

Original Paper

A Study on Cultural Differences in Chinese and English

Proverbs

Linyuan Qiu¹

¹ Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Hainan, China

Received: March 19, 2026

Accepted: April 22, 2026

Online Published: May 9, 2026

doi:10.22158/assc.v8n3p17

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v8n3p17>

Abstract

Proverbs are the crystallization of language and an important carrier of culture. Because of the differences in geography, religion, philosophy, customs and values, there are significant differences between Chinese and English proverbs. These differences are inevitably related to the development history of the two cultures, the differences in social structure, and the differences in religious and philosophical traditions. This paper systematically sorts out the differences between the two languages, analyzes the reasons for the differences, and explores how to promote the development of cross-cultural communication and improve translation practice and English learning. In the study, it is found that Chinese proverbs emphasize collectivism, modesty and righteousness, while English proverbs emphasize individualism, confidence and practicality. The fundamental reason for the differences between the two is that the two cultures have been developing in different directions. Understanding the differences between the two languages can avoid cultural misunderstandings and enhance cross-cultural communication ability.

Keywords

Proverb, cultural difference, Chinese-English comparison, cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In the process of global integration, cross-cultural communication has become more and more frequent. The number of learners of Chinese and English, the two most spoken languages in the world, is increasing. However, language learning is not only to master vocabulary and grammar, but also to understand the culture contained in the language. If learners do not understand the culture behind the language, they can not avoid misunderstanding in communication.

Proverbs are a unique form of language, which are created by the people in their daily life, and use

concise language to summarize the experience of the whole society. Proverbs are closely related to life, which can reflect the cultural characteristics of a nation. In the process of analyzing proverbs, we should analyze what language groups focus on, what they value and what they exclude. Therefore, the comparison between Chinese and English proverbs is not only a language comparison, but also a cultural comparison.

In the process of long-term historical evolution, Chinese and English have formed their own proverb systems, which are inevitably influenced by Confucianism and agricultural civilization, and emphasize the importance of collectivism, advocating humility and restraint, and pursuing interpersonal harmony. English proverbs are inevitably related to Western commercial civilization, rational tradition, theology and ethics, and pursue the value of self-development, emphasizing the importance of independence and practicality. The above differences are fully reflected in the semantics and rhetoric of proverbs. For example, the Chinese proverb “one fence and three stakes, one hero and three gangs” emphasizes the importance of cooperation, that is, individuals can only achieve success with the support of the group. English proverbs say, “God helps those who help themselves”, which means that people should take the initiative to be responsible for themselves and achieve success through their own efforts. Although the two proverbs have the same meaning, they are obviously different in the way of assistance, which is the inevitable result of the difference of value.

From this point of view, we should systematically analyze the cultural differences between the two languages, and have a deeper understanding of the applicable context of the proverbs, which can not only help learners grasp the semantic connotation, but also have a deeper understanding of the differences between the two languages, including personality, social norms and values.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Study

This paper analyzes the differences between the two languages from the cultural level, analyzes the reasons for the differences, and analyzes what impact these differences will have on translation and cross-cultural communication.

From the theoretical level, this research is conducive to further understanding the relationship between language and culture. In the study of language relativity theory, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956), an American linguist, pointed out that language has a direct impact on people’s understanding of the world. Proverbs are the most culturally rich content in language, which can be used as a reference for the development of this theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Proverbs

2.1.1 Definition of Proverbs

In the study of Chinese linguistics, the “Modern Chinese Dictionary” points out that proverbs are expressions passed down in the process of mass circulation, using concise language to reflect the truth. This definition reflects the characteristics of proverbs: the scope of circulation is relatively wide, the

form is relatively fixed, the language is colloquial, and it can reflect the truth.

From the perspective of English linguistics, the Oxford English Dictionary defines proverbs as “short, concise and concise sayings that are known to people, which are generally recognized as reasonable and can be passed on for a long time.”

According to the above definition, the proverb is understood as a short sentence, which is fixed in form and passed on to the people, using simple language to describe truth.

2.2 Review of Related Research at Home and Abroad

Western countries have made in-depth research on proverbs, and the time span is long. Aristotle was the first to use proverbs in his works, which is enough to show that Western countries have a long history of research on proverbs. In the modern era, a large number of linguists, folklorists and cognitive linguists have analyzed proverbs from different perspectives. With the rapid development of cross-cultural research in recent years, more and more scholars have focused on proverbs.

Chinese scholars have made remarkable achievements in the comparative study of Chinese and English proverbs. Liu Ying (2023) compared the differences between the two languages from the aspects of values, customs, environment and other aspects. Yang Liu (2022) analyzed the language culture from the perspective of cultural value, and constructed a complete system. In terms of translation strategy, scholars have summarized a variety of methods, including free translation, literal translation and so on. Wang Fan (2017) pointed out that the majority of proverbs are based on metaphor and metonymy.

In the process of sorting out the literature, the shortcomings of the existing research are further felt. First, the current research only stays at the level of listing differences, and does not analyze the reasons for the differences, only to point out what differences exist between the two languages, but not to analyze why the differences exist. Secondly, the theoretical framework is not perfect. Some scholars do not build a reasonable theoretical framework when writing papers, and even if they use Hofstede's theory, they only cite it directly, without integrating it with the analysis of proverbs. Thirdly, the research methods are not standardized, and some scholars only take a few examples as research objects, without explaining the source of proverbs, which has a negative impact on the reliability of the research results. Fourth, the commonality between the two languages is not enough. Most scholars only focus on the differences between the two languages, which is not conducive to readers' understanding of the similarities between the two languages, and may form a wrong impression.

According to the above analysis, this paper makes improvements in the following aspects: first, to analyze the reasons for the differences, and to analyze from the aspects of social structure, historical development and so on; secondly, to find authoritative references, to find typical examples, to clarify the sources, to unify the research methods, and to find the commonalities in the differences, so as to avoid “seeking differences”.

2.3 Theoretical Basis

2.3.1 The Relationship Between Language and Culture

In the process of studying the relationship between language and culture, scholars have put forward two academic views, one of which is that language is a tool, which is neutral in itself, and the other is that language can shape human thinking. In this study, the former view is supported, that is, language is not the decisive factor of human thinking, but can reflect cultural characteristics. Language is like a mirror, which can reflect the thinking habits and values of a certain cultural group. In the process of analyzing language materials, we should pay attention to the importance of proverbs, which are widely used in people's daily life and reflect the reflective function. Therefore, each proverb is a cultural code, which can reflect the thinking mode of a certain cultural group. This is the premise of this research.

2.3.2 Cross-Cultural Communication Theory

Geert Hofstede (1980) is a Dutch scholar, who believes that cultural differences can be divided into six dimensions: power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, long-term orientation and short-term orientation, and indulgence and restraint. Among them, the concepts of individualism and collectivism, long-term orientation and power distance are more consistent with the differences between Chinese and English proverbs. Chinese society has a high power distance and has a strong sense of hierarchy, which can be seen from the proverbs. In the long-term orientation, it is necessary to be patient and have a long-term plan. This paper will take these three dimensions as the research focus to analyze the differences between Chinese and English proverbs.

3. Comparison of the Origin and Characteristics of Chinese and English Proverbs

If we want to grasp the differences between the two languages, we must analyze the characteristics of the two languages and grasp the origin of the two languages. Only in this way can we understand the differences between the two languages at the cultural level.

3.1 *The origin of Chinese and English Proverbs*

The production mode of each nation, the living environment and the ideological tradition have a direct impact on the formation of proverbs. Because of the differences between the two countries in terms of history, culture and geography, the proverbs formed are also different.

3.1.1 The origin of Chinese Proverbs

Chinese proverbs can be traced back to ancient times. Before the birth of writing, spoken language already existed. In the process of production, people summarized many practical sentences, which were passed down orally, continuously improved and gradually formed proverbs. It can be seen that Chinese proverbs have a strong folk color.

The birth of writing has created good conditions for the promotion and dissemination of proverbs. In the process of the development of Chinese literature, proverbs have gradually taken shape. The Book of Songs is the earliest poetry collection in China, and some of its content has been recognized as proverbs, such as "throwing peaches and returning plum blossom", which has become a well-known proverb. The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period were the peak periods of the development of Chinese culture. The works of the Hundred Schools of Thought quoted many proverbs.

Confucius cited “ancient words” and “folk proverbs” in *Analects* to illustrate the truth. Mencius, Xunzi and other books also quoted many proverbs, which shows that more than 2000 years ago, proverbs had become a tool for Chinese people to pass on experience and express ideas.

Chinese proverbs are deeply influenced by farming civilization. China is an agricultural country with a long history. In agricultural production, seasonal changes are the most critical. Farmers have accumulated rich agricultural knowledge in the process of production, which has been summarized into agricultural proverbs passed down from generation to generation. For example, “plant melons and beans before and after the Grain Rain” tells farmers what to plant and when to plant. “White Dew is early, Cold Dew is late, and the autumn equinox is the most appropriate time to plant wheat” tells farmers the best time to plant wheat. Agricultural proverbs are not only a kind of language, but also have strong guiding significance for agricultural production, which is enough to reflect the characteristics of Chinese proverbs.

3.1.2 The Origins of English Proverbs

Compared with Chinese proverbs, English proverbs have a wider range of sources, which is related to the characteristics of British history, which has experienced many stages, including the Roman period, the Anglo-Saxon period, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and so on. Each stage has had a profound impact on the formation of English proverbs.

The Bible is the source of English proverbs, which has a high status in the hearts of Westerners. Christianity has a strong influence in Western society. Many sentences in the Bible are translated into English, which has promoted the prosperity of English proverbs, such as “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, which comes from Exodus in the Old Testament, and “A wolf in sheep’s clothing”, which comes from the Gospel of Matthew. These proverbs are not only widely used in religious activities, but also used in daily life, and can reflect a certain truth.

Western culture has had a profound impact on the development of English proverbs, especially ancient Greek and Roman culture, which is an important source of English proverbs. The philosophical works and fables of Greece, and the drama and speech of Rome, have a large number of expressions, which are distilled into proverbs in the development of history. For example, “know yourself” was written on the wall of the Temple of Delphi in ancient Greece and is a key proposition in Socratic’s philosophical research. “All roads lead to Rome” is a historical fact that the Roman Empire became a transportation hub. The proverbs in classical culture reflect the inheritance of English proverbs from Greek and Roman traditions.

William Shakespeare is an outstanding poet and playwright in the history of British literature. His works have contributed to the formation of English proverbs. Many of the vivid expressions he created have been used in daily language, and have become part of English proverbs. For example, “All that glitters is not gold” comes from *The Merchant of Venice*. “Brevity is the soul of wit” comes from *Hamlet*. The creation of these proverbs shows that literary works are also an important source of proverbs.

English proverbs also originate from the life of the people, which is related to commerce, hunting, sailing and other activities. “Still waters run deep” is a natural phenomenon, which is a summary of people’s experience in life, and is similar to Chinese agricultural proverbs.

3.1.3 Comparison of the origin of Chinese and English Proverbs

From the above analysis, we can see that the origins of Chinese and English proverbs are different, but they also have similarities. The similarity is that the proverbs of the two languages are derived from the life experience of the people. Whether it is Chinese farming proverbs or English nautical proverbs, they are the crystallization of human wisdom in the process of practice. The development of proverbs in the two languages is inevitably related to classical literature. Chinese proverbs are closely related to the Analects and the Book of Songs, while English proverbs are related to the Bible and Shakespeare’s works. This means that proverbs are not only the crystallization of folk wisdom, but also inevitably related to the upper culture. The difference between the two languages is that Chinese proverbs are derived from Confucian classics and agricultural civilization, while English proverbs have a wide range of sources, including religious classics, literary works, classical culture and so on.

There are obvious differences between the two cultures, which are related to the development of history. Chinese culture has a strong continuity, which has been maintained for thousands of years, and agricultural civilization has become the main line. Western culture has a strong diversity, and its cultural heritage has been preserved for a long time, which is enough to show the characteristics of English proverbs.

3.2 Linguistic characteristics of Chinese and English proverbs

Linguistic characteristics are the most fundamental difference between proverbs and other languages. Because of the differences between Chinese and English languages, the formal characteristics of proverbs in the two languages are also different.

3.2.1 Linguistic characteristics of Chinese Proverbs

Chinese proverbs have unique language characteristics. The first is neatness. Chinese is a tonal language, and most words are monosyllabic or two-syllabic. This feature makes it easy for Chinese to form antithetical language. Chinese proverbs are generally symmetrical in structure, with the same number of words and similar structure. For example, “If a person has no foresight, there will be immediate worries” is a four-character antithetical language, and each sentence has four words. “路遥知马力，日久见人心(As distance tries a steed, time reveals one’s true nature.)” is a five-character antithetical language, with five words in each sentence. “近朱者赤，近墨者黑(He who nears vermilion grows red; He who nears ink grows black.)” is a four-character antithetical language. This kind of antithetical structure can make people remember the proverb quickly.

The second is rhyme. Rhyme can make language more rhythmic and musical, which is conducive to the spread of proverbs. Many Chinese proverbs have the same vowel at the end of the sentence, which is similar to poetry and has a strong rhythm, which is the reason why Chinese proverbs can be passed on for a long time.

The third feature is that it uses a large number of metaphors to explain the abstract truth with specific things, which is enough to show that the metaphor is rich, including daily necessities, natural phenomena, plants and so on. For example, “dog bite dog” is a metaphor for people who do evil deeds, and “grass on the wall” is a metaphor for people who have no firm opinions. The use of metaphors can make abstract truths more intuitive.

The fourth feature is the omission of the subject. Chinese is a language that emphasizes topics, and the subject can be omitted. This is a common phenomenon in proverbs. For example, the sentence “If you don’t go into the tiger’s cave, how can you get the tiger’s son” does not have a clear subject, and the speaker does not need to specify who does not enter the tiger’s cave, because the listener can naturally understand. In the sentence “Do not do to others what you do not want to do yourself”, there is no subject, and the omission of the subject makes the sentence more concise, which is in line with the characteristics of proverbs.

3.2.2 Linguistic Features of English Proverbs

English proverbs have obvious language characteristics, which are inevitably related to the structure of English.

The first feature is the use of alliteration. Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant at the beginning of words. Many English proverbs use this technique to enhance rhythm, such as “forgive and forget”, “waste not, want not”, “look before you leap”, and so on. Alliteration makes proverbs more powerful and easier to remember.

The second feature is the use of rhyme. Rhyme refers to the same consonant or vowel sounds at the end of a group of words. English proverbs also use rhymes. For example, in “Haste makes waste,” the ending sounds of ‘haste’ and ‘waste’ are the same. In “A friend in need is a friend indeed,” the ending sounds of ‘need’ and ‘indeed’ are similar. Rhyme enhances the musicality of proverbs.

Third, parallelism. Parallelism means that the same grammatical structure is used in the same sentence. This structure makes the sentence more orderly and powerful. For example, “Easy come, easy go” uses the same structure in the two sentences, “Like father, like son” also uses the same structure. Parallel structure makes the logical relationship between proverbs more and more clear.

The fourth feature is to use contrast to make a negative statement. English proverbs are full of negative words and contrasting structures, which can make people deeply feel the principle of life. “All that glitters is not gold” uses the negative word “not” to tell people not to be deceived by the appearance. “Better late than never” uses the contrast to show that if you can do something, it doesn’t matter if you do it later. “Out of sight, out of mind” uses a negative structure to show that distance will have a negative impact on emotions.

3.2.3 Comparison of the Linguistic Characteristics of Chinese and English Proverbs

After careful analysis, it is found that the two languages have similarities and differences in terms of language characteristics. Similarities include: proverbs in the two languages pursue simplicity and beauty, and proverbs in the two languages are easy to remember and have a good rhythm. This shows

that proverbs, as a kind of oral language, are easy to spread in the process of transmission, and can be remembered by people. The difference between the two languages is that the number of Chinese proverbs is relatively large, and the number of words is relatively balanced, which is related to the characteristics of Chinese pronunciation. Chinese has four tones, each word is a syllable, which is convenient for confrontation. English proverbs have obvious characteristics, which are related to the characteristics of the English language. In addition, English proverbs have a subject, while Chinese proverbs do not. This is related to the differences between the two languages. English is a subject language, while Chinese is a topic language. The grammatical difference between the two languages is also reflected in the proverb.

3.3 Commonalities between Chinese and English Proverbs

Although there are obvious differences between the two languages in the use of proverbs, they also have commonalities, which should be taken seriously because they are the premise of cross-cultural communication. First, proverbs are all derived from life experience. The Chinese say “spring planting and autumn harvest”, while the English say “Make hay while the sun shines”, which are all words of experience in the process of life and production. It can be seen that human beings will produce the same wisdom when solving the same life problems. This is a necessary prerequisite for cross-cultural communication.

Secondly, the two proverbs have a strong educational function. Proverbs are not only a summary of experience, but also a means of moral education. Chinese proverbs require people to be humble, hardworking, and filial to their parents. English proverbs require people to be honest, diligent, and thrifty. It can be seen that the two cultures use language to convey values to others, and proverbs can play the same role in this respect.

Third, the two kinds of proverbs have a strong warning nature. Some proverbs are used to warn people to avoid making certain mistakes or to avoid danger. This similarity shows that different cultures have similar warnings to human weaknesses. Fourth, the two kinds of proverbs pursue language beauty and refinement. The reason why proverbs can be passed on for a long time is not only because of their high value, but also because of their beautiful form. Whether it is English or Chinese, it can reflect the pursuit of language beauty, which is conducive to enhancing the expressiveness of language and attracting others.

The above analysis further shows that although the two languages are different in culture, human beings are the same in pursuing values and accumulating life experience, which is the basis of translation and cross-cultural communication, and we should not only see the differences between the two languages, but also see the similarities.

4. Manifestations of Cultural Differences in Chinese and English Proverbs

The similarities between the two languages are only one of the issues, and the differences between the two languages are more prominent. The differences between the two languages reflect the differences

between the two cultures.

4.1 Differences in Values

4.1.1 Differences between Collectivism and Individualism

Chinese proverbs often emphasize the importance of the collective. “人多力量大” (Many people mean great strength) directly expresses the power of the collective. “众人拾柴火焰高” (When everyone adds fuel, the flames rise high) illustrates that individual contributions can converge to create a huge effect. “一根筷子容易折，十根筷子难折断” (A single chopstick is easily broken, but ten chopsticks are hard to break) shows that unity is strength. Chinese proverbs also emphasize that individuals should subordinate themselves to the collective and maintain harmony. “家和万事兴” (A harmonious family brings prosperity to everything) reflects the importance placed on family harmony. “以和为贵” (Harmony is most precious) applies to broader social relationships.

Compared with Chinese proverbs, English proverbs are more concerned about the importance of self-reliance and self-reliance. “God helps those who help themselves” means that people should strive for their own interests and not rely on others. “Every man is the architect of his own fortune” means that every person is the builder of his own destiny. “A man’s home is his castle” means that personal space can not be violated. “Every tub must stand on its own bottom” means that every person should be responsible for his own actions.

Through comparison, we can see that the two languages have obvious differences in the use of proverbs. Chinese proverbs reflect the importance of unity, while English proverbs reflect the importance of individuality. There is a fundamental difference between the two in terms of values. Chinese people regard themselves as an important part of the collective, and the value of the individual depends on the contribution to the collective. Westerners are different. They regard themselves as independent individuals and emphasize the importance of personal choices and achievements.

4.1.2 Differences between Righteousness Priority and Interest Pragmatism

Chinese culture has the idea of “valuing righteousness and not personal interests”, righteousness is the embodiment of morality, justice and ethics, personal interests are reflected in wealth and interests. In the traditional Chinese value system, righteousness is regarded as a higher pursuit, and individuals are encouraged to pursue righteousness and not personal interests (Cao Xiang, 2019). Western countries regard personal interests as an important content, especially in the context of capitalism, they pursue practical interests. In fact, Western countries do not ignore justice and morality, the difference is that they pursue personal interests, while Chinese culture emphasizes righteousness (Zhou Qianru, 2018).

4.2 Differences in Geographical Environment and Mode of Production

The formation of proverbs is inevitably related to the production mode and geographical environment. The differences in natural conditions and production activities are reflected in proverbs in the form of images and materials. Britain has a long history of commercial and transportation development, while China has a long history of agricultural development. The proverbs of the two countries are inevitably different.

4.2.1 Differences between Agricultural Culture and Maritime/Commercial Culture

There are many agricultural elements in Chinese proverbs. For example, “one point of effort, one point of gain”, which means that if you work hard, you will get a reward. “If a person is diligent, the land will not be lazy” uses the personification method to encourage people to work hard, which is enough to show that Chinese agricultural civilization is full of practicality.

By comparison, there are many English proverbs related to navigation and commerce, such as “Still waters run deep”, which is a description of the sea, using calm water to reflect the depth of the situation and people. “Money makes the world go round” is also a common proverb, which emphasizes the importance of money in commercial society.

4.2.2 Differences in Animal Imagery

The same animal or plant will have different symbolic meanings in the cultural systems of the two languages, which is an important manifestation of cultural differences, and also the root cause of cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Taking “dog” as an example, the status of dogs in traditional Chinese culture is relatively low, and the phrase “dog 仗 person” is used to satirize those who rely on powerful forces to bully others. “Dog eyes look at people” is to satirize those who look down on ordinary people. In English culture, dogs are loyal friends to human beings. The phrase “Every dog has his day” means that everyone will have a good opportunity in his life. The phrase “Love me, love my dog” means that if you want to accept someone, you must accept his shortcomings.

4.3 Differences in Customs and Lifestyle

Culture is inevitably related to people’s lifestyle and customs. Because of the differences between different cultural backgrounds, people’s understanding of family, diet and social interaction is different, which is inevitably reflected in the proverbs, and the proverbs of different countries are different.

Chinese proverbs emphasize the importance of filial piety. “Among all virtues, filial piety is the most important” is a classic saying, which fully shows that filial piety is the core content of the moral system. “The tree wants to be still, but the wind does not stop, the son wants to support the parents, but the parents have passed away” is another well-known proverb, which means that when the parents are alive, they should be respected and cared for, and they should not be neglected because of external factors, so as to avoid regret.

Generally speaking, there are not many English proverbs related to filial piety, which are related to the concepts of friendship, equality and so on. For example, “All men are created equal” is a well-known proverb, which means that all human beings are equal and no one is born to be superior. Independence is also one of the values pursued by English proverbs, “God helps those who help themselves” is a typical example, which means that people should rely on their own efforts to get out of trouble, not to rely on others. Friendship is also an important value in English proverbs, “A friend in need is a friend indeed” is a typical example, which means that a friend who can help you in trouble is a real friend.

4.4 Differences in Philosophical and Religious Traditions

In the process of forming proverbs, religious and philosophical traditions have a significant impact. China has Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, while the West has Christianity. These philosophical and religious traditions are reflected in English and Chinese proverbs.

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are the three pillars of traditional Chinese philosophy, which are deeply reflected in Chinese proverbs. Confucianism requires people to abide by social order and cultivate morality, which is reflected in the proverb “Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you”, which emphasizes the principle of reciprocity. Taoism requires people to go with the flow and not to be too forceful, which is reflected in the proverb “When the boat reaches the bridge, it will naturally straighten out”. Buddhism emphasizes the law of cause and effect, “good people get good rewards, and evil people get evil rewards”, which requires people to do good and avoid evil. These proverbs are the crystallization of the three major philosophical traditions of China, which have a profound impact on people’s understanding of life, morality and fate.

A large number of English proverbs come from the Bible, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” comes from Exodus, “The leopard can not change its spots” comes from the Book of Jeremiah, “A house divided can not stand” comes from the Gospel of Matthew, “Man proposes, God disposes” reflects the belief in God’s sovereignty.

5. Analysis of the Causes of Cultural Differences in Chinese and English Proverbs

The most fundamental reason for the differences between the two languages is that the two cultures have diverged in philosophy, social structure and historical development.

5.1 Differences in Historical Development Trajectories

China has been an agricultural country for thousands of years, and the development of agriculture has a strong impact on the formation of proverbs.

The most important feature is stability. Because farmers can not move freely, they are bound to the land, and they have a strong sense of being attached to their hometown. This value is reflected in the proverb: “A golden nest or a silver nest is not as good as one’s own straw nest”.

The second is that there is a strong sense of cooperation, which requires many people to cooperate in the process of agricultural production, and collectivism has been formed in Chinese culture.

The third feature is respect for experience. In the process of farming, we should make full use of the knowledge accumulated by the ancestors, respect the elders, and respect the traditional wisdom. “If you don’t listen to the advice of the elderly, you will suffer losses in front of you”, which is a common proverb.

Looking back on the long history of China, the dynasties have changed again and again, but the agricultural thread has not been broken, which is a unique feature of China, which has a strong impact on Chinese proverbs.

Looking back at the history of Britain, it is not difficult to find that there are many different stages,

such as the Industrial Revolution, Roman rule and so on. English proverbs are rich in content, including Christian doctrines, Germanic traditions, Greco-Roman culture and so on.

The Industrial Revolution is a turning point in history. The concept of time has changed, from the traditional seasonal to the clock, and the concept of “time is money” has been formed. At the same time, individualism has been promoted, “God helps those who help themselves” is a typical example, and pragmatism has been cultivated, “a penny saved is a penny earned” is the most typical example.

5.2 Differences in Social Structure

Social structure is a general term for the relationship between all members of society. There are obvious differences between China and Western countries in this respect, which are reflected in the proverb.

Fei Xiaotong, a Chinese scholar, said in 1985 that the relationship between Chinese people is like ripples, which will be radiated from the center to the outside, and the family is at the center of the whole society. This structure has a strong influence on the values of Chinese people, and they regard filial piety as the most important virtue.

This is also the reason why the differential model emphasizes the importance of face and harmony. In a society with close ties, harmony is the most important. The proverb “Harmony is most precious” is a typical example.

Western society is a “group pattern”, which is composed of many independent individuals, but the relationship between them is relatively loose. This structure emphasizes the importance of individual independence, which is reflected in “Every tub must stand on its own bottom”.

This pattern can also explain why English proverbs emphasize self-expression. In a society with a large number of independent individuals, everyone should express their opinions and pursue their own interests, which is consistent with the connotation of “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.”

6. Implications of Chinese-English Proverb Differences for Cross-Cultural Communication

In the process of analyzing the differences between the two languages, we should analyze the reasons for the differences, which is conducive to the improvement of theoretical understanding, but also conducive to the improvement of practical application ability. In order to make cross-cultural communication more smooth, we should understand the differences between the two languages.

6.1 Application in English Learning and Teaching

Learning English is not only to accumulate vocabulary, but also to understand the culture of the target language. Proverbs are the concentrated embodiment of culture and play an important role in teaching and learning.

Proverbs are a good way to learn about culture. Every proverb is a cultural unit, which contains the values, behavioral norms and ways of thinking of a certain cultural group. If students can master a certain proverb, they can not only learn a new expression, but also understand how people in English-speaking countries deal with a certain problem.

Teachers should guide students to use proverbs in the process of teaching, and introduce one or two

English proverbs to students in each class, analyze their literal meaning, and introduce the cultural background to students (Da, 2018). For example, when introducing “God helps those who help themselves”, students should be guided to analyze the value of individual effort in English-speaking countries, and to integrate language learning with cultural learning, so that students can form a perfect language knowledge system.

English learners often encounter English proverbs in their learning process, but they do not understand the meaning of the proverbs, and they can only interpret them literally, which is a common mistake. Some learners directly translate the words of proverbs into Chinese, but they do not know that proverbs have a strong metaphorical meaning and can not be directly translated according to the literal meaning. “Every dog has his day” is a typical example. If learners translate it literally as “every dog has its day”, they will not know what it means. In fact, this is a proverb, which means that everyone will have a stroke of good luck. In the teaching process, teachers should guide students to analyze the meaning of the proverbs, explain the cultural background, and avoid the literal interpretation of students.

6.2 Considerations in Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication is an activity in which people from different cultural backgrounds communicate with each other. In the process of communication between Chinese and English, the use of proverbs and the understanding of proverbs are two problems that need to be solved urgently, and we should pay attention to the following aspects.

6.2.1 Avoid Ethnocentrism

In the process of cross-cultural communication, ethnocentrism is a common problem. People use their own cultural standards to measure others' behavior, which is not conducive to the smooth development of cross-cultural communication.

For example, if a Chinese person communicates with an English speaker, he will feel that the English speaker is too self-promoting and too direct, but if an English person communicates with a Chinese person, he will think that the Chinese person is too reserved and not confident enough. This is because the two sides use their own cultural standards to evaluate others.

After understanding the differences between the two languages, we should deeply feel that there is no right or wrong in the behavior of the two sides, only the difference in cultural background. We should not regard directness as rudeness and reserve as cowardice. Every style has its own rationality. In the process of cross-cultural communication, we should pursue understanding and not blindly judge.

6.2.2 Understand the Cultural Logic Behind Proverbs

If the other party uses a proverb in the process of communication, we should not only understand it from the literal level, but also not use the logic of our own culture to interpret it, but also understand the cultural logic behind it.

In this case, we should not pursue equivalence between the two languages, but should focus on the mainstream status of proverbs in the two cultures. At the same time, we should realize that the fundamental way to grasp the differences between proverbs is not to pursue superficial correspondence,

but to grasp the weight and position of various values in the cultural system. In order to understand the differences between the two cultures, we should deeply feel that the value of one culture is higher than that of the other, and the value of the other is relatively low, so as to understand the logic of the other party's behavior and avoid cultural misunderstanding.

6.2.3 Aim for Effective Communication, Not Cultural Conversion

The fundamental purpose of cross-cultural communication is to achieve effective communication, not to change one side into the other. We should not abandon our own cultural values, nor should we require the other party to accept our culture. What we need to do is to respect cultural differences and achieve communication.

The use of proverbs requires flexible handling. If you are confident that the other person will understand your meaning, you can use proverbs to enhance the effectiveness of communication. If you are not sure whether the other person will understand, you should use plain language to convey the same meaning. After all, the purpose of communication is to enable the other party to understand, not to show off their language proficiency.

7. Conclusion

The main findings of this study can be summarized in the following three aspects.

Firstly, there are obvious differences between the two languages in many aspects. Chinese proverbs reflect the characteristics of collectivism, emphasizing the importance of righteousness and not being arrogant, while English proverbs pursue individualism and are more pragmatic.

Secondly, there are fundamental differences between the two countries. From the historical development point of view, China has been in the agricultural civilization for thousands of years, with strong stability and collective cooperation, and Britain has experienced the industrial revolution and the integration of diverse cultures, showing obvious pluralism. From the social structure point of view, the Chinese differential mode of association emphasizes family, blood ties and harmony, while the Western group pattern emphasizes competition, independence and rights. From the philosophical tradition, China integrates Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, which is compatible, moral and secular, and the two countries' proverbs are inevitably different under the influence of these factors.

Thirdly, the existence of these differences is conducive to cross-cultural communication. In the process of learning English, we should understand the importance of proverbs and use them in the process of learning English to deepen our understanding of English culture, so as to avoid the mistakes caused by literal translation and enhance cross-cultural awareness. In cross-cultural communication, we should not have too strong national self-esteem, but should respect the differences between the two cultures, analyze the cultural connotations of proverbs, and communicate in a flexible way. The above understanding is not only conducive to language learners, but also to translators and people who participate in cross-cultural communication.

Proverbs are the crystallization of language and the crystallization of culture. Although the length of

proverbs is short, they can reflect the wisdom of a nation for thousands of years. Some proverbs are vivid, which can reflect the core values of a culture. By comparing the proverbs of the two languages, we can see that there are similarities and differences between the two cultures. Differences can make people feel the diversity of culture, and similarities can make people deeply feel that cross-cultural understanding is possible.

In the context of globalization, cross-cultural communication is becoming more and more important. Learning a foreign language is only the first step, and to truly master it, we need to understand the culture behind it. I hope that through this study, English learners can deepen their understanding of English culture and have a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage.

References

- Benjamin, L. W. (1956). *Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (J. B. Carroll, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cao, X. (2019). A cultural contrast and translation of Chinese and English proverbs. *Literature Education (Upper)*, 2019(8), 146-148.
- Da, W. (2018). The role of English proverbs in vocational high school English teaching. *Modern Vocational Education*, 2018(16), 198.
- Fei, X. T. (1985). *From the soil: The foundations of Chinese society*. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Liu, Y. (2023). Cultural differences between Chinese and English proverbs and their translation strategies. *China National Exhibition*, 2023(13), 192-194.
- Wang, F. (2017). *A cross-cultural study of English and Chinese proverbs from the perspective of metaphor and metonymy*. Changchun: Jilin University.
- Wang, F. (2017). An analysis of metaphor types and differences in Chinese and English proverbs. *Journal of Jilin Provincial Institute of Education*, 33(6), 154-156.
- Yang, L. (2022). *A comparative study of Chinese and English proverbs from the perspective of linguistic culturology*. Shenzhen: Shenzhen University.
- Zhou, Q. R. (2018). A brief discussion on the comparison of cultural connotations of Chinese and English proverbs. *Chinese Character Culture*, 2018(23), 113-114.