

Comparative Analysis on Cattle-related Proverbs between Chinese and Japanese: Based on a Paremiological Spectral List

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Abstract Animal proverbs, an important part of language, are the summary of life experience among countries, which were fully endowed with national and cultural features. The differences in history, culture and national characters between China and Japan could be exposed by comparing the proverbs related to cattle. This study, employing a spectral list which reflects the actual use of proverbs, aims to analyze the reasons for the differences in the acquisition of Chinese and Japanese cattle-related proverbs and explore the connotation of metaphors from a sociocultural perspective. The study found that Chinese cattle-related proverbs have higher popularity and are larger in the quantity, richer in the genre and form than that of Japanese, which is related to the different cultural and historical contexts in which these proverbs emerged. The study also found that common metaphors in Chinese and Japanese cattle proverbs show a negative image when describing other persons. Although cattle have made great contributions to the social and economic development in ancient China and Japan, their metaphors are mainly used to criticize human behavior with a negative image, such as being stubborn or stupid. This study provides a comparative analysis of Chinese and Japanese cattle proverbs from a sociocultural perspective and hope to improve the study of animal proverbs and promote cross-cultural communication.

Keywords Comparative Analysis of Cattle-related Proverbs, Spectral List, Proverbs Acquisition,

Metaphorical Interpretation of Proverbs

1. Introduction

Cognitive linguistics studies the relationship between language and human cognition, which considers language as a reflection of human experience and regards metaphor as an important cognitive mechanism that maps one conceptual domain to another. Animals are common metaphorical objects in human daily life, and they could be used to evaluate human moral qualities, personality traits, social status, etc [1]. Proverbs are a concise and wise form of linguistic expression that reflects the cultural characteristics and values of different peoples. A typical example is the proverb related to cattle, which uses their animal characteristics and habits to describe and evaluate human behavior and attitudes. In different regions and countries, cattle-related proverbs express different patterns of experience and philosophies for dealing with the world, reflecting the influence of the natural environment, historical context, social institutions and other factors on human perception and culture [2].

Proverbs are the crystallization of the culture of a region or nation. However, with the progress of society and the changes of the times, many proverbs have gradually declined in frequency of use in daily life and could no

longer objectively reflect social life. This study aims to examine the acquisition of cattle-related proverbs by the Chinese and Japanese populations by establishing a list of the frequency of their use in both countries. From the perspective of social culture, this paper also analyzes the reasons for the differences in the acquisition situation and the connotation of cattle-related proverbs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on the Proverbs Related to Cattle

Numerous studies have been undertaken to delve into the multifaceted world of cattle proverbs. These studies aim to unravel the intricate web of the origin, evolution, and mode of transmission of these proverbs across different regions of the world. In the context of Europe and the Americas, cattle proverbs are intricately linked to the agricultural and animal husbandry practices, which are an integral component of the rural life and folk culture [3-5]. While in the context of Asia, these proverbs are found to be more intertwined with the social life, human relations, and moral values.

Chinese scholars have conducted research on Chinese and Japanese cattle proverbs from two main perspectives. Firstly, regarding the origin of these proverbs, Fei [6] explored the origins of animal proverbs and found that these proverbs mainly originated from daily life and customs, followed by fables, with literary works ranking last. Li [7] discussed from a linguistic perspective that there are significant differences in the way that Japanese and Chinese express the same imagery. Specifically, Japanese tends to use marine creatures as metaphors, while Chinese is better at using land animals as a basis for analogy.

Secondly, research has been conducted on the metaphors used in cattle proverbs. Hui [8] found through in-depth analysis that in Chinese, “cattle” is usually associated with honest and hardworking people. Lingfei’s research [9] further revealed that when Chinese people use the imagery of “cattle”, it could be used to praise courageous and resolute character, or to criticize stubborn and foolish behavior. Shu [10] also pointed out that Chinese people are good at using cattle-related idioms to satirize those who are affected and overly boastful.

In addition, compared to the research on Chinese animal proverbs, there has been relatively little research on Japanese animal proverbs, particularly in the field of cattle proverbs. Among them, only Toshiomi’s research [11] has explored how to observe “cattle” from a specific perspective and create proverbs based on this.

In general, there has been relatively little research on cattle-related proverbs in both Chinese and Japanese contexts. Furthermore, existing studies on cattle-related proverbs have not gone deep enough, as they only explored the semantics of the metaphorical vehicles and have not delved into the cognitive linguistic perspective to examine

the relationship between semantic generation and different social life experiences.

2.2. Studies on the Methods to Comparison of Proverbs

The comparative study of proverbs across cultural backgrounds has been a topic of great interest to researchers. However, analyzing all the proverbs one by one in different cultural backgrounds could be a time-consuming and laborious process. Therefore, most researchers tend to choose proverbs that have been studied by previous researchers [12-14] or conduct exhaustive searches of dictionaries to obtain proverbs in two languages [15-16]. However, this approach is subjective in selecting proverbs, which affects the objectivity and fairness of research results. Therefore, it is necessary to use more objective and scientific methods to select proverbs to ensure the accuracy and reliability of research results.

To address this issue, Permiakov, a Russian proverb researcher, proposed the concept of “Paramiological Minimum” in 1985 [17], to ensure objectivity in proverb selection. He conducted a survey and analyzed 300 proverbs that are necessary to understand Russian culture. Mieder [18] developed the research on “Paramiological Minimum” and suggested that it could be determined through recall questionnaire survey, awareness survey, and frequency survey.

Based on this research, Lau [19] and Doctor [20] combined two research methods, such as news corpus and questionnaire survey, to investigate values by extracting a few proverbs through large-scale surveys. Korean scholar Jeong [21] argued that the “Paramiological Minimum” could only distinguish the popularity of proverbs and cannot reflect the actual use of a certain proverb in real life. She suggested that by comparing different versions of proverb dictionaries, the most frequently used proverbs recognized by lexicographers could be derived.

However, the social usage of proverbs recognized by lexicographers is not always known. Thus, a questionnaire survey is required to determine the actual frequency of use of a proverb in a specific language environment. The results of these questionnaires can be sorted to form a Spectral List, which reflects the popularity and actual frequency of use of a certain proverb in a specific cultural context. This list can provide valuable insights into the cultural cognition and metaphor understanding behind the proverbs.

In conclusion, Jeong [21] proposed the concept of “Paramiological Minimum” and suggested the use of a combination of questionnaire surveys and spectral lists as an effective method for objectively comparing proverbs originating from diverse cultural backgrounds. The rationale for selecting this approach as a research method is based on its ability to facilitate the objective selection of proverbs, accurately capture the comprehension and usage of a given proverb by individuals, and provide a deeper

understanding of the cultural cognition and metaphorical interpretation underlying the proverb.

3. Materials and Methods

The Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean cultures share a common heritage of Chinese characters. This has resulted in many similar proverbs circulating among these three countries. This article aims to investigate the proverbs about cattle in China and Japan, employing Jeong's research process. The investigation is divided into two steps: collecting the corpus of Chinese and Japanese proverb dictionaries and carrying out a Keyword Fill-in-the-Blank questionnaire to test the acquisition of cattle proverbs by Chinese and Japanese people.

This study selected 20 proverb dictionaries, 10 each from China and Japan. Each dictionary contains an average of 5,000 entries and is published by well-known publishing houses in both countries. The corpus of Chinese and Japanese proverb dictionaries was established by collecting proverbs about cattle. Through repeated counting statistics, 343 Chinese cattle-related proverbs and 176 Japanese cattle-related proverbs were obtained. Non-repeated

counting and statistics were then carried out to classify and sort the proverbs according to their frequency of occurrence. The 15 most frequently used proverbs were screened to form a Keyword Fill-in-the-Blank questionnaire.

As for the participants, we did the random sampling and selected 100 Chinese college students and 100 enterprise employees in Shanghai as well as the same in Japanese contexts with 400 in total. 380 valid questionnaires were received and the results of the statistical analysis are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. Repeated counting was used to count the total number of Chinese and Japanese cattle-related proverbs, while non-repeated counting was used to measure the popularity of these proverbs. Distinct counting was used to measure the cognitive commonality of lexicographers when including proverbs [22].

The statistical results show that the most frequently used proverbs in Chinese and Japanese related to cattle are similar. The correct rate of the Keyword Fill-in-the-Blank questionnaire was high for most of the proverbs, indicating that they are commonly used in daily life. However, a few proverbs had a low correct rate, indicating that they are less common.

Table 1. Spectral list of Cattle-related Proverbs in Chinese

NO.	Cattle-related proverbs in Chinese	Repeated	Non-repeated	Correct rate
1	强按牛头不喝水/You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make it drink.	23	9	28%
2	杀鸡焉用牛刀/Break a fly upon the wheel.	12	9	98%
3	牛皮不是吹的火车不是推的/Talk horse.	11	9	28%
4	马不知脸长 牛不知角弯/Men are blind in their own cause.	11	9	6%
5	儿孙自有儿孙福 莫为儿孙做马牛/Children need to live their own lives.	9	9	52%
6	牵牛要牵牛鼻子/Get to the point.	9	9	58%
7	初生牛犊不畏虎/They who know nothing fear nothing.	8	8	100%
8	好马不停蹄 好牛不停犁/Good non-stop.	8	8	6%
9	龙眼识珠 凤眼识宝 牛眼识稻草/As blind as a bat.	8	8	12%
10	学者如牛毛 成者如麟角/Masters are rare.	8	8	10%
11	宁为鸡口 无为牛后/Better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion.	8	8	16%
12	对牛弹琴 牛不人耳/Cast pearls before swine.	8	7	98%
13	九牛身上拔一根毛/A drop in the ocean.	8	8	20%
14	牛吃草 鸡吃谷 各人自有各人福/Everyone has his own happiness.	7	6	20%
15	牛皮喊不倒人 草深掩不住苗/Bragging counts nothing.	6	6	4%

Table 2. Spectral list of Cattle-related Proverbs in Japanese

NO.	Cattle-related proverbs in Japanese	Repeated	Non-repeated	Correct rate
1	牛は牛連れ、馬は馬連れ/Like attracts like	9	7	23%
2	牛を馬に乗り換える/Play to one's strength.	7	7	26%
3	牛に引かれて善光寺参り/Success often comes unexpectedly.	5	5	44%
4	商いは牛の涎/Long-term plans, great returns.	5	5	18%
5	牛の角を蜂が刺す/Constant dripping wears away the stone.	7	5	10%
6	牛の歩み/At a snail's pace.	5	5	41%
7	牛も千里、馬も千里/All roads lead to Rome.	6	5	23%
8	牛に対して琴を弾ず/Cast pearls before swine.	14	5	18%
9	牛のしりがい/If you refuse the elder's advice, you will walk the whole day.	5	4	3%
10	牛の小便/Heedless	6	4	0
11	牛を食う気/They who know nothing fear nothing.	5	4	10%
12	牛追い牛に追われる/Put the cart before the horse.	4	4	8%
13	庖丁牛を解く/Highly skilled	3	3	0
14	角を矯めて牛を殺す/Ovellkill	3	3	10%
15	牛売って牛にならず/ Try to gain an advantage only to end up worse off.	3	3	8%

4. Discussion and Results

4.1. Acquisition of Cattle-related Proverbs in China and Japan

This paper analyzes the differences in the results of the “repeated counting” and “unrepeated counting” surveys of Chinese and Japanese dictionaries in terms of cattle-related proverbs. It explores the cultural significance of cattle in China and Japan, and how these cultural differences influence the acquisition of expressions and metaphors related to cattle in both countries.

As indicated by Table 1 and Table 2, a comparison of the results obtained from the “repeated counting” and “unrepeated counting” methods employed in the survey of Chinese and Japanese dictionaries revealed significant differences between the data collected from the two countries. The results are $t(28) = 2.995$, $p < 0.01$; $t(28) = 8.3111$, $p < 0.001$. It shows that compared with Japan, cattle proverbs are not only more popular in China, but also more in number, and the expression forms of proverbs are more abundant. Compared with Japanese proverbs related to cattle, there are many “variant shapes” in Chinese proverbs related to cattle, that is, different constructions with the same meaning [23]. The rich language expressions of Chinese proverbs not only reflect the Chinese people's emphasis on cattle, but also reveal the national characteristics of metaphorical cognition and understanding under the different natural environments and

social cultures of China and Japan.

In addition, the results of the Keyword Filling in the Blank survey show that the ranking of cattle proverbs in the same language environment, recognized by lexicographers and frequently used is far from what people actually learned. The first proverb in Table 1, “强按牛头不喝水” and the first proverb in Table 2, “牛は牛連れ、馬は馬連れ”, have high repetition rates with 23 and 9, respectively. It suggests that they are considered important proverbs by dictionary compilers. However, the correct response rates for these two proverbs were low among Chinese and Japanese participants, with only 28% and 23% correct rate, respectively. While the second proverb in Table 1 and the third proverb in Table 2 had high correct response rates, which indicates that dictionaries cannot timely reflect the updates and iterations of commonly used proverbs, as language and culture, at the level of consciousness in social life, changed with the development of human behavior and social relationships. Further comparison of the correct response rates of the questionnaires for Chinese and Japanese respondents revealed that in Table 1, the correct response rates for five Chinese proverbs were higher than 50%, with the top three being No. 7, 2, and 12, with response rates of 100%, 98%, and 98%, respectively. However, the correct response rates in Table 2 were all below 50%, with the relatively higher rates being No. 2 and 6, with response rates of 44% and 41%, respectively. It implies that the Chinese participants are more familiar with proverbs about cattle in their own language, compared to

the Japanese participants.

To sum up, the results show that Chinese cattle proverbs are not only more popular, but also much more in number than those in Japan, and the expression forms of Chinese proverbs are more abundant. This difference could be attributed to the long history of cattle farming in China and the close relationship between cattle and agricultural production, as well as the rich myths and legends related to cattle in Chinese culture.

As Hui [8] said, cattle have an important position in Chinese traditional culture. In the Chinese context, cattle are regarded as a symbol of labor, strength and wealth. As shown in the sixth proverb in Table 1, “牵牛要牵牛鼻子”, the seventh proverb, “好马不停蹄, 好牛不停犁”, and the fourteenth proverb, “牛吃草, 鸡吃谷”, the cattle functioned as the important tool of farming in ancient Chinese society and were closely related to agricultural production. According to archaeological evidence, about 7,000 years ago, the ancestors of China's primitive society had begun to domesticate the wild buffaloes that inhabited the coastal or swampy areas of southeast China, and gradually used them for Agricultural cultivation [24]. In addition, cattle also have myths and legends in Chinese culture. For example, Emperor Shennong is the image of “the head of a cow and a human body” [25]. And cattle are also widely used by Chinese folks. All in all, cattle have a long history in Chinese culture and have become an important image in Chinese culture.

Unlike China, Japanese society attached great importance to fishery and despised agriculture. During the agricultural production of Japanese society, cattle are not traditional farming animals, but are mainly used for cargo transportation and for meat production. It could also be verified by the first, second, sixth, and seventh proverbs in Table 2, which illustrate that in ancient Japanese society, cattle, like horses, were used as means of transportation. According to historical documents, the earliest record of using cattle in Japan can be traced back to 539 AD. When Prince Shotoku built Shitennoji Temple in Namba (now Osaka City), he used cattle to haul building materials. As a raw material for meat production, cattle have had a rough experience in the development of Japanese society. Influenced by Buddhist concepts such as prohibiting killing and releasing animals, ancient Japanese society had implemented a policy of “no meat-eating” for a long time. It was not until the Tokugawa shogunate era that the “Wakan Sancai Drawings” published around 1712 showed the record of cattle as food and tonic medicinal materials. However, in the 18th century, with the development of the Meiji Restoration, Japanese society began to gradually lift the ban on “eating beef”. But Japanese people still have a strong sense of resistance to eating beef. During the same period, newspapers and magazines in the society once called for opposition to “eating beef” [26]. Based on the historical interactions between Japanese people and cattle, it could be observed that cows have occupied a relatively insignificant position in Japanese society and culture.

Consequently, the number of proverbs pertaining to cattle in Japan is comparably smaller than that of China, and their forms are less diversified.

4.2. Comparison on the Understanding of Metaphor Carrier of Cattle-related Proverbs

By comparing Table 1 and Table 2, it is found that “牛马” and “牛琴” are common metaphor carriers in Chinese and Japanese proverbs, referring to “马不知脸长, 牛不知角弯” (No. 4 in Table 1), “牛は牛連れ、馬は馬連れ” (No. 1 in Table 2), “对牛弹琴” (No. 12 in Table 1), and “牛に対して琴を弾ず” (No. 8 in Table 2). The metaphorical vocabulary in animal proverbs comes from the contact between human beings and the natural environment or the practice of social production [27]. The appearance of “牛马” and “牛琴” in Chinese and Japanese proverbs can be said to have common cultural significance for the ancient Chinese and Japanese societies.

First, take the proverbs containing “牛马” as an example. As the earliest domesticated livestock, cattle and horses were widely used in agricultural production in the early farming society. Therefore, their images are gradually closely related to the life of agricultural society. In farming society, cattle and horses play an important role in human agricultural production, transportation and military activities. In ancient China, cattle were an important farming tool. Even the number of cattle also symbolizes the strength of the country. As the Eastern Han Dynasty's *Customs Discussion* recorded that “Cattle are the foundation of farming, and people cherish them. They are the most useful, and its number shows the strength of a country.”

All dynasties in Chinese history attached great importance to cattle and horses, and especially promulgated laws to protect them. For example, the early Qin Dynasty set up laws and regulations to protect cattle and horses. *Ritual Regulations* of the Han Dynasty stipulated that “the princes should not kill cattle without reason”, and the *Law of Tang* of the Tang Dynasty stipulated that “killing cattle will be punished for one and a half years”. Japan's cattle and horses are mainly used for material transportation and it began in the eighth century. The government at that time established official roads such as Tokaido, Higashiyamado, and Hokurikudo with Heiankyo as the center, and began to use cattle and horses for transportation. Before World War II, according to the *Imperial Statistical Yearbook*, Japanese society still had 1,088 carriages for people and 115,197 carts for cattle. From this point of view, cattle and horses played an important role in the economic development of ancient Chinese and Japanese farming societies.

Although cattle and horses played such an important role in the economic development of ancient Chinese and Japanese societies, when the metaphor of cattle is used to evaluate persons, it still has a negative tendency.

Take the Chinese and Japanese proverbs containing “牛

琴” as an example. “对牛弹琴”, “playing the piano to the cattle, and the cattle cannot appreciate”, first came from Mou Rong's *Answers to questions* in the Han Dynasty. It is said that Gong Mingyi played the instrument to the cow, but the cow was still lying on the ground and grazing. It's not that the cow can't hear, it's that it can't understand. The ancient Chinese regarded Qingcao as elegant music, but after playing to cattle, they were unmoved. Based on the elegant music and cattle, it evolved to describe ignorant people. The cattle here is not only a metaphor for people with low comprehension, but also contains a negative evaluation.

There is no such thing as a coincidence, Japanese proverb “牛に対して琴を弾ず”, “牛に経文”, “馬に念仏”, “犬に論語”, “兔に祭文” and the Korean proverb “쇠귀에 경읽기” all expressed similar evaluation tendencies.

The proverbs mentioned above compare experience to profound and elegant things such as elegant music, scriptures, and analects, and compare people who do not understand the truth to livestock such as cattle, horses, rabbits, and dogs. From this, it can be seen that people associate livestock with “stupid” together. From the perspective of social and cultural reasons, the ancient Chinese used to assign different grades and statuses to animals according to their living habits and application status [28].

The evaluation of cattle in ancient China also influenced the people of Japan and South Korea along with the spread of Buddhism to the east, and took root there. This can be seen from the origin of the proverb. It exemplifies the “牛に対して琴を弾ず”(No. 8 in Table 2), which derived from *Zu Ting Shi Yuan* compiled by Mu'an Shanqing in the Northern Song Dynasty (1107-1110) and the book was reproduced and published by Tofukuji Temple; the variant form “牛に経文” derived from Joruri's work *Ono Michikaze Aoyanagi Inkstone* in 1754.

In addition, in ancient Japan, the idea of “穢れ” (translated as “kegare”, referring to filthy things) in Shintoism also influenced Japanese people's evaluation of animals. Shintoism, as a native Japanese religion, has always regarded the life and death of humans and animals, bleeding, and unnatural events that surpass human power as “穢れ”. Therefore, even though cattle played an important role in the development of Japan's transportation industry, the Japanese still did not think highly of cattle.

To sum up, it is precisely because of the social experience of humans in domesticating livestock that the psychology of “human beings are the best of all creatures” is derived, which leads to the use of livestock metaphors in low-level and negative behaviors.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

China and Japan both belong to the East Asian cultural sphere. The differences in thinking modes between China's

land-based culture and Japan's ocean-based culture can be discerned through a comparative analysis of the quantity and variations in metaphors of cattle-related proverbs.

This paper drew the Spectral List through corpus, statistics and surveys, and formulated relatively objective corpus screening criteria. It compared the actual mastery of Chinese and Japanese proverbs related to cattle, and analyzed the connotation of cattle proverbs in the two countries as well as the reasons that resulted in the differences and similarities from a social and cultural perspective.

The study found that cattle occupied an important position in Chinese traditional culture and were closely related to ancient agricultural production. In Japan, cattle were not the main production tool and were influenced by Buddhism and Shintoism. Japanese people have a sense of resistance to cattle.

Therefore, the number of cattle proverbs in Japan is less than that in China, and the acquisition rate of cattle proverbs is lower than that in China.

Further analysis of the common metaphor of Chinese and Japanese cattle proverbs shows that “牛马” as a common metaphor of Chinese and Japanese proverbs shows that it has made important contributions to the economic development of the ancient societies of the two countries. However, from the case of “牛琴”, it can be seen that the traditional concept of China's “Liuchu” (six major animals in ancient China) and the prejudice of Japanese Shintoism lead to negative tendencies when animal metaphors were used to evaluate persons.

There is still a long way for the study of animal proverbs. In the future, we could carry out research on the comparison of Chinese and Japanese proverbs of other animal metaphors and the comparison of multilingual cattle proverbs, in order to better improve the study of animal proverbs and promote cross-cultural communication.

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