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THE SYMBOLISM OF THE NUMERAL PHRASE 四大 [sìdà] "THE FOUR GREAT ONES" IN THE CHINESE LANGUAGE PICTURE OF THE WORLD

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Annotation. This article analyzes the symbolic meaning and national-cultural labeling of the numbering phrase "four great ones" in the Chinese language picture of the world, examines the modern interpretation of expressions with this numerical component using examples from journalism and colloquial speech. The semantic field of this numeral, which refers to non-equivalent vocabulary, is formed by religious and philosophical concepts, mythological images, historical information, objects of material and spiritual culture of the Chinese people.

Keywords: numeral, symbolic meaning, Chinese linguoculture

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THE IMAGE OF THE DRAGON IN CHINESE AND RUSSIAN LINGUISTIC CULTURES

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Summary: In the article the representation of the dragon in Russian and Chinese dictionaries, idioms and folklore is analyzed and therefore its image in both linguistic cultures is compared. The aim is to check some theories about perception of dragons in China and Russia.

Key words: a dragon, dictionary, an idiom, folklore, legends, semantics.

Dragon is quite a notable figure in both Chinese and Russian mythologies and cultures but at the same time quite controversial: being a symbol of prosperity in China, it can be associated with death and danger in Russian culture [12; 203].

In this article we've decided to analyze and compare the image of the dragon in both Chinese and Russian linguistic cultures, i.e. to find out how it is represented in dictionaries as well as to compare its representation in phraseological units and folklore of both countries. The main aim is to check if dragons have a strongly positive perception in Chinese and a negative one in Russia. The article is quite relevant in the view of the Year of the Dragon.

While carrying out a research we applied several methods, e.g. analysis, inductive method and comparison.

We will start with analyzing the representation of the dragon in dictionaries. According to the "Dictionary of the Russian Language" by V. I. Dal «дракон» is «диавол, чёрт.

Сказочный крылатый змей. Полукрылатая ящерица жарких стран» (A devil. A fairytale serpent. A half-winged lizard from southern countries) [2; 219]. While S. I. Ozhegov in his dictionary suggests the following definition of the dragon: «Сказочное чудовище в виде крылатого огнедышащего змея» (a fairytale creature having the look of a winged, fire-breathing serpent) [11; 227]. In the “Large explanatory dictionary” by S. A. Kuznetsov we can find one more definition: «Сказочное чудовище в виде крылатого огнедышащего змея, пожирающее людей и животных» (a fairytale monster looking as a winged, fire-breathing serpent, eating people and animals) [6; 282]. In the dictionary by L.P. Krysin dragon even compared with hydra and vasilisk [5; 272].

Three above mentioned meanings highlight some common characteristics of this creature: “serpent”, “winged”, “fairytale”. S.I. Ozhegov and S.A. Kuznetsov both mention such characteristic as breathing fire. Moreover V.I Dal and S.A. Kuznetsov in their own turn imply dragon’s evil nature by comparing it with the devil or a monster.

Besides, in the dictionary by S.A. Kuznetsov we can find two more words having the same root as an above-mentioned «дракон» – «драконить» meaning «резко отчитывать, ругать, критиковать» (to scold, to tell off) and «драконовский» meaning «крайне жестокий, беспощадный» (extremely cruel, ruthless) [6; 282]. In the last case the word takes its roots in the name of one severe ruler of Athens – Draco. Nevertheless both words have quite negative connotation and indicate relatively negative perception of the dragon in Russian linguistic culture in general.

To study the representation of the dragon in Chinese dictionaries, we’ve decided to turn to online service 汉典 (zdic.net) as one of the most accessible and comprehensive resources. One of the definitions for 龙 is as follows “传说中的一种长形、有鳞、有角的神异动物，能走，能飞，能游泳，能兴云作雨” (mythical supernatural creature which is quite long, scaly and horned. It can walk, fly, swim and can cause rain). From this definition we can notice that one of the main supernatural abilities of a Chinese dragon is managing water. Besides, 汉典 gives one more noteworthy definition “封建时代用作皇帝的象征，或称关于皇帝的东西” (at times of feudalism used as a symbol of the Emperor or name things having connection with him). This reference to the Emperor contributes to the positive image of the dragon created by Chinese and in comparison with Russian dictionaries, we can notice that in Chinese one some more characteristics are highlighted – “long”, “scaly”, “horned”, as well as the ability to swim and cause rain. Moreover, we should mention that character 龙 goes into several words such as 卧龙 (“sleeping dragon”, outstanding person living in solitude), 犹龙 (“like a dragon”, about outstanding person) and is often used as a surname for a child, which signifies hope he can be as healthy and strong as a dragon. All the above mentioned definitions and examples contribute to a positive perception of the dragon in Chinese linguistic culture.

Now let’s analyze some phraseological units with dragon. We have found not so many in the Russian language: «драконовы (драконовские) меры» (draconian measures) about strictness and severity of someone’s order [7; 147]. The etymology of the phraseological unit can as well be connected with the name of Draco which was mentioned above. And one more idiom – «драконово семя» (dragon seed, the seed of discord), «сеять зубы дракона» (sow, plant dragon’s teeth) meaning the source of the conflict or creating conditions for the trouble. These idioms have a Greek origin.

Seeing themselves as descendats of the dragon (龙的传人) Chinese invented plenty of idioms with 龙: 汉典 gives 316 idioms with this component. Among some of them are 真龙天子 (dragon – heaven’s son, about the Emperor), 望子成龙 (wish one’s son becomes a dragon, hope to see one’s son succeed in life), 龙马精神 (spirit of a dragon horse, vigorous spirit of the aged). In Chinese idioms dragon – is the symbol of power, strength and authority

[8; 170]. Dragon is very often used in combination with other animals also having special meaning for the Chinese, most often it is tiger (藏龙卧虎 – hidden dragons and crouching tigers, about people with unusual, but unrecognized talents; 生龙活虎 – doughty as a dragon and lively as a tiger; brimming with energy; 虎踞龙盘 – where tigers crouch and dragons coil, forbidden terrain). In the last idiom a dragon and a tiger are even associated with danger. Among other animals which have a positive connotation for the Chinese there are phoenixes (龙飞凤舞 – like dragons flying and phoenixes dancing, of a flamboyant style in calligraphy), but there are also negative ones like snakes (龙蛇混杂 – dragons and snakes jumbled together, good and bad people mixed up). In this idiom a dragon represents a virtue, while a snake – vice. Such an abundance of idioms signifies that dragon has acquired quite special and even symbolic meaning for the Chinese.

Now, let's turn to the representation of the dragon in folklore of both countries.

The dragon in Russian folklore is quite an ambiguous figure as it can comprise dark and light, life and death [12; 203]. “Russian dragons” have lots of names and different legends passing from generation to generation are connected with them”, says Russian ethnographer and folklorist Sergey Markin [9]. The dragon in Russian fairy tales mainly presents itself as «Змей» «Змий» (Zmei) or «Змей Горыныч» (Zmei Gorynich). Zmei is quite big, can fly, breathe out fire and can have 3, 6, 9 or even 12 heads. One of the descriptions of the dragon we can find in the fairytale based on the epic ballade «Добрыня Никитич и Змей Горыныч»: «страшный змей о трёх головах, о семи когтях, из ноздрей пламя пышет, из ушей дым валит, медные когти на лапах блестят» (a scary serpent with three heads and seven claws, fire blazing from his nostrils, smoke rising from his ears, copper claws sparkling on his paws). In most cases it represents danger and every Russian epic hero (bogatyр) conceives it his duty to carry him away. It can steal a woman («Иван Царевич и Марфа Царевна») [3] or just do harm. Sometimes Zmei can be less wise, strong and crafty than a man and get into traps made by the main character, therefore producing a comic effect («Змей и цыган» – Zmei and a gypsy) [3]. But a dragon can as well help the main character, as in the fairytale «Чудесная рубашка» (A wonderful shirt) where Zmei hired a soldier to serve him and then helped him along the way.

There are various versions how dragon in Chinese culture can look like, but most often it is described as an animal-like creature (mostly snake-like) with the head of the camel (the horse) and having four legs. There are plenty of dragons in Chinese folklore and mythology, perhaps the most important ones are Dragon Kings (龙王) who command over bodies of water and protect certain places. Dragon has quite a positive image in Chinese culture general: we can take a dragon Mushu from “Mulan”, Jade Dragon as examples – all of them protected and helped people or main characters on their way. But there are different dragons in Chinese mythology, and their temper, as well as features of appearance (colour, horns), may vary from dragon to dragon [12]. Sometimes in Chinese legends and mythology dragon appears to be quite violent and cause destruction: Red Dragon steals young girls and makes people pay tribute to him, Water Dragon in myth about Li Bin destroyed the mole carefully built by people [13; 137]. Sometimes the dragon can represent danger for one particular person and have quite a metaphorical nature; for example the legend about Ye Gong where the main character had seemed to love dragons before he saw a real one. This story gave birth to an idiom 叶公好龙 (Ye Gong loves dragons meaning professed love of what one really fears).

As we see, dragon can appear to be quite violent in both Chinese and Russian folklore, and it is a rule for the latter. We even can single out some common motives – for example stealing girls, living near the water bodies. Besides, we can come to the conclusion that the image of the dragon is not strongly negative in Russian fairytales, the same as it is not

strongly positive in Chinese legends and myths. And whereas such exceptions can be seen from time to time in Chinese folklore, they are rather rare and not common in Russian one.

Having analyzed the representation of the dragon in dictionaries and legends of both languages we can make the following conclusion: dragons are quite different in Russian and Chinese linguistic cultures starting from their appearance and ending in some of their traits and behavior. From certain definitions and idioms we can infer that the notion of «дракон» in Russian linguistic culture is rather picked up from other cultures of the world and its images in Russian fairytales are more likely analogues based on resemblance. What about their representation and perception by both cultures in general, we can't say that it is strongly positive or negative. E.g. in Chinese culture being a symbol of prosperity, strength and power, as well as being associated with the Emperor, it appears to be quite violent in some myths and legends, and, as in Russian folklore, is capable of destroying something or doing harm to people. But it is an exception, rather than a rule, and there is a lot of cultural and linguistic evidence (the abundance of idioms is only one of them) that dragon still has a special meaning for the Chinese, being a reliable protector of the country and its people.

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