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English and Chinese Idioms as the Reflection of Cultural Linguistics

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Abstract. The article deals with the peculiarities of linguistic features of idioms on the example of English and Chinese cultures. According to the research work, English and Chinese are contactless languages, therefore, the question of similarities and differences of the idioms functioning is of great importance. The author stresses, idioms present the way of cultural expressiveness and reveal unique features of national mentality. The work is aimed at analyzing key characteristic features of idioms with the component of natural elements in English and Chinese cultures and revealing the main aspects of cultural identity by linguistic means. Idioms enrich any language with their colorfulness and individuality, expressing the main national characteristics and traditions, carrying people's attitudes to everyday problems. In particular, the idioms with a natural element component reflect perfectly the attitude of the people to living beings, their conscientious activities and behavior; such type of idiom units are indivisible and stable, they are of particular interest for the analysis, since a completely different meaning can be isolated separately from the words used in phraseology.

Key words: idioms, English, Chinese, language and culture identity, natural element component, similarities, differences

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Английские и китайские идиомы как отражение лингвокультурологии

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Аннотация. Английский и китайский являются бесконтактными языками, поэтому вопрос о сходствах и различиях функционирования идиом имеет большое значение. Автор подчеркивает, что идиомы представляют собой способ культурной выразительности и раскрывают уникальные особенности национального менталитета. Работа направлена на анализ ключевых характерных черт идиом с компонентом природных элементов в английской и китайской культурах и выявление основных аспектов культурной идентичности языковыми средствами. Идиомы обогащают любой язык своей красочностью и индивидуальностью, выражая основные национальные особенности и традиции, передавая отношение людей к повседневным проблемам. В частности, идиомы с компонентом природного элемента прекрасно отражают отношение людей к живым существам, их добросовестную деятельность и поведение; идиоматические единицы такого типа неделимы и устойчивы, они представляют особый интерес для анализа, поскольку отдельно от слов, используемых во фразеологии, можно выделить совершенно другое значение.

Ключевые слова: идиомы, английский, китайский, языковая и культурная идентичность, компонент природного элемента, сходства, различия



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Introduction

Idioms units make up a considerable part of any language as a result of scientific and technological progress, the linguistic personality, language features and its research within the framework of intercultural communication and the need to focus on the problems of language and culture symbiosis. One of the phenomena in the language of particular interest is idioms' analysis. In our research work we pay attention to the peculiarities of idioms' with the natural elements in two cultures, they are English and Chinese cultures [Awonusi, 2002, p. 34].

The research work of idioms' units with natural element component in Chinese and English and their comparison reveal the communicative side of the language, since English and Chinese are from different language families. The relevance of this work lies in the need to analyze the idioms' units of these two languages with the allocation of common features and peculiarities in the translation of cultural characteristics of two different states [Anderson, Pelteret, 2012, p. 91].

The aim of the article is to conduct a comparative analysis in idioms' units that somehow include the name or characteristic of a natural element component, especially animal, as well as to establish the diversity and similarity in the use of such idioms in the British and Chinese languages and culture.

The purpose of the research work gave rise to a number of tasks:

- 1) to identify the general theoretical aspects of the use and study of idioms' units with natural component in English and Chinese;
- 2) to consider the main types of animals reflected in idioms of both languages;
- 3) to identify common and special features of idioms, as well as to determine the nature of the reflection of the animal world in the idioms' units of these languages.

Idioms are an integral part of any language; thanks to idioms' units, it is much easier for scientists to analyze the cultural and everyday specifics of the country, since they clearly reflect the peculiarities of the worldview, lifestyle, customs and traditions of a particular cultural community.

Idioms function in a language based on the perception of the surrounding reality, therefore, they are the most unique and interesting linguistic units in the language. One must stress, "the idioms' composition of a language is a mirror in which a linguistic and cultural community identifies its national identity" [Yule, 2017, p. 66].

Methods

Two groups of methods were used in the research work: general scientific methods and special methods. The group of general scientific methods includes analysis, synthesis, abstraction, generalization. These methods are used to comprehend the relevant theoretical and practical material.

The group of special methods includes a descriptive method that allows identifying the characteristic features and relationships of linguistic units; a method of component analysis which provides the interpretation of a language unit, a quantitative method used in the selection of linguistic material to measure the productivity of certain linguistic and cultural units in the speech of native speakers, a definitional method used in obtaining lexicographic information about the meaning of the language unit. In addition, methods of collecting and processing linguistic material were used, in particular, the method of illustrative examples selection for certain linguistic phenomena from written sources.

Results and discussions

Chinese and English are contactless entities belonging to different language families, and this is precisely what determines the interest of this research work – to identify similar and distinctive features in the idioms with natural component element of two opposite cultures and languages.

In any language, idioms add the necessary variety and color. Idioms with a natural element component differ in variability in the perception of representatives of the animal world; there are both sharply negative and positive assessments. Thanks to this, it becomes possible to track the national characteristics of the assessment and the composition of the animal world in different states.

Features in the formation and use of idioms with natural component elements in English

In English linguistics, as well as in Chinese, the science of idioms is not separated into a specific brunch, but is analyzed within the framework of language and culture study. The main sources of practical idioms material in our research work are Oxford dictionaries (“Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms”, “Oxford Dictionary of English Phraseology”) edited by Judith Siefring and “Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs” under the authorship of Jennifer Speake.

“Oxford English Dictionary” writes: “An Idiom is a group of words that has a special meaning that is different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word” [Ayto, 2020, p. 23]. The Penguin Dictionary defines phraseology as “the way that words and phrases are chosen and used in a particular language or subject” [Gulland, 2001, p. 12]. Naturally, the problems of idioms are considered not only by dictionaries, but also by textbooks of the English language, scientific works on grammar, semantics and lexicology. In particular, J. Thomas's work is an ideal proof of this, and the study itself is considered one of the best in the problem of idiomatic study process of the English language. The work represents an attempt to systematize and universalize idioms [Thomas, 1999, p. 22].

Currently, these problems are mainly reflected in the works on methods of teaching English. In particular, the work “Idioms: Processing, Structure, and Interpretation” presented the main definitions of idioms and approaches to their study, as well as methods for teaching them to students of English as a foreign language. In linguistics, there is a work “Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English: A Corpus-based Approach” which examines idioms from the point of view of structural and psychological approaches.

Idioms have a significant place in culture and linguistics for English and Chinese. They are used metaphorically and figuratively, idioms enrich a person's speech regardless of his or her social status. The comparison analysis of idioms with the natural element components component of the Chinese and English languages will greatly facilitate communication between such different cultures and will allow for high-quality and tolerant translation of periodicals, works of fiction, scientific papers.

Modern researchers successfully reveal the semantics of idioms and associative aspects of their use in reality in accordance with the cultural characteristics of nations.

Features in the formation and use of idioms with natural component elements in Chinese

One of the first attempts to systematize Chinese idioms was the publication in 1915 of the Dictionary “Qihui” (《辞源》). However, in-depth research was written only in the 1950s. The most famous scientists analyzing phraseology in China are: Zhang Zhigong, Ni Baoyuan, Ma Guofan and Wen Duanzheng (温端政) [Fuller, 2004, p. 65].

Knowledge of idioms in China is the standard of erudition, ancient folk wisdom, and it is still widely used in modern life, and in popular culture. Idioms of the past actively function in



the modern language too. Also, the Chinese are very fond of when foreigners use idioms in everyday life conversations.

The definition of idioms gives you the famous Chinese encyclopedia 百度 (bǎi dù): 《熟语是习用的词的固定组合，语义结合紧密、语音和谐，是语言中独立运用的词汇单位，它包括成语、谚语、歇后语和惯用语。》 (“Turn of phrase/idiom is constantly used, a fixed combination of words, semantically related, phonetically consistent, is an independent unit of language that includes chenhui, Proverbs and sayings, unsaid and idiomatic expressions”).

Literally, 熟语 is translated as “a well-known phrase” which coincides with the research of Russian scientists. For example, V. I. Gorelov writes that the term 熟语 is used in modern Chinese linguistics and means “a branch of linguistics that studies the phraseological system of the language in its current state and historical development”. He also emphasizes that in this definition and term one can observe parallels with the opinions of Russian scientists such as N. M. Shansky, V. V. Vinogradov, O. S. Akhmatova.

V. I. Gorelov offers the following classification of Chinese idioms:

1. “Idioms units-phrases (phrasemes)”:

1.1 四字格 (Sì zì gé) - (“idioms expressions”) – containing four hieroglyphs, individually having their own meanings, but together forming a new meaning.

1.2 “Idioms combinations” – idioms with one of the words determining the idiom itself.

2. “Idioms-sentences” - idioms which are stable sentences, and hieroglyphs cannot be changed or replaced in any way [Hill, Lewis, 2002].

There is also a classification given by Ma Guofan (吗国国) whose works are particularly valuable for Chinese language and culture analysis. The translation into Russian of this classification was carried out by I. V. Voitsekhovich:

1. 成 (chéngyǔ) – idioms (chengyu – “ready-made phrases”);

2. 俗语 (súyǔ) - sayings;

3. 谚语 (yǔ yàn) - proverbs;

4. 歇后语 (xiēhòuyǔ) – “half-words”, phrases with a broken end;

5. 惯用语 (Guànyòng yǔ) – familiar expressions;

6. 语敬 (yǔ jìng) – set expressions;

7. 格言 (Géyán) – aphorisms [Lin, Leonard, 2012, p. 76].

Thus, scientists are still interested in the analysis of idioms units in both English and Chinese. Russian and foreign researchers have derived various classifications of idioms units, including those with a natural element component, thereby systematizing and approximating cultures to distinguish phraseology into a separate science is a question of worth discussing. It is extremely important to combine these studies and, using the comparative method, to find common and special things for comparing linguistic cultures so far apart from each other in order to form stable links for communication.

Comparative analysis of the natural world represented in idioms based on English and Chinese culture

The main categories of animals represented in the idioms of the English language

In our research work the analysis of idiom with natural element component was made according to the subdivision into some groups: “pets”, “wild animals”, “mythical animals” on the principle of denoting language and cultural peculiarities connected with the components.

The most popular pets in the UK have gained trust for their loyalty, affection, ability to establish some kind of contact with people, etc. The fact of domestication has played a good role for hu-

manity: now they could use cattle for food, and the life cycle of each individual was much calmer than in the wild.

One must stress, chicken is the main source of eggs and partly meat in the culture of the United Kingdom. It is *the problem of chicken and egg* that is one of the fundamental in philosophy. In the English version, it sounds like *“a chicken-and-egg problem”*. Now this expression is used as a figurative, and translates as *“a problem that has no solution”*.

Also, the chicken brain is considered as something insignificant by the English people: *“run around like a headless chicken”* – *behave recklessly, thoughtlessly*. In addition, the chicken appears to be a very cowardly creature: *“to be chicken/to smell chicken”* – that is *to be afraid*. A very vivid example of the use of such an expression is reflected in the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*: *“Is there a KFC around? Because I smell chicken?”*

Carelessness and absent-mindedness are also signs of the image of a chicken in English culture: *“handwriting is like chicken scratch”* – *writing like a chicken with a paw*.

Geese play an important part in the UK life too. They have taken root well as a Christmas dish. And the ability of a goose to easily stay on the water is firmly embedded in the English proverbs *“goosebumps”* – *to have goose skin*. The stupidity of the goose (like of many birds) is reflected in the culture and mentality of many countries, including England as well. So, for example, *“stupid as a goose”* shows the stupidity of a person, *“like a goose”* is conditionally transferring the animal's mind to people [McCarthy, O'Dell, 2004, p. 87].

The cow serves as a source of meat, milk and leather for the UK. It is used both as food and in leather production, for example, the manufacture of shoes and clothing from cow leather. In the United Kingdom a clear distinction is made between a female and a male cow which is implanted in the idiom: *“milking a bull”* – that is *“waiting for milk from a bull”*, sarcastically hinting that it is, modestly speaking, impossible to get milk from a male.

To the same extent, such a sign of a cow as steadfastness, *“taking a bull by the horns”* is considered: *“strong as a bull”*.

A cow is a big animal that does not have enough flexibility and stability, so people often make fun of it in conversations. For example, *“awkward as a cow on a crutch”* or *“like a cow on ice”*, thereby showing the dimensions of the interlocutor or clumsiness of cows.

Everyone knows that the UK is a leader in the sale of sheep wool. It should be noted, sheep is revered very highly in this island state, it is valued and protected. Moreover, new species are bred to increase competitiveness. Naturally, this fact could not but affect the cultural customs of the British: sheep are firmly embedded in the proverbs of the English language. For example, *“separate the sheep from the goats”* – *distinguish good from bad*, *“black sheep”* – *spoiled, bad person*. By the way, black sheep have gained such a reputation being used in idioms thank to the peculiarities of their wool - it is very difficult for it to change the color which in some cases is an obstacle to export [Philip, 2007, p. 109].

The stupidity of a sheep is also an extremely common thing in the English language, that is clearly seen from the proverb *“as silly as a sheep”* – *very stupid* which is used everywhere both in fiction and scientific literature, everyday life, and on official level too.

Such natural element of idiom as pig is often used in Britain. This animal is one of the main sources of meat in the country. However, most proverbs reflect the negative qualities of a pig, such as *negligence* – *“piggishness”*, rudeness, slovenliness, indelicacy are also used to describe a person who is *“like a pig”*. There are such idioms as *“make a pig of yourself”* – it is *to eat at the table indecently*, *“to eat like a pig”*, *“make a pig's ear of something”* – *to do something sloppy* [Seidl, 1989, p. 109].

In the UK, a pig is a very simplified animal, capable of enjoying every little thing. This is well reflected in the expression *“happy as a pig in muck”* – *happy as a pig in mud*.



Speaking of animals living directly in the homes of the British, cats and dogs have been the leaders for centuries. In English, there is a huge number of idioms with a natural component element dedicated to pets. Moreover, both the cat and the dog are viewed from different sides, reflecting the depth of emotional connection with a person: *“it's no place to swing a cat” – there is nowhere to fall; “like a cat on hot bricks” – sit on pins and needles; “every dog has his day” – there will be a holiday; “a shy cat makes a proud mouse” – a timid cat and a mouse frolics.*

A dog is a loyal friend of a person who does not look at social status, appearance, the amount of money in a bank account. That is why the dog is beloved among the British as it is faithful. The quality of *“the guard of the hearth, at home”* is clearly illustrated in the proverbs *“barking dog never bites” – do not be afraid of a rattling dog, be afraid of a silent one; “an old dog barks not in vain” – an analogue of “an old raven does not croak for nothing”; “a dog in the manager” the dog doesn't let others eat either* [The Oxford ..., 2004, p. 165].

However, the dog also has negative signs transferred to humans, for example: *“don't live like a dog, only barking for the whole day” – barking like a dog; “look for a dog to kick” – analogous to “look for a scapegoat”*. Also, a negative representation of the dog appears in the famous work by J. K. Rowling *“Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban”*, when Professor Trelawney read a terrible omen from the tea leftovers in Harry's cup: *“The Grim, my dear, the Grim!”* cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that Harry hadn't understood. *“The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen – the worst omen – of death!”* [Thomas, 2017, p. 65].

A cat and a dog are often compared in proverbs, reflecting the behavior of opposites: *“cat and dog life” – to live like a cat with a dog (constantly quarreling); “it's raining cats and dogs” – very heavy rain (pours cats and dogs).*

The cat is a noble solitary animal, but still very much loved by the inhabitants of the United Kingdom. For example, *“to have more lives than a cat” – to have nine lives like a cat; “it's no place to swing a cat” – nowhere to drop an apple (literally “nowhere for a cat to turn around”); “live under the cat's foot” – “henpecked” – definition, basically, used to describe men who are under the power of their partners; “the cat shuts its eyes when it steals the cream” – the cat knows whose meat she ate* [Mc.Carthy, O'Dell, 2004, p. 76].

Among wild animals, the most popular are those involved in set expressions of Great Britain, and they are considered to be *a bear, a hare, a wolf, a fox, a mouse.*

Bears in ancient times lived on the territory of the entire northern hemisphere, including the UK and China, however, due to some circumstances, it is now impossible to meet them in Britain. At the same time, this does not deprive the English language of many idioms dedicated to these wild animals.

Bears are huge, hungry, clumsy and extremely dangerous creatures for humans, and this is vividly shown in the proverbs: *“hungry as a bear” – very hungry; “escape the bear and fall to the lion” – analogous to “out of the fire and into the flames”* [Thomas, 2017, p. 98].

It is curious that a noisy meeting/gathering is described by British idioms as *“bear-garden”*. Most likely, this is due to the loud bearish roar that has become quite famous.

The rabbit or hare is a curious, cowardly animal that lives in many countries, including Britain. At the same time, hares have a high speed of movement, and it allows them to avoid danger and save their lives in natural selection. The idiom *“one cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds”* means *“you can't sit on two chairs”, “as fast as a hare”*.

In connection with the Easter tradition, while the rabbit hides eggs for children, the British have a certain way – to give rabbits in various variations – chocolate, ginger, marzipan, etc. So, the proverb *“pull a rabbit out of a hat”* became popular.

The wolf is a typical representative of predatory animals in most of the northern hemisphere. However, wolves have disappeared from the territory of the United Kingdom. Neverthe-

less, the English language is still full of proverbs about wolves and their inherent hunger: “*a growing youth has a wolf in his belly*” – to be terribly hungry; “*to cry wolf*” – to raise a false alarm; “*wolf in sheep's clothing*”; “*who keeps company with the wolf will learn to howl*” – to live with wolves – howl like a wolf [Wright, 2002, p. 129].

Foxes are very common among the British, it is a symbol of cunning, as well as in many countries of the world. The characteristic features of a fox are transferred to a person in English idioms: “*cunning as a fox*”; “*don't let the fox guard the henhouse*” – leave the fox in the chicken coop.

Mice belong to the largest class of terrestrial vertebrates, basically, these animals, bring discord to the farming estates, farms, and everyday life of ordinary people. A lot of time and effort is devoted to the idioms with the word “mouse”, since there is quite a large number of them. For example, “*cat-and-mouse game*” means *outsmarting someone*. And the interrogative exclamation “*Are you a man or a mouse?*” is used as *encouragement*. The proverb “*like rats deserting a sinking ship*” indicates *the cowardice of a mouse* and means “*to desert, to engage in desertion*” [Gulland, 2001, p. 209].

The expression “*poor as a church mouse*” is indicating *the stinginess (or reasonableness)* of church leaders who do not create favorable conditions for the reproduction of mice. Although in the Indian city of Deshnok there is a whole church of rats and mice which are revered in their own way; they live at home, they are poured milk and spiked with food, and no one is watching their population.

In the context of idioms with natural components English has many mythological animals as a dragon, a phoenix, an elf.

Dragons are mythological creatures that have a negative connotation in the English language. Basically, dragons for the British are a fire-breathing creature that loves gold, jewelry and does not possess any moral qualities. They are found in many works of fiction – “The Hobbit” by J. R. Tolkien, “Leviathan” by T. Hobbes, as well as local fairy tales and stories depict such characters too.

So, for example, there are such sayings as “*tickle the dragon's tail*” – *do something dangerous*, “*sow dragon's teeth*” – *try to prevent danger, but to no avail*.

Phoenixes have a special meaning in the British mentality. They symbolize rebirth, renewal, purity and hope, as the phoenix in English mythology rises from the ashes. So, there are such sayings as “*rise like a phoenix*” or “*like a rising phoenix from the ashes*” meaning rebirth.

Elves are mythical creatures, people inhabiting fictional worlds and possessing wisdom and tranquility. The main saying reflecting the behavior of elves is a quote from The Lord of the Rings: “*And it is also said*”, answered Frodo. “*Go not to the Elves for counsel, for they will say both no and yes*” – “*And they also say*”, Frodo replied, “*if you ask the elves for advice, you will hear "yes" and "no" in response*” [Wright, 2002, p. 147].

The diversity of idioms with natural element components in the Chinese language and culture

China is one of the oldest states on Earth, and its history is more than one thousand years. China is the country where paper (as well as paper money), a folding umbrella, a compass, gunpowder, land and sea mines, oars, bells and many other things were invented, the use of these inventions are actively used up to this day.

The animal world of China has about two thousand terrestrial vertebrates, among which there are more than a hundred exclusive ones, those that are found only on the territory of the Republic of China: the Chinese tiger, the Chinese alligator, the red panda and others.

The concept of pets in China's culture is different from the ideas of the same category of European states. For example, one of the most popular types of pets that are not used for food are

birds. Thrushes, larks, finches tied to special bird leashes in the park are common in modern China. Basically, domesticated animals were used and are used by the Chinese for food.

However, animals have been tamed by Chinese people since ancient times. Thus, the cow is one of the main symbols of agriculture and vital energy in China. One of the Proverbs says – 《牛是农家宝，种地少不了》 (Niú Shi bǎo nóngjiā, zhòng dì shàobùliǎo) – “cows are the farmer's treasure” and “it's impossible to live without cows in the agriculture” [Weigui, 2001, p. 301]. The cow serves the Chinese nation not only as a source of sustenance, but also as a motivation to fight enemies as it gives courage. An example of this is the set-expression 《孺子精神》 (rúzi jīngshén) – “A cow is obedient even in front of a child” [Jiao et al., 2010, p. 165]. One must stress, in China there is no gender difference between a bull and a cow. This is due to the fact that dairy production was not widespread in the Middle Kingdom at all, and, therefore, the Chinese did not pay any attention to the differences between a bull and a cow.

The horse is also highly revered by the Chinese, even being a sacred animal. It is a symbol of wisdom and experience. The horse is a wise animal: 《老骥伏枥，志在千里》 (Lǎojífùlì, Zhì zài qiānlǐ) – “the old horse in the stable”, “a horse wants to work at a thousand miles”; 《路遥知马力，日久见人心》 (Lù yáo zhī mǎlì, rì jiǔ jiàn rén xīn) – “after a long distance, you learn the stamina of the horse, and after a long time you know that person in your heart” [Ji, 2013, p. 109].

Of special use of Chinese proverbs are pets like chickens (鸡) and duck (鸭): 《鸡鸭喂的全，家中有油盐》 (wèi jī yā de quán, jiāzhōng yǒu yóu yán) – “Breed chickens and ducks in the house, and it is oil and salt”. The idiom 《鸡飞蛋打》 (jī fēi dàn dǎ) – “The chicken flew away, the eggs broke” indicates a feature of the Chinese language that emphasizes the negative affect of the main feature of the chicken – to lay eggs. Another example is the proverb 《借鸡生》 (jièjī shēngdàn) – “to borrow a chicken that lays eggs”. Basically, the idioms with natural element components of the Chinese language fix the negative features of the chicken, such as *stupidity, fussiness, inability to fly*: 《鸡飞狗跳》 (Jī fēi gǒu tiào) – “Chickens fly, dogs jump”, means some kind of *turmoil*; 《牝鸡司晨》 (Pìn jī sī chén) – “the chicken announces the dawn”, transmits the *image of a henpecked man* [Harbaugh, 1999, p. 301].

In China, more than anywhere else in the world, people are aware of the peculiarities of *geese* – the fat on their feathers prevents the penetration of water and allows them to stay afloat. So, in Chinese culture there is an idiom 《水过鸭背》 (ShuǐGuò yā bèi) – “like water from a goose”.

Speaking of pets that are loved, it's necessary to note that the most popular pets all over the world are cats and dogs. These pets were tamed about eight thousand years ago, although the question of their origin remains debatable.

Dogs have an ambiguous characteristic in Chinese proverbs. For example, a dog (狗) as an abstract concept symbolizes loyalty, obedience, protection of the building, thus reflecting the positive side of it: 《狗吠非主》 (Gǒu fēi fēi zhǔ) – “the dog does not bark at his master”, 《打狗看主》 (dǎ gǒu kàn zhǔ) – “before you beat the dog, look at its master”. However, being tamed by a man, the dog was taken as a stupid and vile, false, or even lying creature: 《狗屁不通》 (Gǒupì bùtōng) – “bullshit”, 《猪朋狗友》 (Zhū péng gǒu yǒu) – “bad company” [Li et al., 2016, p. 169].

It is interesting to note that in the Chinese language they often refer to the theme of cruelty to animals, having a metaphorical sense, of course, not calling for similar action: 《快马一鞭·快人一言》 (Kuài mǎ yī biān, kuài rén yī yán) – “*Horse is customized with a whip, and the man – word*”, 《快马加鞭》 (Kuài mǎ jiā biān) – “*to drive a horse whip*” [Ji, 2013, p. 123].

A cat is a rather controversial animal for the language analysis in the Chinese culture. Its main characteristic – *catching mice* – is vividly reflected in the idiom: 《穷鼠啮狸》 (Qióng shǔ niè lí) – “*in extreme cases, the weak are capable of a bold act*” (literally “*sometimes a mouse can bite a cat*”), 《猫哭老鼠》 (māokū lǎoshǔ) – the Russian version of “*crying with his eyes, but with his heart laughs*” (literally “*the cat mourns the mouse*”), 《猫鼠同处》 (māoshǔ tóngchǔ) – “*a cat and a mouse live under the same roof*” (analogous to “*opposites attract*”). Also, a cat in China is a symbol of prosperity, being considered a kind of “*patroness of the house*” [Li et al., 2016, p. 209]. The famous statuette of a cat with a raised paw is placed all over the world in offices.

The world of wild Chinese animals is of great interest. Hundred species of terrestrial vertebrates live only on the territory of China, including the long-eared pheasant, red-crowned crane and red panda. It is known that wild animals are those animals that are able to independently forage for themselves and ensure survival in natural (pristine) conditions. The analysis of language and cultural peculiarities of idioms with natural element component is a very useful way, as it allows you to determine and specify the historical settlement of individual species of wild animals on the planet.

The main wild animals reflected in Chinese proverbs are bear, tiger, fox, wolf, monkey, turtle, snake and crane.

Bears have been common in most of the northern hemisphere, including China, since ancient times. The proverbs with these elements have an ambiguous character: some praise the symbol of the bear, others belittle and denigrate it. For example, 《熊心豹胆》 (Xióngxīnbào dǎn) figuratively translates as “*courage, fortitude*”. At the same time, 《梦熊之喜》 (Mèng xióngzhīxǐ), 《熊罴之祥》 (Xióng pí zhī xiáng) mean the *future birth of a son in the family*, which has been considered an auspicious sign in Chinese culture since ancient times. In addition, the panda (or bamboo bear) is a symbol of China, and according to the Chinese themselves it reflects all the excellent features of their state: calmness, reason, good nature, Yin and Yang (black and white coloring of the bear). However, the negative features of the bear are also shown in Chinese idioms – 《柙虎樊熊》 (Xiá hǔ fān xióng) – that is “*a man is as dangerous as a bear*” [Ji, 2013, p. 132].

The tiger is a classic representative of predators among wild animals in China. And since tigers are especially common in Asia there are many idioms devoted to this animal. Basically, these predators are depicted in proverbs as strong predatory animals, and their characteristics are awarded to people: 《谈虎色变》 (tánhǔ sè biàn) – “*to be afraid much*”, literally “*change in face when talking about a tiger*”; 《虎视眈眈》 (hǔshì dāndān) – “*look predatory like a tiger*”, the Russian version is “*a greedy dog needs a lot*”. Also, the tiger in the Chinese mentality has a high authority, and it can be used for selfish purposes: 《狐假虎威》 (hú jiǎ hǔ wēi) – “*the fox took advantage of the tiger's power*”, that is “*to rake in the heat with someone else's hands*”. An interesting phenomenon is the decrease in the assessment of any situations due to the use of a tiger as a kind of “*ideal animal*”: 《画虎类犬》 (huàhǔ lèi quǎn) – “*I drew a tiger, but a dog came out*”.



The fox, as well as in most cultures, is reflected in China as a cunning and selfish animal, conditionally transmitting its signs to a person in idioms: 《狐埋狐搯》(hú máihú huá) – “*what the fox buries, it digs up*”, that is “*to overdo it, to start some business with too long thoughts*”; 《狐狸尾巴》(húli wěiba) – “*you can't hide your real face*” [Lin, Leonard, 2012, p. 89].

The image of a wolf in Chinese proverbs is hyperbolized and is shown as something eternally hungry and cunning, ready for anything for the sake of survival: 《狼吞虎咽》(lángtūnhǔyàn) – “*to have a wolf's appetite*”, 《杯盘狼藉》(bēipán lángjí) – “*to eat everything*”.

There are also proverbs describing the howl of a wolf in Chinese idioms: 《鬼哭狼嚎》(guǐ kū láng háo) – “*howl like a wolf*” [Weigui, 2001, p. 609].

The monkey is exposed as a dismissive, frivolous animal, symbolizing stupidity, mediocrity: 《猴头猴脑》(hóu tóu hóu nǎo) – “*monkey brain*” - *stupid*; 《尖嘴猴腮》(jiānzǔi hóusāi) – “*to have a nondescript appearance*”.

Turtles – one of the most ancient animal species – are revered and respected in China. They symbolize wisdom, experience, longevity. For example, as a compliment to a noble man, they say 《麟凤龟龙》(lín fēng guī lóng).

The snake, as a venomous reptile, is negatively reflected in Chinese idioms. She is awarded cunning, readiness to attack suddenly, stealth, danger: 《蛇口蜂针》(shé kǒu fēng zhēn) – “*the mouth of a snake, the sting of a bee*”, that is *an evil, toxic person*; 《养虺成蛇》(yǎng huī chéng shé) – “*warm the snake on your chest*”. People are mostly afraid of snakes. Fear of a poisonous creature forces us to look for comparisons with creatures similar in danger (dragon, bee, tiger, etc.)

The image of a crane in China means a privileged position in the society, longevity (even immortality), nobility, well-being: 《鹤立鸡群》(hè lì jī qún) – “*to be noble like a crane*”; 《龟年鹤寿》(guī nián hè shòu) – “*to gain immortality*” [Ji, 2013, p. 99].

A huge number of proverbs with natural elements in the Chinese language are aimed at reflecting the behavior of mythological creatures. This is due to the widespread spread of religious teachings throughout China around the 5th century BC.

The dragon is a kind of mythical creature that has body parts from every animal and lives in the water and sky, bringing rain and blessing. It symbolizes well-being in all matters. The idiom “*a sea abyss appears, and a dragon is born in this abyss*” clearly indicates the “*place of residence*” of this creature.

The dragon has a special meaning in the life of every Chinese. He is a sign of their nation, spiritual outlook, cultural cohesion, energy. Also, the dragon embodies a symbol of power, honor, dignity, success: 《山不在高，有仙则名，水不在深，有龙则灵》(gāo Shān bùzài, xiān yǒu zé míng, bùzài shuǐ shēn, zé yǒu líng lóng) – “*Though the mountain is not high, it is known, because there is a patron, and the river is not deep and important because that's where the dragon dwells*”; 《飞龙乘云》(lóng fēi chéng yún) – “*to occupy a high social position*” [Weigui, 2001, p. 789].

The Chinese phoenix is an animal of the air element that does not regenerate by burning. It symbolizes loyalty, well-being, family happiness: 《凤凰于飞》(fēnghuángyúfēi) – “*happy spouses*”; 《百鸟朝凤》(bǎiniǎocháofèng) – “*peaceful rule of the monarch*”.

The unicorn is another interesting mythological creature of China. He appears before humanity only in times of general prosperity, happiness and tranquility. Also, a unicorn is a very rare creature, to meet one means incredible luck and blessing: 《麟角虎翅》(lín jiǎo hǔ chì) – “*the rarest talent*”. The unicorn is a good sign for the birth of a son - 《麒麟送子》(Qílín sòng zi) – “*The unicorn brings sons*” [Lin, Leonard, 2012, p. 97].

Conclusions

To sum it all, after conducting some research on the frequency and availability of idioms with natural life component functioning on the territories of the UK and China, we can deduce some typological similarities and differences in the cultures of these countries.

Firstly, English and Chinese are contactless, and therefore these languages are quite different. This fact could not but have an impact on the culture and mentality of both states.

Among domestic animals, cats and dogs are the most popular to use as the elements of idioms in the United Kingdom, while in China the frequency falls towards cows, horses, chickens and ducks.

Idiom with components of wild nature component in English and Chinese are characterized by duality, they transfer animal qualities to a person, also describe the social role of a person, giving it either a negative or a positive character. At the same time, in the Chinese language, the main characteristics of a person acquire a positive direction, unlike English, where preference is given to a certain censure type characteristics of human vices through the prism of animals.

Also, the description of animals in the idioms may not always coincide with the real behavior, but only it reflects the attitude of the nation to a particular species. Natural components in idioms express different characteristics of the animal according to research work, reflecting the specific features of the language group.

Thus, natural elements in the idioms are quite diverse in their lexical meaning, still they reflect the peculiarities of the worldview of nations, and it is a subject to future research works as they are of dual nature. The frequency of idioms with natural component element use depends on the nature of the distribution of any animal on the territory of the country and expresses a symbolic perception due to the peculiarities of the language, culture and mentality of the peoples.

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