。更为复杂的是,文化意象往往有不可替代的特征,我们称之为文化意象缺失。孙悟空就可以是中华文化的一个文化意象,他反映了中华民族对这个机制灵活可爱的人物(或动物——猴子)的认可,进而体现出该民族认同神通广大、敢于斗争、心地善良、富有正义、形象可爱的价值观。但是这样的文化意象不可能体现在英语谚语中。英语谚语是对英语国家民族生活的高度凝练,其文化意象便具有自身的特殊性。孙悟空这个文化意象在英语文化中出现缺失,找不到可以替代的文化意象,具有不可替代性。

根据我们长期的研究发现,汉语为母语的英语学习者往往缺乏英语语言的文化意象而造成英语学习的巨大困难,更不用说对文化意象缺乏差异性、共通性以及缺失性的认识了。一方面,上面提到的英语表达困难是因为缺乏对英汉两种语言文化意象差异性的认识。“七”这个数字在汉语和英语中的文化意象是有较大差异的。在汉语中,“七”的意象与“八”是联系在一起的。在英语中,“七”与“六”是联系在一起的。英语中的比较准确的表达是“at sixes and sevens”或者干脆是“What a mess!”或“Be messy!”。“七”在英语文化中也