

陈运香 著

汉英数字文化 内涵对比研究

A Contrastive Study of the Cultural Implications of
Numbers in Chinese and English Numerologies

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序

潘文国

在语言与文化的关系上，恐怕再没有比数字与文化的关系更古老、更神秘、更引人入胜了。中国古代的术数之学，可说是中国传统文化中最深层的内容之一，远肇自《易经》，发展于道家和阴阳家，而又大盛于宋代理学的这一理论体系，实际已渗入了传统中国人思维的方方面面，影响所及，普通的中国人，不管其是否自我意识到，都会有一种“数”的敏感，对“一、二、三、四”之类都有一种说不清、道不明的感觉。近些年里，由粤语中“八、发”同音而导致的“八”字大行其道，更由中国而走向世界，连国际奥委会主席罗格也谈起了“八”字经，笑言今年北京奥运会是五“八”相聚：08年8月8日晚上8时开幕，而他正好是国际奥委会第8任主席！无独有偶，古时西人对数字的敏感与喜好恐怕也不亚于中国，《圣经》中无处不在的“七”字实际已成了世界人民的共同财富。日历上一周的“七”天便是拜其所赐，不管你是否相信天主教、耶稣教，一周都得过七天，而周日都是法定的休息日。此无它，因为这一天是上帝创世的休息日。上帝都需要在这一天休息，何况你我他！时至今日，中国人出国到西方去，星期天总是最难捱的日子，因为是日不仅机关关门、商店关门、银行关门、邮局关门，连交通也是一片混乱（例如纽约周末的地铁交通，便常常让人大叹苦经）。难怪当年希特勒进攻苏联和日本偷袭珍珠港，都要利用周日发动，曾使中国人颇为不解，其实只是因为连西方的军人，都要雷打不动地奉行星期日休假制而已。而由耶稣“最后的晚餐”中第13人犹大现身而导致的对“13”的忌讳也冲击着本以13为吉数的中国人心理。

正因如此，对数字与文化的研究，一向是从事语言与文化研究的人们关注的焦点。近现代中国学者对此的研究大约肇始于闻一多的《七十二》，至上世纪八、九十年代更是蔚然成风，专著论文连篇累牍。西方在这方面的研究比较零散，但也出现了 George Ifrah 的《数

字世界史》(*The Universal History of Numbers*) 那样的专著。同时,对中西数字文化进行比较的论文也时而可见。但相对来说,这一类研究数量较少,而且偏于谈中西数字文化之间之异,对“异”处背后之“同”着力不多。运香的这部基于其博士论文的专著可说是第一部系统地研究这一问题的著作,其特点有三,一是有明确的理论指导,全书以萨丕尔-沃尔夫的语言相对论为基本理论依据,又以最新对比语言学理论即异同并重的观点为指导,富于哲学探索精神;二是基于大量语料,对汉英数字文化的内涵进行较为系统的研究,同时运用了语料库方法,在这一领域还是一个创新;其三是宏观与微观相结合的方法,既从宏观方面对数字与文化的关系作了总体比较与研究,又以中文之“一”与英语之“七”为突破口,重点解剖,取得了颇好的效果。这是一部颇为成功的研究著作。

运香的学历背景是英语,从我攻读英汉对比研究,被“迫”阅读了许多以前较少接触的中文文献,特别是外语学者通常感到陌生的中文古籍,所遇到的困难和挑战是可以想见的。另一方面,在这一领域的突破,也昭示着她学术视野和研究功力的升华。我深深地为她庆幸,也为她祝福,祈望她今后取得更大的成绩。

由于这一研究具有相当的开创性,其不足之处也是难免的。最大的困难是材料太多,无法作穷尽性的研究,尽管洋洋洒洒数十万言,还只能说是浅尝一脔。今后的持续研究还大有可为。其次是英汉比较而以《圣经》为例,显得并不地道,如能找到一种更典型的英文著作,也许会更有说服力。这也期待于她今后的努力了。

是为序。

2008年9月7日于纽约

Preface

Established as a branch of linguistics in the 1950s, Contrastive Linguistics has developed rapidly both at home and abroad. I became interested in the area of Contrastive Linguistics during my Ph.D. study in the School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiaotong University. There, fortunately, I met my supervisor, Prof. Pan Wenguo, who ushered me into the discipline of Contrastive Studies between Chinese and English. He has always been most generous with his time and private library. I benefited greatly from both his lectures and the discussions with him and his students. His profound knowledge as well as his personality has been a constant source of encouragement to my research in the area of Contrastive Linguistics.

This book is largely based on my Ph.D. dissertation, which centers principally upon the contrastive studies of Chinese and English numerals. As Chinese and English belong to the eastern culture and the western culture respectively, their numerological features differ markedly in terms of the implications of numbers as well as the ways numbers are used in the two languages. This study involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches, but centres upon the latter. The data used for analysis are based largely on two parallel corpora: the Chinese novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* and its English version, and the Bible and its Chinese version, in an attempt to investigate the differences and similarities regarding cultural implications of numbers between Chinese and English.

The major findings of this study are:

Firstly, numbers and culture are closely interwoven. Numbers are symbolic representation of a people concerning their cultural features such as philosophy, worldviews, history, religions, beliefs, superstitions, etc.

Secondly, considerable differences exist between Chinese and English numerologies. The different implications of Chinese and English numbers are related closely with their cultural peculiarities. Furthermore, different implications of numbers exist not only between two languages but within the language as well.

Thirdly, different philosophical views are the fundamental causes which result in those differences.

Finally, there are some similarities between Chinese and English numerological cultures. Such similarities include similar philosophical interpretations of the universe, similar worldviews, and similar uses in rhetorical devices.

This book consists of seven chapters. Each chapter concludes with a summary which contains the gist of the chapter. Chapter Four, Chapter Five and Chapter Six, the core of this book, focus on the analysis of the cultural implications of numbers from the contrastive perspective. The three categories under which implication of C-E numbers are investigated are philosophy in numbers, thought in numbers and vagueness in numbers.

My great gratitude should be given to my Ph.D. supervisor, Professor Pan Wenguo for his insightful comments and suggestions. My sincere gratitude should also go to Professor Zhou Zhipei and Professor Feng Wenchu, who not only provided me with their invaluable suggestions throughout the writing process, but also gave me their parental love and encouragement in times of difficulty and frustration. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Professor Li Wenzhong and Professor Wei Naixing for their professional assistance in corpus data processing. Appreciation is also expressed to the friends: Professor Wang Haihua, Dr. Zhao Yong, Dr. Lin Yuzhen, Mr. Zhao Baoyu who have helped me in a variety of ways in the process of writing this book. And dedication of the book should be given to my parents and my family for their understanding and unswerving support.

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List of Abbreviations

ADORM	<i>A Dream of Red Mansions</i>
CD	Chinese Dictionary
CE	Chinese and English
EC	English to Chinese
LRH	linguistic relativity hypothesis
MCD	<i>Modern Chinese Dictionary</i>
NIV	New International Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SWJZ	<i>Shuowen Jiezi</i> written by Xu Shen
SWH	Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Every nation has its own way of expressing number. The concept of numbers is believed to be formulated resulting from people's cognition of the outside world. As Adrian Room pointed out (1989:8), the concept of number arose in prehistoric times, although originally the numbers themselves would not have been understood abstractly, as they are today. Numbers primarily function as mathematical value, but they have been endowed with specific implications with the historical and social development, and gradually have become an organic part of language. Therefore, numbers are not only functional, but a real part of the [English]¹ language (ibid:7).

Chinese and English differ markedly in using numbers. The uses of numbers, either in Chinese or English, can fall into two distinct categories: numbers for precise quantities and numbers for vague meanings. Numbers used to express precise quantities do not have much difference in different languages whereas numbers used for vagueness vary considerably in different cultures. As a result, the study of vagueness by numbers has been of great interest to language researchers and much research has been conducted to explore numerological implications.

This study is similar to those previous ones on one hand in that it deals with the similar issue, but different on the other hand in that it aims not only to investigate in what aspects the cultural implications of numbers differ in

¹ This statement by Adrian Room resulted from his study of English language, but it is also adaptable for any other language.

the two languages but also to find out whether any similarities exist between Chinese and English numerologies.

This chapter is made up of seven parts, involving motivation of this study, research questions, research objectives, theoretical framework and methodology, and finally the organization of the book.

1.1 Motivation of the present research

Numbers exist in all languages and are pervasive in daily life. When it comes to numbers, Pythagoras, the prominent Greek philosopher and mathematician, stated his opinion as such (Cheng Li and Cheng Jianhua 2000:165).

Numbers were not cast blindly into the world. They came together in orderly balanced systems, like the formation of crystals or musical chords, in accordance with all-embracing laws of harmony.

Pythagoras thought highly of numbers by making his famous statement: number is in everything. It is true that life is filled with numbers. As a special category, numbers primarily act as counting and calculating. But it is not always necessarily the case. Many situations can be found in which they are metaphorically used. So the meanings that numbers convey in these situations vary in one way or another in different languages. Then what image of numerical values is evoked by the curious succession of the words “one,” “two,” “three,” and so on? What features do numbers possess in different languages? What kind of relation exists between number symbols and the ones that they symbolize? These questions are likely to arise if cultural factors concerning numbers are taken into consideration.

“What is the most difficult task? The one that seems to you easiest. To see with your eyes what is before your eyes.” This verse was written by Goethe, which can be applied very well to refer to the mysterious relation between

numbers and their implications. Numbers are not as easy as they seem to be. Seemingly, simple numbers tell more than their denotations. It is believed that there must be an underlying structure of meaning under the cover of the symbols. Just as Jespersen pointed out, “number might appear to be one of the simplest natural categories, as simple as ‘two and two are four.’ Yet on closer inspection it presents a great many difficulties, both logical and linguistic.” (1928:188)

Every civilization has its own signs for numbers, so the properties that numbers possess in different cultures are bound to be different. It is, therefore, believed that the numbers in Chinese and English that are deeply engrained in Eastern and Western cultures are supposed to have peculiar features of their own. It is true that quite a few researches have been made on the cultural implications of numbers, some of which were based on the analysis of the individual properties of either English or Chinese and some of which were conducted from the contrastive perspective, emphasizing the differences rather than the similarities. *Seventy-two*, written by Wen Yiduo, for instance, can be an example of the former, in which the Chinese number *seventy-two* was studied. Another typical example of this kind is the article *The Fifteen Numerals in Chinese*¹ by Zhang Qingchang, in which he made a systematic study of the fifteen numerals in Chinese concerning their denotations as well as their connotations. Meanwhile, many an essay has been found in recent years to focus on the contrastive study of cultural properties of English and Chinese numbers. The studies related in this field are noticeably rewarding, but they are far more than satisfactory in that the contrasts are mostly on the basis of the micro-analysis rather than the macro one. Besides, many more efforts have been made to study Chinese numbers than to attach weight to both Chinese and English. And most of the previous studies have centered upon

¹ The fifteen numerals he referred to are the numerals from one to ten together with zero, half, hundred, thousand and ten thousand.