

## Introduce to the Non-symmetry of Word Derivation between 'Wenhua' and 'Culture'

Fei Deng<sup>1</sup> & Jianli Tang<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The western civilizations have brought many new thoughts to Chinese language in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and further influenced and changed the words' meanings of Chinese words. To studying the Chinese-English translated terms and knowing their different derivation can bridge the gap between different cultures. The scholar translated the English word 'Culture' into Chinese word 'Wenhua'. 'Wenhua' is derived from two words which are 'Wen' and 'Hua' in ancient Chinese language. 'Wen' means 'to feel and experience the nature by heart, and then painting and describing things, at last, one can achieve correlating knowledge through this process in ancient Chinese language'. 'Hua' means 'to change' which stresses persons can improve them based on 'Wen'. The start-point of meanings emphasizes the harmonious relationship between human beings and outer nature, and stresses the inner harmony of human beings by themselves. Namely, 'Wenhua' focuses on the all sorts of social and ethical relationship which comes from the inner human beings society. The start-point of meanings derivation of English word 'Culture' emphasizes the interrelation between human being society and the outer nature, and focuses the contrary relationship which embody as the remolding one and the reformed one.

**Keywords:** Word derivation, Translation, Wenhua, Culture, Non-symmetry









### 1. Introduction: The 'Culture' as 'Wenhua' Enters Chinese Language

The western civilizations have brought many new thoughts to Chinese language in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and further influenced and changed the words' meanings of Chinese words. To studying the Chinese-English translated terms and knowing their different derivation can bridge the gap between different cultures. This paper would like to explore the different traits of China-West through analyzing the difference of word derivation and core meanings between Chinese word 'wenhua' and English word 'culture'. Japan scholar Ishikawa Yoshihito (1995) believed that 'wenhua' is an ancient Chinese word, and in Japanese it was introduced new meanings coming from the west, at last, it returned to the word system of Chinese as a semantic translation word. China famous linguists Wang Li (2001) also considered that modern Chinese word 'wenhua' was introduced from Japan, and it invested ancient Chinese word many new meanings. However, some scholars have provided many different viewpoints about the word wenhua's derivation. Fang Weigui (2004) had looked up considerable files and sorted out a lot of material, and he believed that it has lot or little influence coming from Japanese for using the word 'wenhua' as the literal translation word of the word 'culture', but it was much complex than we can imagine that how about the influence degree which Japanese bringing to Chinese, how about the function and effect during the process which the Chinese understood the concept by its self, used the concept and developed the concept, furthermore, where the civilization concepts came from in the modern times. All in all, one point is clear that the concept of modern civilization came not only from Japan but also from the west. We consider that Fang Weigui's viewpoint is right, namely, ideology of culture had entered China was much earlier than the word 'wenhua' was introduce into China from Japan.






<sup>1</sup> Institute of Chinese Language and Document, Southwest University, Chongqing City, China. Chinese department of Chinese University of Hong Kong, Xinjie Territory, HK. [Dengfei2345@sina.com](mailto:Dengfei2345@sina.com)

<sup>2</sup> College of Philosophy and Society Development, Huaqiao University, Xiamen city, China.

## 2. The Meanings of the Chinese Character 'Wen' in Ancient Writing

'Wenhua' consists of two Chinese characters in Chinese. One is 'wen', and the other is 'hua'. They emerged early. We can see their shapes in the inscriptions of the oracle-bones and bronze ware in ancient Chinese Shang and Zhou dynasty. The figures of 'wen' are  (Heji946a),  (Heji18682),  (Heji4889) and  (Heji4611b) in the oracle-bone inscriptions. And the shapes of 'wen' are  (Wen Ling),  (Tao Zun),  (Ling Gui) and  (lv Ding) in the inscriptions of bronze ware in ancient Chinese Zhou dynasty. There are a few different opinions about the meanings of Chinese character 'wen'. Section Wen of Shuowen Jiezi said: 'wen' means to draw in the way of crossing, and Du Yu-cai added notes and said: 'wen' means to draw pictures using the crossing lines. Xu Zhong-shu (1988: 995), Zhu Fang-fu (1962: 67-68) and Yan Yi-ping (1961: 1009-1010) did further study of 'wen' in Oracle-Bone Inscriptions, and said: 'wen' like a uprightly standing person whose chest was decorated with pictures, so they considered that the meanings of 'wen' derived from the ancient people's tattoo. These view-points can be supported by Chinese ancient literature documents. From Chinese character 'wen' in the inscriptions of the oracle-bones and bronze, we can see various figures on man's chests, but the most important figure is heart. So Wu Qi-chang and Xu Jin-xiong have provided new opinions that it has something with ancient sacrificing. And Wu Qi-chang (1959: 226-227) said: 'wen' indicate the subject who would be sacrificed to when someone is dead. And Xu Jin-xiong (2009: 1-2) believed that 'wen' disclose when person is dead; people will cut their chests to let the blood flow into the soil in the sacrificing ceremony. An ancient people considered that the Spirit never dies, and it exists with nature. The Spirit should return to nature, and find another life. Of course, this view-point has some present anthropological proofs from Africa and South Pacific islands. This caused the heart-like figure become the main signs on the chest. Lin Yun (1986: 72) said: it can indicate the mind traits when people curve the heart-like figures on chest. All in all, the meanings of 'wen' disclosed the primitive ideas about relationship between man and the nature. It disclosed that persons are a part of the nature, and human beings must be adapting to the nature from birth to death.

## 3. The Meanings of Chinese Character 'Hua' in Ancient Writing

The character figures of 'hua' are  or  in the oracle-bone inscriptions, and its figures in the bronze wares' inscriptions are  (Hua ding),  (Zhongzihua plate) and  (Situhua ding). Xu Zhongshu(1988) said that 'hua' is like the figure that one person stands upright and one person stands upside down. Zhu Fangfu (1962) said that 'hua' is like the shape that one stands upright and one stands upside down, namely we call it 'to turn somersault' in nowadays common saying. Guoyu's Jinyu chapter said that sheng bai ruo hua. Weizhao added notes and said that 'hua' is 'it is irrational to change each other', and Xunzi's zhengming chapter said that zhuang bian er shi wu bie er wei yi zhe wei zhi hua. Yang Liang added notes and said that 'hua' means change the old figure. Zhu Fangfu considered that these items of meanings are extending meaning. 'Hua' has the meanings of 'to be pregnant'. Lvshichunqiu's Guoli chapter said that pou yunfu er guan qi hua, sha Bigan er guan qi xin. Gaoyou added notes and said that 'hua' is 'to be pregnant'. Shangshu's Yaodian chapter said that niao shou zi wei. Kongzhuan said that 'to be pregnant' called 'zi'. Kong Yingda added notes and said that 'to be pregnant' is 'hua'. So we can say that the meaning items of 'change' derivate from 'to be pregnant'. Yijing's Heng chapter said that riyue de tian er neng jiuzhao, sishi bianhua er neng jiucheng. Huainanzi's Fanlun chapter said that fa yu shi bian, li yu su hua. Gao You added notes and said that 'hua' is 'to change'. From this meaning item, the meaning item 'to attempt guided to change by persuasion' emerged. Shuo Wen's Qi sector said that 'hua' is 'reform through persuasion'. Lvshichunqiu's DaYue chapter said that tianxia taiping, wanwu anning, jie hua qi shang. Gao You added notes and said that 'hua' is 'to follow'. And 'hua' has the meaning items of 'nature' and 'function of nature'. Su Wen's Wuchangzheng chapter said that zhao hu zai, shengren zhi wen ye, hua bu ke dai, shi bu ke wei. Wang Bing said that 'hua' is 'nature'. Lun Heng's Dinggui chapter said that tiandi zhi xing, ben you ci hua, fei daoshu zhi jia suo neng lunbian. Hua's meaning start-point is human being. Its shape disclosed that one person stands upright and one person stands upside down in the inscriptions of the oracle-bone and bronze ware in the ancient Chinese Shang dynasty and Zhou dynasty. No matter it indicated 'to turn somersault' or 'to be pregnant', one is certain that person is focus which comes from 'hua'. It is from person's change to the change's cause—attempt guided to change by persuasion and protocol and music education. And it also is from the person's change by nature to outer nature's change. We consider that this discloses that thought start-point based on the person's nature is characteristic of the early Chinese culture and the ideology of human being harmoniously existing with the outer nature is stressed. We can say that the meaning start-point and focus of the Chinese characters 'hua' and 'wen' are human being. So-called wenhua is 'to become human beings' and 'to live as human beings'.

Here, human beings are objects who suit the value of the mainstream culture. It disclosed the process during the time when the primitive persons turn to modern person who have accepted the knowledge and value from the mainstream culture, and who change their mind and behaviors through education.

#### 4. The Meanings of 'Wenhua' in Language Literature of Ancient China

These two words 'wen' and 'hua' were used together lately in Chinese documents. Shuoyuan's Zhiwu chapter said: 'fan wu zhi xing, wei bu fu ye, wenhua bu gai, ranhou jia zhu.' Buwangshi's Youyi chapter said: 'wenhua nei ji, wugong wai you.' Zhongheyuejiuzhang's Zhongge said: 'wuhua yan xi wenhua chang, liyue zhao xi gugong liang.' We can see that 'wenhua' in Chinese was used contrast with 'wugong' or 'wuhua'. 'Wugong' and 'wuhua' mean 'to reach one's goal through war'. Wenwangyoushen sector of Shijing's Daya chapter said: 'wenweng shouming, youci wugong, jifa yu chong, zuoyi yu feng.' Zheng Xuan added notes and said: 'wugong means 'to fight against four states and arrive at Chong at last'. Namely, 'wenhua' was not a word, but a phrase in Chinese documents. It means 'wenzhi' and 'jiaohua'. 'Wenzhi' means 'to regulate the populace through education of suitable protocol and music'. Liji's Jifa chapter said: 'wenwang yi wenzhi, wuwang yi wugong.' Dazhaoyuanhaoshu written by Fan Zhongyan said: 'xiaoguo wu wenzhi eryou wugong, huo mo da yan.' 'Jiaohua' means 'to attempt to guide populace through political measures' and 'to attempt to guide mass of the people through education'. The prelude of Guanju sector of Shijing's Zhounan chapter said: 'mei jiao hua, yi feng su.' The Shoushi sector of Yantielun written by Huan Kuan said: 'shiyi wangzhe she xiang xu, ming jiaoshu, yi fangdao qi min.' The word 'wenhua' emerged much later than the word 'wenming', and they sometimes shared with the same meanings. It was difficult to differentiate 'Cultur' and 'Kultur' from 'civilization' during long time in Germany. Till 19 century, many Germany scholars used these two words after differentiating them. Civilization was defined as 'social, material, mechanical and artificial embodiment' or 'the achievements obtained by rational technology in the way of characters, commerce and agriculture skillfulness', and culture was defined as the subjective factor and levels of human beings social life which includes ideology and dream, art and literature, morals and ethics, and philosophy and religion. Carl Schneider (1968:187) considered that culture was thought as it cannot accumulate continually, and it cannot be lent and learnt by the alien people. In Chinese documents, 'wenhua' was used contrast with 'wuzhi'. It was a kind of way and political ideology to regulate the mass of the people, administer the states and conquer the alien persons. At last, the majority of people became submissive to the rulers and the minority of persons became the next rulers who can suit the existed standards.

#### 5. The Meanings of 'Culture' in English

The word 'wenhua' was used to translate the English word 'culture'. Generally speak, this English word 'culture' derivate from the verb 'cultivate'. The meaning of 'cultivate' in New Edition is 'to prepare and use (land) for crops or gardening'. And it is 'to prepare (land) for crops by plowing, etc.; help (crops) to grow (eg by breaking up the soil around them, destroying weeds etc.' in Modern Edition. It is (a) prepare and use (land, soil, etc.) for growing crops, (b) grow (crops)' in the fourth edition. It is clear that 'tries to acquire or develop (a quality or skill)', 'give care, thought, time, etc. to develop sth. ', and 'take (the mind, feelings, etc.) more educated and refined' are its extending meanings. The English word 'cultivate' derivate from Latin word 'cultus' which means 'to plant', and the other is 'colere' which means 'to explore'. It is a specific activity like 'to prepare land, soil'. We consider that the original meanings of 'cultivate' is obviously 'to prepare land'. Firstly, 'to prepare land' is the first step to plant. It came from the planting civilization during this period human beings wanted to extricate themselves from the single-product economy based on the hunting and picking fruits, and wanted to improving their life standard and entered well-beings society. Following the higher life standard, human beings' outlook and lifestyle had change, and they had grown agile, so they had overtaken the simple life mode that the existing materials were their sole source of life. Human beings of the early times had known the values of the land and known the outer natural environments step by step during the period when they live close to the nature. They had grasped the knowledge that plants can periodically grow, flower, and fruit. So human beings began to use the simple tools to plant. It was a milestone for human beings though it was a primitive planting. This indicated that human beings had overstepped themselves, and marked the human beings' wisdom rising to a new high step. This indicated that human beings surpassed the fixed nature, and they imprint the nature with their activities, and changed the natural environments of some territory to some extent. It symbolized that human beings overpass one period, and entered a new stage. Namely, human beings can not only live by directly exacting from the nature, but also obtain a new lifestyle by working based on their wisdom.

If we say the human beings in the early times have directly lived by the nature, the human beings in this period certainly were apt to animal natural instinct. The human beings lived much instinctive, and the social activity is to do manual labor which differentiated human beings from other high class creature, so 'cultivate' had changed human beings' life and living space, and made human beings have independent and special environments. We can say that the natural and original meanings of the word 'culture' are wisdom and surpassing. Namely, human beings have transcended the limit of their life condition and wisdom, so the word has reflected the improving process during which human beings live naturally. The fundamental and core meanings of noun 'culture' is 'the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively (a refined understanding or appreciation of this)' in the New Edition. Its meanings say in the fourth edition: (a) state of intellectual development of a society, (b) particular form of intellectual expression, e.g. in art and literature. And its meanings in the Modern Edition are: (a) advanced development of the human powers; development of the body, mind and spirit by training and experience, (b) evidence of intellectual development (of arts, science, etc.) in human society. Speaking in brief, the core meanings of 'culture' focus on 'human intellectual achievement'. And the meanings of the word 'intellect' are 'the faculty of reasoning and understanding objectively'. Namely, the meanings of the word 'culture' stress the meanings start point—human beings have developed the capacity of analyzing and understanding the nature, and improving themselves based on the early experiencing the social change and activities of molding the outer objective environments. Its fruit of this process is Culture.

## 6. Conclusions

1. The western civilizations have brought many new thoughts to Chinese language in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and further influenced and changed the words' meanings of Chinese words. To studying the Chinese-English translated terms and knowing their different derivation can bridge the gap between different cultures.
2. The scholar translated the English word 'Culture' into Chinese word 'Wenhua'. 'Wenhua' is derived from two words which are 'Wen' and 'Hua' in ancient Chinese language. 'Wen' means 'to feel and experience the nature by heart, and then painting and describing things, at last, one can achieve correlating knowledge through this process in ancient Chinese language'. 'Hua' means 'to change' which stresses persons can improve them based on 'Wen'. The start-point of meanings emphasizes the harmonious relationship between human beings and outer nature, and stresses the inner harmony of human beings by themselves. Namely, 'Wenhua' focuses on the all sorts of social and ethical relationship which comes from the inner human beings society.
3. In short, 'Wenhua' is 'Renhua'. 'Ren' means 'human beings'. The meanings of 'Renhua' have focused on the accumulating process of human beings' inner traits which comes from the reforming ourselves in aspect of humanism love and improving ourselves in aspect of ethical remolding, and during this process, introspecting is a very important method.
4. The start-point of meanings derivation of English word 'Culture' emphasizes the interrelation between human being society and the outer nature, and focuses the contrary relationship which embody as the remolding one and the reformed one. And during this process, human beings have introspected themselves about the development issues of the spiritual and capacity.
5. All in all, Chinese word 'wenhua' and its translated corresponding English 'culture' have different start-point of meanings derivation. The meaning core of 'Culture' is 'human intellectual achievement'. 'Wenhua' is a governing ideology which is contrast to 'wugong', and it concludes administer the society, regulating human beings, conquering the aliens, and making the aliens submit to the authority of their own. It is obvious that the word derivation and fundamental meaning of these two words in Chinese and English are distinctively different during the translating process, and it embodies the original and fundamental heterogeneity factors of ideology and social values between the west society and the east society.

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