

A comparative study of proverbs about money in English and Chinese

Chahaerma

National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 14201, Mongolia
tsakhimaa@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper aims to compare and analyze the proverbs about money in English and Chinese languages, exploring their cultural differences and linguistic characteristics. Through comparative research, it reveals the similarities and differences in the attitudes and values of money between English and Chinese cultures, and discusses the cultural connotations and historical origins behind the proverbs. The study finds that English money proverbs emphasize utility and humor, reflecting a utilitarian view of money in Western society, while Chinese money proverbs focus more on morality and wisdom, reflecting a cautious attitude towards money in Eastern culture. By analyzing the cultural differences in money proverbs between English and Chinese languages, it can help people better understand and respect different cultures' perspectives on money, promoting cross-cultural communication. Additionally, the paper also explores the role of money proverbs in education and cultural inheritance, and prospects for future research directions.

Keywords: money proverbs, English-Chinese cultural comparison, linguistic characteristics, cultural differences, cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Money, as a symbol of universal material and spiritual needs in human society, plays an important role in different cultures. Proverbs, as a form of language, carry rich cultural connotations and wisdom, reflecting people's cognition of life, values, and social norms. English and Chinese, as two of the world's most widely used languages, also reflect their respective cultural characteristics and values through their money proverbs. By comparing the proverbs about money in English and Chinese, we can deepen our understanding of the attitudes and value orientations towards money in different cultures, promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding. Therefore, this study aims to reveal the cultural differences and commonalities behind the money proverbs in English and Chinese languages through comparative analysis, explore their roles in cross-cultural communication and cultural inheritance, and provide new perspectives and ideas for deepening people's understanding and respect for different cultures.

2. The Position of Money in English and Chinese Cultures

2.1. A Comparison of Attitudes Towards Money in English and Chinese Cultures

The position of money in English and Chinese cultures reflects the different perceptions and values of wealth in the two cultures. As countries with long histories and unique cultures, the UK and China have significant differences in their attitudes towards money. In British culture, money is often seen as a symbol of success, power, and social status. British people generally value personal financial independence and the realization of self-worth, so money plays a crucial role in British society. Successful businessmen and wealthy entrepreneurs are admired and respected by British society, and the wealth they accumulate is seen as a result of hard work and smart investments, reflecting individual abilities and social status. In contrast, in traditional Chinese culture, money is imbued with more moral and social responsibilities. Chinese people generally believe that the acquisition of wealth should be combined with morality and integrity, emphasizing harmony between individuals and society. Traditional values emphasize thrift, diligence, and filial piety. Money is seen as an important resource for maintaining family and social stability, rather than just a symbol of personal achievement and glory. Therefore, although both English and Chinese cultures value the role of money in life, there are

significant differences in their attitudes and values behind them. This difference not only affects individual behaviors and social customs but also reflects different cultural understandings and pursuits of wealth, success, and happiness[1].

2.2. The Symbolic Meaning of Money in English and Chinese Cultures

Money carries profound symbolic meaning in both English and Chinese cultures, reflecting people's perceptions and pursuits of life, society, and human values. In British culture, money is often seen as a symbol of success, power, and social status. Through the accumulation of wealth and successful careers, individuals can gain social recognition and respect, thereby realizing their self-worth and social status. Therefore, money in British society is often seen as a means to achieve dreams and pursue happiness, a product of individual efforts and hard work. In comparison, in Chinese culture, the symbolic meaning of money is more diverse and profound. In addition to symbolizing success and power, money also carries more ethical and social responsibilities. In traditional Chinese culture, the acquisition of wealth is considered to be combined with morality and integrity, emphasizing harmony between individuals and society. Therefore, money in Chinese culture is also closely related to emotions, interpersonal relationships, and social responsibilities, reflecting the Chinese pursuit of family and social harmony. In conclusion, whether in British or Chinese culture, money has important symbolic significance, reflecting people's pursuit of success, happiness, and social values. However, the symbolic meaning varies in different cultural backgrounds, reflecting unique understandings of the meaning of life and human values in each culture.

3. Overview of Money Proverbs in English and Chinese

3.1. Money Proverbs in English

Money proverbs in English have a long history, reflecting the profound understanding of wealth, economy, and life wisdom in Western culture. These proverbs are often presented in concise and humorous forms, being both practical and philosophical, and are widely loved and passed down. Firstly, money proverbs in English emphasize the close connection between time and money. For example, "Time is money" emphasizes the value of time and the importance of efficiency. This proverb warns people to cherish time because wasting time means losing money. Additionally, "A stitch in time saves nine" implies that timely action in economics can prevent greater losses, emphasizing the concept of prevention is better than cure. Secondly, money proverbs in English emphasize thrift and financial wisdom. For instance, "A penny saved is a penny earned" tells people that saving is a way to increase wealth[2]. This proverb encourages people to start from small things, increasing wealth through thrift and financial management. Similarly, "Make hay while the sun shines" also reminds people to seize opportunities and act promptly to maximize profits. Moreover, money proverbs in English also reflect people's understanding of the influence and status of money in social interactions. For example, "Money talks" indicates the importance of money in decision-making and influence. This proverb suggests that money can change people's attitudes and behaviors, even affecting the direction of society. Additionally, "Every man has his price" also emphasizes the influence of money on human nature, indicating that people often abandon principles and values when faced with money temptation. In summary, money proverbs in English convey rich economic wisdom and life philosophy with their concise, humorous, and practical characteristics. These proverbs not only provide guidance and inspiration but also reflect the unique understanding of wealth, success, and happiness in Western culture, providing important references and references for people in economic activities and life[3].

3.2. Money Proverbs in Chinese

Money proverbs in Chinese also have a long history, reflecting the profound thinking and understanding of wealth, life, and social relationships in Chinese culture. These proverbs are often expressed in concise and philosophical ways, carrying economic wisdom as well as moral norms and social values. Firstly, money proverbs in Chinese emphasize thrift and wealth accumulation. For example, "One minute of cultivation, one minute of harvest" tells people that only through hard work can they reap rich rewards. This proverb emphasizes the inevitable relationship between effort and reward, encouraging people to work hard to become wealthy. Additionally, "Wealth does not last three generations" warns people to manage finances carefully to prevent wealth loss and emphasizes the inheritance and management of family wealth. Secondly, money proverbs in Chinese emphasize the

complex relationship between money and emotions and interpersonal relationships. For example, "Money can move ghosts to grind flour" reflects the influence of money in interpersonal relationships, implying that money can change people's attitudes and behaviors[3]. This proverb reveals the importance of money in interpersonal communication and social relationships, demonstrating the role money plays in interpersonal interaction. Additionally, "Money is external to the body" reminds people to cherish health, family, and emotions, not to sacrifice true happiness for money. Moreover, money proverbs in Chinese also emphasize the association of money with morals and social responsibilities. For example, "Money is not everything" tells people that money is not the only way to solve all problems, reflecting the values of traditional Chinese culture and emphasizing the importance of morality and spirituality. Additionally, "Wealth and honor come from heaven, poverty from man" also reminds people to obey fate, not to pursue material wealth excessively, but to focus on self-cultivation and pursue inner peace and satisfaction. In conclusion, money proverbs in Chinese convey the unique understanding of wealth, life, and social relationships in Chinese culture with their profound and rich connotations. These proverbs not only provide economic wisdom and life philosophy but also reflect the emphasis of Chinese culture on family, society, and moral values, providing important guidance and inspiration for people in economic activities and social interactions[4].

4. Cultural Differences in Money Proverbs between English and Chinese

4.1. Differences in Cultural Backgrounds

There are significant differences between English and Chinese cultures in history, values, and social systems, which are also reflected in money proverbs. Firstly, there are differences in attitudes towards money between English and Chinese cultures. In British culture, money is often seen as a symbol of success, power, and social status, reflecting individualism and utilitarianism. Therefore, English money proverbs emphasize the importance of individual effort and wealth accumulation, as well as the influence of money in social interactions. In contrast, in traditional Chinese culture, money is endowed with more moral and social responsibilities, reflecting collectivism and family values. Hence, Chinese money proverbs often emphasize thrift, diligence, family responsibilities, and the complex relationship between money, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. Secondly, there are differences in the pursuit of wealth and success between English and Chinese cultures. In British culture, individual success is often closely related to wealth and social status, emphasizing individual effort and struggle. Therefore, English money proverbs often emphasize individual effort and wealth accumulation. In contrast, in Chinese culture, individual success is often closely related to family and social honor and respect, emphasizing personal moral qualities and social responsibilities. Hence, Chinese money proverbs often emphasize thrift, diligence, family responsibilities, and the complex relationship between money, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. In summary, there are significant differences between English and Chinese cultures in attitudes towards money and value orientations, which are also reflected in money proverbs. These differences not only reflect the different understandings and pursuits of money in different cultures but also reflect the different pursuits and values of life, happiness, and success in different cultures. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication and understanding, it is necessary to fully recognize and respect the differences between different cultures to promote the development of cultural exchanges and cooperation[5].

4.2. Differences in Linguistic Expression Styles

There are some differences in linguistic expression styles between English and Chinese cultures, which are also reflected in the expression of money proverbs. Firstly, in English, money proverbs are usually more direct, humorous, and vivid. English money proverbs often use concise and powerful language expressions to directly address the core issues, making it easy for people to understand and remember. For example, "Time is money" succinctly highlights the close connection between time and money, with strong expressive and imagery. In contrast, Chinese money proverbs often rely on metaphors, allusions, and other rhetorical devices, appearing more implicit and subtle. For example, "An inch of time is worth an inch of gold, but an inch of gold cannot buy an inch of time" uses allusions to express the value and irreversibility of time, emphasizing the priceless value of time. Secondly, English money proverbs often have a certain sense of humor and irony. English culture emphasizes humorous and relaxed expression styles, and humor and irony elements are often integrated into money proverbs[6]. For example, "Money talks" humorously emphasizes the importance and influence of money in social interactions through concise and humorous expressions. In contrast,

Chinese money proverbs tend to focus on connotations and artistic conception, using humor and irony less frequently. In summary, there are certain differences in linguistic expression styles of money proverbs between English and Chinese cultures. English money proverbs are more direct, humorous, and vivid, often using concise and powerful language expressions to directly address core issues, while Chinese money proverbs are more implicit, elegant, and often use metaphors, allusions, and other rhetorical devices, appearing more profound and subtle. This difference not only reflects the cultural characteristics and expression habits of English and Chinese languages but also provides a new perspective and thinking for people to understand and appreciate the wisdom and charm of different cultures.

4.3. Differences in Money Concepts and Value Orientations

There are significant differences in money concepts and value orientations between English and Chinese cultures, which are also reflected in money proverbs. Firstly, the concept of money in British culture tends to focus more on individual success and self-realization. British people generally believe that through individual efforts and smart investments, wealth and social status can be enhanced, leading to success and happiness. Therefore, English money proverbs often emphasize individual effort, wealth accumulation, and the importance of money in individual lives and social interactions. In contrast, the concept of money in Chinese culture tends to focus more on family and social responsibilities. Chinese people generally believe that the acquisition of wealth should be combined with morality and honesty, emphasizing harmony between individuals and society[7]. Hence, Chinese money proverbs often emphasize thrift, diligence, family responsibilities, and the complex relationship between money, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. Secondly, the value orientation of money in British culture emphasizes more on personal material enjoyment and social status enhancement. British people generally believe that money can bring comfort in material life and social status enhancement, which are key to individual success and happiness. Therefore, English money proverbs often emphasize the practicality and utilitarianism of money in life and the importance of money in personal lives and social interactions. In contrast, the value orientation of money in Chinese culture emphasizes more on moral qualities and social responsibilities. Chinese people generally believe that the acquisition of money should be combined with morality and honesty, emphasizing harmony between individuals and society. Hence, Chinese money proverbs often emphasize thrift, diligence, family responsibilities, and the complex relationship between money, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. In summary, there are significant differences in money concepts and value orientations between English and Chinese cultures. British culture emphasizes more on individual success and self-realization, emphasizing the importance of money in individual lives and social interactions; while Chinese culture emphasizes more on family and social responsibilities, emphasizing the close connection between money, moral qualities, and social responsibilities. This difference not only reflects the different understandings and pursuits of money in different cultures but also reflects the different pursuits and values of life, happiness, and success in different cultures[8].

5. Application and Implications of Money Proverbs in English and Chinese

5.1. Application in Cross-Cultural Communication

As important carriers of language and culture, money proverbs have significant application value and enlightening significance in cross-cultural communication. Through comparative analysis of money proverbs in English and Chinese, people can better understand and respect the concepts and value orientations of different cultures, promoting smooth cross-cultural communication and cooperation[9]. Firstly, in business communication and international cooperation, money proverbs can help people better understand the commercial behaviors and communication styles of different cultures. By studying the cultural connotations and wisdom contained in money proverbs, one can better grasp the cultural background of business negotiations and cooperation, avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences. For example, understanding the values of individual effort and success in British culture can help Chinese businessmen better understand the behaviors and mindset of British business partners, thus promoting more effective cooperation. Secondly, in education and cultural exchange, money proverbs can also serve as important tools and resources for cross-cultural communication. By studying the attitudes and values of money reflected in money proverbs, people can gain a deeper understanding and experience of the wisdom and charm of different cultures, promoting cultural exchange and mutual respect. For example, by comparing money proverbs in English and

Chinese regarding thrift and diligence, students can better understand the understanding and pursuit of labor and wealth in both Chinese and British cultures, cultivating their ability for cross-cultural communication and understanding. In summary, money proverbs, as important components of language and culture, have significant application value and enlightening significance in cross-cultural communication. Through the study of money proverbs, people can better understand and respect the concepts and value orientations of different cultures, promoting smooth cross-cultural communication and cooperation[10].

5.2. Insights in Education and Cultural Inheritance

Money proverbs play an important role in education and cultural inheritance. They are not only the crystallization of wisdom but also an important part of cultural tradition. By learning and inheriting money proverbs, people can inspire thinking about money, life, and society, cultivating correct money concepts and value orientations. Firstly, money proverbs can help people establish correct money concepts and value orientations. In the educational process, guiding students to learn and understand money proverbs can help them realize that money is not only a material wealth but also a reflection of social responsibility and moral concepts. For example, by learning the Chinese proverb "Time is money," students can recognize the value and preciousness of time, cultivating habits of time-saving and cherishing time. Secondly, money proverbs can help people cultivate correct financial concepts and attitudes towards life. In social and cultural inheritance, money proverbs often contain rich experience and wisdom, guiding people to treat wealth and money properly, avoiding blind pursuit of material enjoyment, and cultivating habits of thrift and financial management. For example, by learning the English proverb "A penny saved is a penny earned," people can be taught the importance of saving and thriftiness, thus cultivating correct financial concepts and attitudes towards life. Finally, money proverbs can also help people inherit and promote national culture. As a form of language and culture, money proverbs contain rich cultural connotations and wisdom, being an important part of national cultural tradition. By inheriting and promoting money proverbs, people can inherit and promote national culture, inspiring love and pride in national culture. In conclusion, money proverbs have significant enlightening significance in education and cultural inheritance. By learning and inheriting money proverbs, people can establish correct money concepts and value orientations, cultivate correct financial concepts and attitudes towards life, inherit and promote national culture, and promote social civilization and progress[11].

5.3. Influence of Money Proverbs on Individual Behavior

As a form of cultural inheritance, money proverbs not only reflect people's cognition and values of money but also have profound influence on individual behavior. Firstly, money proverbs guide and influence individuals' financial concepts and behaviors. Through the transmission and learning of money proverbs, people can understand the importance and value of money, learn to properly manage and allocate money, and cultivate good financial habits. For example, when exposed to the Chinese proverb "Money is something outside of one's body," people realize that although money is important, it should not be the sole pursuit of life, thus emphasizing the pursuit of life quality and inner happiness rather than the mere pursuit of material wealth. Secondly, money proverbs influence individuals' attitudes towards life and value orientations. Through the enlightenment of money proverbs, people can realize that money is not omnipotent and pay more attention to spiritual pursuits and the improvement of life quality. For example, when exposed to the English proverb "A penny saved is a penny earned," people realize the importance of thriftiness and financial management, thus paying more attention to simple living and financial planning, reducing unnecessary consumption, and pursuing a more meaningful and happy life. Finally, money proverbs also have a certain influence on individuals' social interactions and interpersonal relationships[12]. Through the dissemination and learning of money proverbs, people can realize the influence and status of money in interpersonal communication, paying more attention to emotional communication and mutual support among people. For example, when exposed to the Chinese proverb "Money can make the devil turn millstones," people realize that although money can change some superficial relationships, true emotions and trust cannot be bought with money, thus paying more attention to the sincerity and durability of interpersonal relationships. In summary, money proverbs have an important influence on individual behavior. Through the learning and dissemination of money proverbs, people can establish correct financial concepts and attitudes towards life, pay more attention to spiritual pursuits and the establishment of interpersonal relationships, thus achieving comprehensive personal development and improvement of happiness.

6. Conclusion

After studying the comparison of money proverbs in English and Chinese, as well as their cultural differences, linguistic expression, money concepts and value orientations, and their applications and insights in cross-cultural communication, education and cultural inheritance, and individual behavior, the following conclusions can be drawn: Money proverbs, as important components of language and culture, reflect the different cultural perceptions and value orientations towards money, embodying their respective cultural traditions and life wisdom. There are significant differences in the expression, cultural connotations, and wisdom of money proverbs between English and Chinese, which not only reflect the different characteristics and value orientations of the two cultures but also provide important references and references for people in cross-cultural communication and understanding. Money proverbs have important application value and enlightening significance in cross-cultural communication, education and cultural inheritance, and individual behavior. By learning and inheriting money proverbs, people can better understand and respect the concepts and value orientations of different cultures, promote smooth cross-cultural communication and cooperation, cultivate correct money concepts and value orientations, guide individuals to deal with money, life, and society correctly, thereby achieving comprehensive personal development and social civilization progress. Therefore, we should pay attention to the learning and dissemination of money proverbs in daily life and educational practice, fully recognize and respect the differences of different cultures, promote cultural exchange and understanding, cultivate correct money concepts and value orientations, guide individuals to actively face money, life, and society, and jointly promote the harmonious development of society and the common progress of humanity.

References

- [1] Clock. Proverb "money" in the concept of comparative analysis between China and Russia [J]. *Journal of youth*, 2020, (17) : 194-196.
- [2] WANG Juan. Traditional view of money through Chinese and Japanese folk Proverbs [J]. *Youth*, 2013,(19):487+486.
- [3] ZHANG Zhe. Comparison of the concept of "money" in English and Russian Proverbs [J]. *Journal of Henan University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 2008, 26(06): 71-73.
- [4] Yang LAN. The cultural connotation of idioms and proverbs about "money" in Russian [J]. *Russian Learning*, 2007,(04):67-69.
- [5] Wang Lanxia. The use of money nouns in Russian proverbs and idioms [J]. *Russian Learning*, 1999,(06):57-59.
- [6] Bao Suzhina, Li Huixian. A comparative analysis of Mongolian and Chinese animal Proverbs from the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor [J]. *Chinese Journal*, 2023, 43(06): 37-44.
- [7] Ma Y. A Comparative study on the conceptual metaphors of "water" in Chinese and Indonesian Proverbs [J]. *Chinese Character Culture*, 2022,(07):143-146.
- [8] Pan Ziwen. A Comparative analysis of the cultural connotations of animal words in English and Chinese Proverbs [J]. *Yellow River. Loess. Yellow Race*, 2022,(03):62-64.
- [9] Hu Linping. A Comparative study on dragon images in Chinese and Japanese Proverbs and folk stories [J]. *Comparative Research on Cultural Innovation*, 21,5(23):168-171.
- [10] Gao Yinsha, Lin Yan. Cultural Differences between China and Japan from the image of auspicious animals in proverbs: A case study of "Dragon" [J]. *Popular Literature and Art*, 2020,(18):62-63.
- [11] Wu Feilong. A Comparative Study on the translation of Proverbs in *Journey to the West* from the perspective of Speech Act Theory [J]. *Journal of Jiangxi Electric Power Technical College*, 2018, 31(10):151-156.
- [12] Qiao Lingling. A comparison of English and Chinese Proverbs about women from the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor [J]. *Journal of Interviewing and Editing*, 2016,(01):312-313.