

A Study of Chinese Idiom Expressions Containing the Word *jin* (Gold)¹

การศึกษาสำนวนจีนที่มีคำว่าทอง

Received: September 13, 2023 Revised: October 20, 2023 Accepted: March 19, 2024

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Abstract

Idioms are phrases or sayings metaphorically composed with a subtle hidden meaning that cannot be deciphered by direct literal translation of individual words. Long-standing idiomatic expressions that have been passed down through ages in each language are precious cultural heritage for people using that language, as they can reflect, for instance, thoughts and beliefs of people from earlier generations within the society. Chinese people often use idiomatic expressions in their daily communication. Many idioms are derived from natural environment, and are in line with ancient Chinese beliefs in the five elements of earth, water, fire, wood and metal, considered the basic components of everything in the world. Due to the fact that gold is a representation of preciousness often related to certain beliefs or concepts in Chinese culture, this article therefore aims to study and analyse idioms containing the word “jin”(金 gold) in order to understand their metaphorical meanings, as well as beliefs, values and other aspects related to them. It was shown that there were 411 idioms containing “jin” (gold) collected from eight selected Chinese idioms dictionaries, with a total of 414 metaphorical meanings. These

¹ **Research project:** The knowledge resources of common word usage and intelligent information retrieval platform for international Chinese education, the principal project of the National Social Science of China, (面向国际中文教育的常用词用法知识资源建设与智能信息检索平台研究, 中国国家社科重点项目, 项目编号: 22AYY014)

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metaphorical meanings can be further divided into nine groups: human, preciousness, beauty, money and treasured items, social status and standard, goodness, stability and strength, nature, and other meanings. Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) can help us gain insights into the past Chinese society, as well as the values, culture, traditions, and beliefs of the Chinese people.

Keywords: “jin”, gold, Chinese, idioms, metaphor

บทคัดย่อ

สำนวนคือวลีหรือคำพูดที่แต่งขึ้นในเชิงอุปลักษณ์ แฝงเร้นความหมายลึกซึ้ง ไม่สามารถถอดความด้วยการแปลคำแต่ละคำตามตัวอักษรโดยตรง สำนวนที่มีใช้สืบทอดกันมาช้านานในแต่ละภาษาล้วนเป็นมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมอันล้ำค่าสำหรับผู้ใช้ภาษานั้น ๆ เนื่องจากสามารถสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความคิด ความเชื่อของคนในสังคม นับแต่อดีตมา คนจีนมักใช้สำนวนในการสื่อสารในชีวิตประจำวัน สำนวนหลายสำนวนได้มาจากสภาพแวดล้อม ธรรมชาติและสอดคล้องกับความเชื่อของจีนโบราณเกี่ยวกับธาตุทั้งห้า ได้แก่ ดิน น้ำ ไฟ ไม้ และโลหะ ซึ่งถือเป็นองค์ประกอบพื้นฐานของทุกสิ่งในโลก เนื่องจากทองเป็นตัวแทนของความล้ำค่า ซึ่งมักเกี่ยวข้องกับความเชื่อบางประการในวัฒนธรรมจีน บทความนี้จึงมุ่งศึกษาวิเคราะห์สำนวนที่มีคำว่า “jin” (金) เพื่อเข้าใจความหมายเชิงอุปลักษณ์ ตลอดจนความเชื่อ ค่านิยม และประเด็นอื่น ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง ซึ่งผลการวิจัยพบว่า สำนวนที่มีคำว่า “jin” ที่รวบรวมจากพจนานุกรมสำนวนจีน 8 เล่มมีทั้งหมด 411 สำนวน ให้ความหมายเชิงอุปลักษณ์ได้ทั้งสิ้น 414 ความหมายและสามารถจัดแบ่งเป็น 9 กลุ่ม ได้แก่ มนุษย์ ความล้ำค่า ความงาม เงินทองของมีค่า สถานะและมาตรฐานทางสังคม ความดีงาม ความมั่นคงและความแข็งแกร่ง ธรรมชาติ และความหมายอื่น ๆ ทั้งนี้สำนวนจีนที่มีคำว่า “jin” ยังสามารถช่วยให้เราเข้าใจสังคมจีนในอดีต รวมถึงค่านิยม วัฒนธรรม พิธีกรรมและความเชื่อของชาวจีนได้อีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: ทอง ภาษาจีน สำนวน อุปลักษณ์

Introduction

Belief in the concept of the five elements is considered a fundamental aspect of Chinese culture. The idea of the five elements, especially yin and yang, has a rich historical background. Although its origins are unclear, the concept is recorded in several important Chinese books, such as *Guoyu* (国语), *Zuo Zhuan* (左传), *Shang Shu* (尚书), and *Sunzi* (孙子). Chinese people have long held the belief that humans are one with nature, and everything in the world is composed of

these five basic elements. They then simplify the complicated phenomena they observe for easy understanding by using the idea of the five elements to explain them. The five-element concept therefore greatly influences Chinese culture and thinking, such as in Chinese cuisine, traditional Chinese medicine, architectural design, etc. Among the five elements, “jin” (gold) is considered the most prominent and is associated with purity and value. Therefore, it is often linked to various aspects of Chinese culture. According to Wei (2018), “jin” (gold) has carried the Chinese civilization for thousands of years. The bodily and cultural experience of “jin” (gold) gave rise to conceptual metaphors of “jin” (gold), which were often used by ancient Chinese people to highlight properties of other objects reflected in many Chinese idioms.

The Chinese language uses idioms in both spoken and written communication. Idioms not only convey meanings clearly and succinctly but also facilitate rapid communication, offer diverse communication formats, and beautify the language. Through research, it has been found that the Chinese language contains a significant number of idioms featuring the word “jin” (gold). These idioms enhance the conveyance of meanings due to the nature of idiomatic expressions, which cannot be directly translated from their characters. They often involve similes that make them challenging to understand.

The idea of the five elements is recorded in the *Shang Shu* which is the oldest historical book in China. The book explains the relationships between the five elements. There are two types of relationship between these five elements, namely promoting and supporting each other (相生) and constraining and inhibiting each other (相克). The specific mutual supporting relationship is gold supports water, water supports wood, wood supports fire, fire supports earth, and earth supports gold. The specific mutual constraining relationship is gold refutes wood, wood refutes earth, earth refutes water, water refutes fire, and fire refutes gold. The supporting and constraining relationships of these five elements have been used to explain the complex interrelationships of our surroundings. Observing the nature around us gave rise to the ancient Chinese system of thinking about the world that was passed on from generation to generation.

The five elements are deeply related to Chinese thought and culture. Therefore, many researchers are interested in and study the five elements through different cultural perspectives, such as the influence of yin and yang and the five elements' philosophical concepts on traditional Chinese food culture. Xu (2009) shows that belief in the five elements influences the food culture of the Chinese people. For example, each taste is related to the five elements. Eating food must be in accordance with the season, and eating food appropriate to the elements will make the body strong and have a long life. Zhang (2010) divides the evolution of the five elements into three periods: The first period, the beginning of Xia and Shang dynasties, was the time when the idea of the five elements was being formed. The second period, the Spring and Autumn Period, was the time when the idea of the five elements developed forming the Five Elements promoting and supporting relationships that had a great influence on the society. The belief in the five elements

was linked with the idea of the school of Si-Meng (思孟学派)⁴ and caused belief in Wu de (五德), which teaches that a good soul must have five virtues. Wu de consists of love (仁), justice (义), etiquette (礼), knowledge (智), and holy (圣). The third period, Late Spring and Autumn Period, was the time when the "earth" was elevated to the highest position among the five elements. Later, the concept of the five elements was continually developed. The thought of Wu de was fused with the thought of the Han Dynasty Confucian School (汉儒), giving rise to the idea of Wu chang (五常), which consists of love (仁), justice (义), etiquette (礼), knowledge (智), and integrity (信). This is the core concept of Confucian thought, which is a doctrine that has influenced China for centuries.

The idea of the five elements has also been studied in various aspects of culture, such as Zhang and Ma's (2018) work on the influence of the five elements through Chinese architecture, which shows that the five elements influence the design of selected materials as well as the colours used in Chinese art. Xu (2011) studied gold in accounting corporate culture and found that there are 110 words related to "jin" (gold) in Chinese accounting vocabulary. Words containing "jin" (gold) reflect that Chinese people regard gold as a good word. Many Chinese trademarks contain the word "jin" (gold). Xu's (2011) study also reflects accounting relationships through meaningful terms related to shareholders, income, expenses, assets, and costs. In addition to the above-mentioned articles, there are many other studies, indicating that the idea of the five elements is deeply related to Chinese life and culture.

The five elements are studied through a linguistic perspective in semantic and cognitive ways. The studies of semantics focus on the evolution of the meanings of earth, water, fire, wood, and gold in various eras to see how the meanings have changed. For example, Xu (2001) studied the development of the meaning of the word "jin" (gold) and the original meaning of gold as metal has evolved to represent the idea of qi (气) or air.

Wang and Sun (2010) studied the metaphors of idioms containing the word "jin" (gold) through metaphorical cognitive analysis of "jin" (gold) in Chinese idioms, suggesting that the metaphors of idioms containing the word "jin" (gold) in the Chinese language can be divided into four groups by origin of expressions. The metaphors are from social experience, production experience, life experience, and literary works or history. Wang and Chen (2015) studied metaphors in the five elements through statistical analysis and translation research, providing evidence for cross-domain mappings with people's body parts. Wei (2018) studied 285 idioms containing the word "jin" (gold), finding six major categories of conceptual metaphors of "jin"

⁴ The Si-Meng School is the common name of the connection between the Zisi School (子思 483 BC-402 BC) and the Mencius School (孟子 circa 372 BC- circa 279 BC) because the two schools have some consistency in their thoughts.

(gold) in Chinese idioms: valuable objects, good objects or phenomena, human beings, high social status, wealth, and standards.

From studying related metaphors of “jin” (gold), it was found that most works focus on studying the five elements that are related to the way of life of Chinese people, such as beliefs about the five elements and food culture, Chinese medicine, Chinese architectural design, and art. The studies from a linguistic perspective are not comprehensive. Some studies on expressions of the five elements are not profound because there are many idioms in Chinese, and it is hard to collect the data. This research will help complete and present different information. This work collects information from eight authoritative dictionaries that have been used in China for a long time. Each dictionary was published at a different time. This makes the collected expressions complete. The results of the analysis of the meaning of the expressions as well as the culture reflected through them become more complete.

This study utilises the cognitive metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which posits that communication in human daily life takes the form of metaphors or comparisons. Conceptual metaphors consist of two domains: what we want to understand is called the target domain, and the concepts that are used to achieve understanding are called the source domain. It can be said that conceptual metaphors are to understand and perceive one thing from one concrete thing. However, metaphors are not just comparing one thing with another. It is also a matter of thought, rationality, and understanding. All metaphors are based on our collective experiences and come from our culture. The study of metaphors can help us understand the way that people think. The study of the meaning of idioms in Chinese containing the word “jin” (gold) not only helps us better understand the meaning and reduce miscommunication, but also helps us understand culture, beliefs, and social values through idioms.

Objectives

1. To study the metaphorical expressions of idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) in Chinese.
2. To analyse the conceptual metaphors of idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) in Chinese through the metaphorical meanings conveyed by the idioms.
3. To examine the imagery reflecting the perspectives of idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) in the Chinese language.

Research Methodology

Idioms in Chinese mean a concise and eloquent word that people have been using for a long time. Chinese idioms typically consist of four Chinese characters. Some idioms cannot be understood directly from the characters, and in some cases, it is necessary to know their origins to understand their meanings. This study collects 411 idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) from the following eight authoritative Chinese idiom dictionaries:

1. Luo, Z. (1986). *Grand Chinese dictionary* (汉语大词典). Hanyu Dacidian Chubanshe (汉语大词典出版社).
2. Language Research Institute of Hubei University. (2004). *Chinese idioms dictionary* (汉语成语大辞典). Zhonghua Book Company (中华书局).
3. Li, X. (2006). *Modern Chinese standard idioms dictionary* (现代汉语成语规范大词典). Changchun Publishing House (长春出版社).
4. Liu, J. (2012). *Chinese idioms essence dictionary* (white) (汉语成语精华词典/白皮). Kaiming Publishing House (开明出版社).
5. Zhao, J., Zhang, Y., & Tan, L. (2013). *Zhonghua idioms dictionary* (中华成语大词典). Sinolingua Press (华语教学出版社).
6. Lexicographical Center of Commercial Press (商务印书馆辞书研究中心编). (2015). *Xinhua idioms dictionary* (新华成语词典). The Commercial Press (商务印书馆).
7. Wang, X. (2017). *Chinese idioms dictionary* (汉语成语大词典). Sinolingua Press (华语教学出版社).
8. Song, Y. (2017). *Chinese idioms dictionary* (汉语成语词典). Sichuan Lexicographical Press (四川辞书出版社).

After collecting idioms containing the word “jin” (gold), we then analysed the meaning of each idiom and categorise it based on its metaphorical meaning. Subsequently we examined the metaphorical meanings of these idioms to reflect the imagery that each idiom expression conveyed, including the traditions, beliefs, culture, and values embedded within the idioms featuring the word “jin” (gold).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Through the analysis of 411 idioms containing the word “jin” (gold), it is found that these idioms have complex meanings, and some even have multiple meanings. Of all the collected 411 idioms containing the word “jin” (gold), a total of 414 metaphorical meanings has been identified. All these metaphorical meanings can be re-classified into 26 distinct categories. In terms of their conceptual metaphors, these 26 categories in turn can be further divided into 9 groups: human, preciousness, beauty, money and treasured things, social status and standard, goodness, stability and strength, nature, and other meanings. For detailed information, please refer to Table 1.

Table 1

Semantic Statistics of Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “Jin” (Gold)

Groups of metaphors	No.	Meaning of the idiom	Examples	No. of idioms	Percentage of total idioms
Human 105 idioms (25.36%)	1	Human behaviour	大马金刀 (dà mǎ jīn dāo) speaking bluntly, sharply, and without mercy	40	9.66
	2	Human being	精金百炼 (jīng jīn bǎi liàn) People must go through various tests before they can become talented.	29	7.00
	3	A person's wealth or luxurious life	千金之家 (qiān jīn zhī jiā) a wealthy family	25	6.04
	4	Good qualities of people	精金美玉 (jīng jīn měi yù) a person with a good heart	7	1.69
	5	A person's superb skills or valuable talents	匠石运金 (jiàng shí yùn jīn) a person who is highly skilled	4	0.97
Preciousness 60 idioms (14.50%)	6	The value of the object	千金难买 (qiān jīn nán mǎi) some things that money can't buy	30	7.25
	7	The value of advice, words, or promises	一诺千金 (yī nuò qiān jīn) A promise is valuable.	12	2.90

	8	The value of artistic works such as articles, poems, or calligraphy	一字千金 (yī zì qiān jīn) a writing or calligraphy that is highly valued	11	2.66
	9	The value of time	一刻千金 (yī kè qiān jīn) Time is gold.	7	1.69
Beauty 58 idioms (14.00%)	10	Beautiful articles, poems, or calligraphy works	金声玉润 (jīn shēng yù rùn) beautiful rhyming poems	26	6.28
	11	Beautiful clothing, decoration, or architecture	金碧辉煌 (jīn bì huī huáng) (buildings or furnishings, etc.) gorgeous, exquisite, dazzling	19	4.59
	12	Beautiful sound	敲金击玉 (qiāo jīn jī yù) Resounding and melodious tone of poetry and prose	8	1.93
	13	Beautiful appearance	金玉其外 (jīn yù qí wài) beautiful on the outside, but terrible on the inside	5	1.21
Money and treasured things 51 idioms (12.32%)	14	Items made of metal	击鼓鸣金 (jī gǔ míng jīn) to order an advance or retreat in battle	33	7.97
	15	Money or valuable objects	金银财宝 (jīn yín cái bǎo) gold, silver, and precious things	18	4.35

Social status and standard 48 idioms (11.59%)	16	Social status	腰金拖紫 (yāo jīn tuō zǐ) high-ranking officials	36	8.70
	17	Standard law	金石之策 (jīn shí zhī cè) a plan, strategy, or decision that is enduring and unshakable	12	2.90
Goodness 39 idioms (9.42%)	18	Beautiful relationship	黄金搭档 (huáng jīn dā dàng) the best partners	20	4.83
	19	Good thing or good phenomenon	黄金世界 (huáng jīn shì jiè) beautiful and perfect situation	10	2.42
	20	The best thing	淘沙得金 (táo shā dé jīn) selecting the highest-quality things from a large quantity	9	2.17
Stability and strength 28 idioms (6.77%)	21	Strong and hard-to-break things	金城千里 (jīn chéng qiān lǐ) The territory is very strong and safe.	24	5.80
	22	Steadfast and unwavering spirit	心如金石 (xīn rú jīn shí) unwavering determination	4	0.97
Nature 13 idioms (3.14%)	23	Hot weather	流金铄石 (liú jīn shuò shí) extreme heat	6	1.45
	24	Sun	金乌玉兔 (jīn wū yù tù) the sun and the moon	4	0.97

	25	Autumn	金风玉露 (jīn fēng yù lù) autumn scenery	3	0.72
Other meanings 12 idioms (2.90%)	26	Other meanings	金吾不禁 (jīn wú bù jìn) no night ban; can access throughout the night	12	2.90
Total				414	100

From the table above, it is found that the attributes of idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) with the highest number are idioms related to humans, with a total of 105 idioms, which is 25.36% of all Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold). Second is preciousness, involving 60 idioms, accounting for 14.50%. Third is beauty, with a total of 58 idioms, accounting for 14.00%. Fourth is money and treasured things, with 51 idioms, accounting for 12.32%. Fifth is social status and standard, with 48 idioms, accounting for 11.59%. Sixth involves goodness, with 39 idioms, accounting for 9.42%. Seventh involves stability and strength, with 28 idioms, accounting for 6.77%. Eighth involves nature, with 13 idioms, accounting for 3.14%. And ninth involves other meanings, there are 12 idioms, accounting for 2.90%.

Discussion

1. Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold)

1.1 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Humans

“Gold” is a substance with many properties. In addition to being a rare and expensive element, gold also possesses qualities such as resilience to heat, non-corrosiveness, and hardness. Due to its unique characteristics, people use the word “jin” (gold) to symbolise various meanings. Among the idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) in the Chinese language, the attributes related to human’s behaviours are the most prevalent. The meanings of these idioms can be divided into five groups, as follows:

- 1.1.1 A total of 40 idioms convey human behaviour, accounting for 9.66%. These idioms describe characteristics, speech, actions, attitudes, and other related meanings associated with humans. For example, 大马金刀 (dà mǎ jīn dāo) speaking straightforwardly, 分金掰两 (fēn jīn bāi liǎng) overly calculating, narrow-minded, and 金舌弊口 (jīn shé bì kǒu) loquacious.
- 1.1.2 A total of 29 idioms symbolise a human being, accounting for 7.00%. This type of idiom often attributes certain qualities of people to gold. For instance, 金无足赤 (jīn wú zú chì) no one is perfect, like impure gold; 精金百炼 (jīng jīn bǎi liàn) pure gold

can be melted many times, describing the process of mastery through training and challenges; and 真金不怕火炼 (zhēn jīn bù pà huǒ liàn) comparison between gold and a human being, be brave and never give up to the obstacles and various challenges.

- 1.1.3 A total of 25 idioms convey the idea of wealth or a luxurious and affluent life, accounting for 6.04%. “jin” (gold) here signifies something valuable, including people with great wealth, luxury, or lavish lifestyles. For example, 千金之家 (qiān jīn zhī jiā) a wealthy family and 千金之子 (qiān jīn zhī zǐ) a rich person.
- 1.1.4 A total of 7 idioms symbolise purity, kindness, and good qualities of a person, accounting for 1.69%. For instance, 良金美玉 (liáng jīn měi yù) a person of high moral character and 精金美玉 (jīng jīn měi yù) a person with a good heart.
- 1.1.5 A total of 4 idioms represent exceptional skills or the precious blessings of an individual, accounting for 0.97%. For example, 金针度人 (jīn zhēn dù rén) pass on the ultimate secrets to others, meaning to teach secrets or skills to others, and 匠石运金 (jiàng shí yùn jīn), according to the Xinhua dictionary’s explanation, originally referring to the carpenter’s stone ax that chopped off the white ash on the tip of the Ying people’s noses without bruising the Ying people’s noses, metaphorically implying extraordinary abilities or skills.

1.2 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Preciousness

Humans consider “gold” as a symbol of preciousness because gold is expensive and rare. There are 60 Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) that also convey the same meaning of preciousness or value. The meaning of these idioms can be divided into 4 groups: 1) the value of the object; 2) the value of advice, words, or promises; 3) the value of articles, poems, and calligraphy; and 4) the value of time.

- 1.2.1 Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) convey meanings similar to that of preciousness, just like gold itself. There are a total of 30 idioms, accounting for 7.25%. These idioms often include words like 千金 (qiān jīn) a thousand pieces of gold and 万金 (wàn jīn) 10,000 pieces of gold. For example, 千金难买 (qiān jīn nán mǎi) some things are so valuable that they cannot be bought with a large amount of money, 千金不换 (qiān jīn bù huàn) of such great value that it cannot be exchanged for money, and 家书抵万金 (jiā shū dǐ wàn jīn) in ancient times, receiving letters from home was not easy due to limited communication and transportation, so they were highly valued.
- 1.2.2 A total of 12 idioms convey the value of advice, words, or promises, accounting for 2.90%. For example, 金石之言 (jīn shí zhī yán) words like gold and jade, meaning valuable advice or counsel, 金石良言 (jīn shí liáng yán) good words like gold and

jade, referring to valuable words of advice, and 金玉良言 (jīn yù liáng yán) valuable words of wisdom or beneficial advice.

- 1.2.3 A total of 11 idioms convey the value of articles, poems, or painting, accounting for 2.66%. For example, 一字千金 (yī zì qiān jīn) a single word is worth a thousand pieces of gold, meaning profound and valuable articles or poetry, and 金壺墨汁 (jīn hú mò zhī) ink and paper are as precious as gold, referring to high-quality and rare literary works.
- 1.2.4 A total of 7 idioms convey the value of time, accounting for 1.69%. For example, 一刻千金 (yī kè qiān jīn) every moment is worth a thousand pieces of gold, signifying the high value of time, and 寸金难买寸光阴 (cùn jīn nán mǎi cùn guāng yīn) an ounce of gold cannot buy any second of time, meaning that time is highly valuable and cannot be bought by money.

1.3 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Beauty

There are 58 Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) that convey a sense of appreciating beauty, accounting for 14.00%. Through analysis, the meaning of this group can be divided into four aspects: 1) beautiful articles, poems, or calligraphy works; 2) beautiful clothing, decoration, or architecture; 3) beautiful sound; and 4) beautiful appearance.

- 1.3.1 A total of 26 idioms signify the beauty and delicacy of literature, poetry, or calligraphy, accounting for 6.28%. For example, 金章玉句 (jīn zhāng yù jù) poetry that has been well selected using words and 锵金铿玉 (qiāng jīn kēng yù) poetry that is a beautiful rhyme.
- 1.3.2 A total of 19 idioms represent the beauty of clothing, decoration, or architecture, accounting for 4.59%. This is because when gold is exposed to sunlight, it shimmers and shines. Chinese idioms with the word “jin” (gold) not only convey the meaning of the golden colour but also symbolise the beauty of clothing, decorative accessories, or architectural elements. For instance, 金碧辉煌 (jīn bì huī huáng) is used to describe the magnificence and grandeur of architecture, and 镂金铺翠 (lòu jīn pù cuì) describes the exquisite and delicate craftsmanship of carving.
- 1.3.3 A total of 8 idioms signify beautiful sounds, accounting for 1.93%. Gold is one of the primary materials used in ancient Chinese musical instruments. Yi (2010) described the materials used in ancient Chinese musical instruments, include gold, stone, clay, leather, wood, silk, gourd, and bamboo. Gold produces distinctive and prominent sounds. Idioms with the word “jin” (gold) thus convey the meaning of melodious sounds. For example, 敲金击石 (qiāo jīn jī shí) the melodious sound like

striking gold and hitting stones, rotund sounds, and 敲金戛玉 (qiāo jīn jiá yù) referring to musical sounds, singing, or other pleasant and melodious sounds.

- 1.3.4 A total of 5 idioms symbolise the beautiful appearance of people, accounting for 1.21%. For example, 金相玉质 (jīn xiàng yù zhì) refers to an individual who is beautiful inside out, and 金玉其外 (jīn yù qí wài) describes people who are beautiful on the outside but have a bad nature or quality on the inside.

1.4 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Money and Treasured Things

Adjectives related to objects with the character “jin” (gold), according to Modern Chinese Dictionary (现代汉语词典), refer to “five metals” (五金), i.e., gold, silver, copper, iron, and tin, generally referring to metals (金属). The Chinese have recognised the significance of gold and had metallurgical technology since the early Western Zhou Dynasty. Ancient people used metal materials to create various objects such as coins, weapons, musical instruments, and other valuable items. Likewise, there are 51 idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) that also has diverse meanings related to objects, accounting for 12.32%. These idioms can be categorised into those conveying the meaning of items made of metal and those conveying the meaning of money or valuable objects.

- 1.4.1 A total of 33 idioms express the meaning of items made of metal, accounting for 7.97%. This category of idioms often refers to weapons or metal tools used in warfare. The meaning of these idioms can be linked to warfare. For example, 击鼓鸣金 (jī gǔ míng jīn) drumming and blowing metal instruments, used in ancient times to issue commands in warfare, which refers to engaging in a battle, and 金戈铁马 (jīn gē tiě mǎ) golden spears and ironclad horses, a metaphor for the splendid demeanour of warriors.
- 1.4.2 A total of 18 idioms express the meaning of money, substances, or valuable items, accounting for 4.35%. For example, 金银财宝 (jīn yín cái bǎo) gold and silver treasures, referring to wealth and valuable possessions, and 金帛珠玉 (jīn bó zhū yù) gold, silk, pearls, and jade, symbolising precious and valuable things.

1.5 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Social Status and Standard

There are 48 Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) that can be related to the golden mindset, including social status and standards, accounting for 11.59%. These idioms convey two main social implications: those signifying social status and those representing important legal standards or requirements.

- 1.5.1 A total of 36 idioms signify social status, accounting for 8.70%. These idioms mainly consist of the characters 金, symbolising a golden insignia and 紫,

signifying purple robes. Wang and Sun (2010) explain that in ancient China, high-ranking officials wore purple robes and had a gold emblem at their waist. Therefore, idioms containing the characters 金 and 紫 are often used to describe high-ranking officials' prestigious status, such as 腰金拖紫 (yāo jīn tuō zǐ) and 腰金衣紫 (yāo jīn yī zǐ) gold at the waist and trailing purple, indicating a high-ranking official.

- 1.5.2 A total of 12 idioms represent important legal standards or requirements, accounting for 2.90%. For example, 试金石 (shì jīn shí) testing gold with a stone, originally referring to a method of testing the quality of gold, which later symbolises a reliable testing method, 玉圭金臬 (yù guī jīn niè) a jade square and a golden standard, a metaphorical expression for important standards or regulations, and 玉律金科 (yù lǜ jīn kē) jade rules and golden principles, referring to crucial conditions or requirements that must be followed.

1.6 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Goodness

People's experiences and perceptions of “gold” allow it to connect with various meanings and symbols. For the Chinese, gold can symbolise goodness in many ways. There are 39 Chinese idioms with the word “jin” (gold) that convey the meaning of goodness, accounting for 9.42%. These idioms can be subdivided into three groups: beautiful relationship, good thing or good phenomenon, and the best thing.

- 1.6.1 A total of 20 idioms signify beautiful relationships, accounting for 4.83%. For example, 金石之交 (jīn shí zhī jiāo) intimate friendship between two people, also referring to good international relations, and 金石交情 (jīn shí jiāo qíng) deep and enduring friendship or unbreakable bonds.
- 1.6.2 A total of 10 idioms convey the meaning of good stories or beautiful events, accounting for 2.42%. For example, 黄金世界 (huángjīn shì jiè) a beautiful and perfect situation and 金瓯无缺 (jīn ōu wú quē) an integrity of a country or territory.
- 1.6.3 A total of 9 idioms convey the meaning of good or high-quality things, accounting for 2.17%. Idioms like 沙里淘金 (shā lǐ táo jīn), 排沙简金 (pái shā jiǎn jīn), and 淘沙得金 (táo shā dé jīn) finding gold through the process of sifting sand all mean the difficulty of obtaining something valuable, as well as the idea that achieving valuable results requires a great deal of effort. Additionally, these idioms also indicate the importance of selecting the highest-quality items from a large number of items.

1.7 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Stability and Strength

Hardness is one of the qualities attributed to all the metals and in Chinese “jin” (gold) can symbolise strength and difficulty to destroy. There are 28 idioms that convey the meaning of strength or durable things, accounting for 6.77%. They can be divided into two groups: those representing strong and hard-to-break things and those signifying a steadfast and unwavering spirit in the face of obstacles.

- 1.7.1 A total of 24 idioms convey the meaning of strength or durable things, accounting for 5.80%. The ancient Chinese used gold as a metaphor for things that are tough, not easily broken or not corroded. For example, 金城汤池 (jīn chéng tāng chí) a city wall as strong as gold and a boiling moat, which metaphorically represents a city or fortress that is extremely strong. Another idiom is 金石之坚 (jīn shí zhī jiān) as hard as metal and stone, which means something is incredibly strong.
- 1.7.2 A total of 4 idioms convey the meaning of a steadfast and unwavering spirit in the face of obstacles, accounting for 0.97%. The idioms containing the word 断金 (duàn jīn) mean cutting gold, which in Chinese signifies that if one's determination is unwavering, even if the task is difficult, success can be achieved. For instance, 二人同心，其利断金 (èr rén tóng xīn, qí lì duàn jīn) when two people work together with a united heart, they can overcome any difficulties, and 心如金石 (xīn rú jīn shí) a heart as strong as gold and stone, which signifies having a firm and unwavering determination.

1.8 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Nature

Taoism is a religion that has existed for a long time in China. The core ideas of Taoism profoundly affected Chinese thought and culture. Some Chinese expressions containing the word “jin” (gold) are also influenced by Taoism, especially expressions that refer to nature. There are 13 expressions with the word “jin” (gold) implying nature, accounting for 3.14%. Idioms with the word “gold” related to nature include hot weather, autumn, and the sun.

- 1.8.1 A total of 6 idioms convey the meaning hot weather, accounting for 1.45%. The process of melting gold requires extremely high heat. The experiences of observing the world have led people to establish a conceptual link between “gold” and “heat.” For example, 焦金烁石 (jiāo jīn shuò shí) and 流金铄石 (liú jīn shuò shí) have similar meanings: stone and melting and turning into liquid, referring to scorching hot weather.
- 1.8.2 A total of 4 idioms convey the meaning of the sun, accounting for 0.97%. Fang (2013) gives details of beliefs about birds in Chinese culture; the Chinese believed that there was a golden bird “金鸟” (jīn niǎo) in the sun. This divine bird resided

within the sun and would fly from east to west every day, causing the sun to rise in the east and set in the west according to the auspicious bird's movement. The wisdom in observing and attempting to understand the natural phenomena of ancient Chinese led to folklore and beliefs. Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) that refer to the sun include 金乌玉兔 (jīn wū yù tù) golden bird and jade rabbit, referring to the sun and the moon. This idiom comes from Taoist anecdotes. According to Yuan (1998), Chinese mythology believes that there is a rabbit on the moon, which is as white as jade, so it is called “Jade Rabbit”. Likewise, there is a three-legged crow in the sun, which is a sacred bird. 玉走金飞 (yù zǒu jīn fēi) jade walks, gold flies, referring to the sun and the moon are like flying, thus signifying how time flies.

- 1.8.3 A total of 3 idioms convey the meaning of the season of autumn when leaves fall, accounting for 0.72%. Chen (1986) states that by expanding the understanding of the five element concepts, the ancient Chinese divided the year into five seasons, corresponding to the five elements of wood, fire, earth, gold, and water respectively. Spring belongs to wood; summer belongs to fire; the period between summer and autumn belongs to earth; autumn belongs to gold; and winter belongs to water. For example, 金风玉露 (jīn fēng yù lù) golden wind and jade dew, referring to the cool and refreshing autumn weather, and 金风送爽 (jīn fēng sòng shuǎng) golden wind brings freshness, meaning the breeze in autumn.

1.9 Chinese Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold): Metaphors Related to Other Meanings

There are 12 Chinese idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) that are difficult to classify because they often convey specific noun meanings, such as place names, royal titles, surnames, etc. This study then categorises all these idioms into one category “other meanings,” accounting for 0.90%. For example, 金谷酒数 (jīn gǔ jiǔ shù) originally meant a large amount of wine in the Golden Valley of the Jin Dynasty’s garden in Luoyang City; later, it referred to a punishment of drinking three glasses of wine at a banquet. 玉堂金马 (yù táng jīn mǎ) Jade Hall and Golden Horses refer to the names of the palace and palace gate in the Han dynasty, it was a place for selecting talented individuals for government positions. Later, this expression came to symbolize a person who is knowledgeable skilled, wealthy, and prominent.

2. The Perspectives of Idioms Containing the Word “jin” (gold) in the Chinese Language

The Chinese idioms that contain the word “jin” (gold) can convey aspects of Chinese society, history, culture, and beliefs, as follows:

2.1 The Society in the Feudal System in Ancient China

Chinese idioms with the word “jin” (gold) can effectively reflect the social system of China, especially during the feudal regime in the past. During that time, the highest authority in government was concentrated at the centre. Wang and Sun (2010) explain that according to historical records, the rulers began to issue official seals and ribbons to leaders and officials of border ethnic minorities in the eleventh year of Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty (汉高祖). In the ninth year of the Yongyuan (永元) era of the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 97), Emperor He (汉和帝) gave officials gold seals and purple ribbons. Later rulers followed the example of Emperor He. In the long history of more than 2,000 years, a system gradually formed. So “gold seal” and “purple ribbon” mean high-ranking officials. In addition, some idioms also showed the level of class in feudal society. For example, 玉叶金枝 (yù yè jīn zhī) and 金枝玉叶 (jīn zhī yù yè) mean jade leaves and golden branches, referring to people from noble or high-status backgrounds.

In ancient China, there were frequent wars, often characterised by intense battles. During the war, music was used to issue orders for launching attacks or retreats. The weapon played a significant role in warfare. The country emphasised a defence system by constructing strong city walls and moats to protect against invasions. Examples of idioms involving the word “jin” (gold) reflecting all the above situations or backgrounds include 金鼓连天 (jīn gǔ lián tiān) the sound of golden drums echoing endlessly, depicting intense and fierce warfare; 金戈铁马 (jīn gē tiě mǎ) golden spears and iron horses, referring to formidable and fearsome warriors; and 金城汤池 (jīn chéng tāng chí) a city with golden walls and a moat filled with boiling water, symbolising a strong and well-protected city or fortress.

2.2 Social Values in Chinese Society

The analysis of the meaning and conceptual metaphors of idioms containing the word “jin” (gold) can be broadly categorised into two main types: values related to humans and values related to various things.

Values related to humans: Chinese society values talented people and admires those who are resilient, patient and tolerant in the face of difficulties. Chinese people also respect those who are moral and virtuous, those who are not influenced by materialism, greed for wealth and fame, and believe that inner beauty is more important than appearance. They also appreciate those who embody qualities such as sincerity and determination. For example, 金相玉质 (jīn xiàng yù zhì) beautiful in both appearance and character; 精金美玉 (jīng jīn měi yù) refers to people with moral virtues; 心如金石 (xīn rú jīn shí) a heart as unyielding as gold and stone; 金石不渝 (jīn shí bù yú) determined and unwavering; 浪子回头金不换 (làng zǐ huí tóu jīn bù huàn) a reformed person is

more valuable than gold; and 真金不镀 (zhēn jīn bù dù) real gold does not need gilding, meaning genuine qualities do not require embellishment.

Social values related to various things, including emphasizing the importance of language and commitment, and recognizing the value of words, guidance, or advice as precious as gold and gemstones. In addition, the Chinese community values time as a precious commodity, and it also treats gold and wealth as scarce resources. The Chinese community also values the importance of friendship and trust. For example, 金石良言 (jīn shí liáng yán) good words are as valuable as gold and jade; 一诺千金 (yī nuò qiān jīn) a promise worth a thousand pieces of gold, emphasizing the importance of keeping promises; 寸金难买寸光阴 (cùn jīn nán mǎi cùn guāng yīn) a second of time cannot be bought with an ounce of gold, signifying the irreplaceable nature of time; 赢金一经 (yíng jīn yī jīng) great advice is valued more than money; 金石之交 (jīn shí zhī jiāo) friendship is as strong as gold or stone, indicating a deep and unwavering friendship.

2.3 Arts and Culture

Some Chinese idioms that contain the word “jin” (gold) partly reflect the significant importance placed on culture and Chinese traditions in society. These idioms illustrate the value of various forms of artistic expression, such as poetry, music, and art, as well as appreciation for the beauty of objects, clothing, accessories, and architecture. They also emphasise the high regard for aesthetics in Chinese culture. Here are some examples: 金声玉润 (jīn shēng yù rùn) poetry that is a beautiful rhyme; 镂金错采 (lòu jīn cuò cǎi) exquisite craftsmanship or artistry with outstanding carving or colouring skills; 金碧辉煌 (jīn bì huī huáng) elaborate decoration, artwork, or architecture with dazzling beauty; 镂金铺翠 (lòu jīn pù cuì) exceptional carving skills that create intricate and beautiful designs; and 敲金戛玉 (qiāo jīn jiá yù) music, singing, or sounds that are melodious and harmonious. These idioms emphasise the importance of artistic and cultural values in Chinese society.

2.4 Ancient religion of the Chinese people

Some Chinese idioms that contain the word “gold” partly reflect beliefs related to Taoism and Buddhist religion, which have had significant influence in China's history, especially Taoism. For example, 金风玉露 (jīn fēng yù lù) golden wind and jade dew, referring to the season of autumn. As mentioned earlier, based on the concept of the five elements in Taoism, gold represents the autumn season. 金刚怒目 (jīn gāng nù mù), A face with the eyes widening in anger, resembling that of the Buddha's attendant warrior holding the Vajra pestle (an ancient Indian weapon), In ancient China, there was an artistic tradition of angry faces, such as statues of gods, and images of gods in Chinese temples. 金乌玉兔 (jīn wū yù tù) the golden crow 金乌 (jīn wū) is a

sacred bird. In Chinese mythology that refers to the sun, and jade rabbit 玉兔 (yù tù) refers to the moon. This idiom alludes to the sun and the moon. Taoists believe that there is a rabbit on the moon and a sacred bird on the sun.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the word "jin," which means "gold," appears frequently in Chinese idioms and has a variety of meanings. It illustrates that Chinese people have had diverse experiences with gold, allowing the Chinese language to convey a wide range of meanings related to it. Additionally, the reflection of history, values, culture, and religion through idioms incorporating the word "gold" indicates that gold has been deeply ingrained in Chinese culture and religion from ancient times.

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