

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

“Fu” and “Zhou”—A preliminary study on “language worship” and its symbolization

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Abstract: The article aims to, based on the study of “Spells” (or “Fuzhou”, 符咒, including the magic figures and incantations), find out the relationship of “Fu” (符, talisman¹), “Zhou” (咒, incantations)” and “language worship” (including written language and oral language). There is an in-depth probe into “language worship”, and the clarification of the term “Fu” and “Fushu” (the use of Fu), “Zhou” and “Zhoushu” (the use of Zhou), no matter in a narrow sense or a broad one. In addition, the differentiation of language, “language worship” and “Spells” has been achieved via symbols and their symbolization. The final conclusion of such study shows that language worship is the process of language symbolization, and spells, in essence, is the symbol of language.

Keywords: language worship; language; Fu; Zhou; symbolization

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Throughout the world, the “language worship” occurs as a common phenomenon in all kinds of cultures. This kind of worship is firstly based on the receivers’ belief that “language has power”. People express their reverence for the special semantics under special circumstances through the so called worship of pronunciation and writing.

There are many researchers working on the study of language worship: Wang Xiangyuan (Wang, 2017), Guo Xiaomin (X Guo, 2007), Liu Ping (Liu, 2006) and so on.

One of the best representation of “language worships” is the “spells” (符咒, Fuzhou). “Fu” (符, talisman) and “Zhou” (咒, incantations), collectively known as the “spells”, have existed in traditional cultures, in different forms, all over the world since ancient times. However, their basic worshiped object is the same, the “sanctity”: the worship of “Fu” comes from the sanctity of words, while that of “zhou” comes from the sanctity of language. Throughout China, although “spells”

1. “Fu” always means “A kind of authenticating object which belonged to military governors and was used to convey an order or to transfer troops” (Xu and Duan, 2010) in ancient China. But nowadays, this word has many other meanings.

seem to be more and more scarce nowadays, in fact, they exist in everyone's life in a broader sense, such as Spring Festival couplets, Shigandang (a kind of stele used to drive out evil spirits), swearwords, homonyms and other writing, and speech acts.

The relationship of "language", "language worship" and "spells" should also be fully discussed and analyzed through the research of symbolization. Among them, "language" is regarded as a symbol system relative to nature, while "language worship" and "spells" are respectively regarded as the process and result of "language symbolization".

1. The origin of the "spells": Language worship

1.1. "Language worship"

As for language, Ferdinand de Saussure, the most important linguist in the 20th century, regarded language as the general model and a set of abstract rules of speech activities of a speech group, and defined it as follows:

"But what is language[langue]? It is not to be confused with human speech[langage], of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one. It is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty." (Saussure, 1959)

For Sapir, the importance of language lies in its instrumental and artificial nature. And language is a symbol system uniquely created by human beings, a non-instinctive way to communicate ideas, feelings, and desires, and a socialized symbol system. (Sapir, 1964)

Different linguists have generally defined language in terms of its different properties. Generally speaking, language is regarded as a tool for speaking and expressing ideas. Based on these definitions of "language", we can discuss the problem of "language worship".

Language worship is a kind of cultural phenomenon Shared by all nationalities at home and abroad. This kind of phenomenon is not directly to Saussure and others described the "language" of worship, but not solely limited to the narrow sense of the worship of normal express (known as "natural language")—the term "language worship" as an expression of aggregation of later scholars to a similar phenomenon, including the language itself and its extension and its symbol of worship (such as text, voice, etc.).

In ancient times, humans have already begun to worship speech and writing. In chapter 22 of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer gives the example of "Personal Names Tabooed", which we can use here to illustrate the origin of language worship:

"Unable to discriminate clearly between words and things, the savage commonly fancies that the link between a name and the person or thing denominated by it is not a mere arbitrary and ideal association, but a real and substantial bond which unites the two in such a way that magic may be wrought on a man just as easily through his name as through his hair, his nails, or any other material part of his person. In fact, primitive man regards his name as a vital portion of himself and takes care of it accordingly." (Frazer, 2017)

In Frazer’s view, this kind of “worship” can be classified as the result of “homeopathic magic” (or “imitative magic”), based on “the belief that words or language are identical with ‘influence’ (or ‘divine power’)”; At the same time, on the other hand, it is also based on the “objective condition of human beings’ lack of scientific cognition of language”, that is, human beings believe that speech or writing has “divine power”. The most critical aspect of language worship is the belief in the assumption that language affects people.

1.2. Different phenomena of language worship: Verbal language worship and written language worship

In this section, we take the different material shells and expression symbols of language in the society as the standard, and divide the different “language worship” phenomena in the world into “the verbal worship” and “the written worship”, and discuss them respectively.

1.2.1 The verbal worship

It is believed that verbal voice is an act of divine, while the “power” in oral words can either have the power to achieve the desire and communicate the commitment by just words or have the power comes from gods- according to the source of power in verbal worship, in this article we will be divided into the “oracle worships” (with which people will worship the gods who release oracle) and the worship of “spirit of speech” (with which people will worship words they speak out).

1.2.1.1 Oracle worship

Oracle worship is characterized by the phonetic worship generated in this kind of worship, which, in essence, is the worship of the originator of the “divine power”. According to the originator of “divine power”, we can be divided into two categories: “divine power comes from scriptures” and “divine power comes from God”.

(1) Divine power comes from scriptures: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Brahmanism

Before there were words, the scriptures of the various Indian religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on) such as *the Vedas*, were taught orally and passed down from generation to generation, and gathered together over the years. *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, two of the great Epics of India, have also been passed down through early oral instruction.

The traditional learning method of Indian religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, is “oral instruction”. Monks teach scriptures by oral teaching. This is also reflected in the “mantra” (Om Mani Padme Hum). It is usually considered in Buddhism to be able to receive all the bodhisattvas’ blessing and compassion by reading the “mantra”. Its contents are extremely rich, mysterious and supreme, and it is also regarded as the crystallization of the great energy, great wisdom and great compassion contained in the universe. Through the recitation of the “mantra”, the monks belong to Buddhism achieve their aspiration to achieve perfection, enlightenment and eventually Buddhahood.

Indian society has maintained a tradition of valuing oral transmission up to the present day. Many people recite *the Ramayana* in their homes, and some temples broadcast the book through loudspeakers to achieve their desires or achieve their fulfillment in merit.

From objectively, this kind of situation has certain historical and cultural reasons, such as:

the low literacy rates of the ancient monks—the sixth inheritor of Chinese Zen Buddhism, Huineng, who was living in the Tang dynasty, is illiterate, so his teacher, the fifth inheritor Hongren passed on knowledge to him by orally speaking. And the disciple of him, Fahai, also sets his teacher's thoughts into the book called *The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra* by using dictation record. So, it means that maybe there used to have much fewer Buddhists who can read than we thought. This kind of tradition, which is produced for historical and cultural reasons, has gradually come into being as the classics of various religions are handed down from generation to generation.

But in the cultural sense, in oral and chanting scriptures lecture, this habit has been handed down from generation to generation in the process, because the Indian classical on religion, the importance of culture, and also to avoid the transmission process of classic misreading and cause unnecessary religious in the sense of “evil consequences”, India culture regards the correctness of the voice as a significant thing. As Pedersen put it:

“The fact that Indians are often careful to maintain the correctness of their sacred words may explain this: they are meticulous in the slightest articulations, believing that if they do not do so, religious sacrifices will not produce good results or even cause trouble.” (Pedersen, 2010)

Turn in general, the “divine power” of the Indian classical literature was moved from the text to the “voice”. Indians by way of the sanctity of transfer text, will read the voice of the classic when given the same divinity, as a result, the process of chanting becomes sanctified, and when they were chanting, they showed the worship of the process and the voice.

(2) Divine Power Comes from gods: Examples of Christianity, Ancient Greek Mythology and Polytheisms

In this phenomenon of “divine power comes from gods”, oral speech mainly serves as a kind of “reporting to god and making known to people” function, which can either convey their demands to God or represent the oral message received from gods.

For Europe, mythologies in both *the Bible* and various cultures are always inseparable from the myth of the “Oracle”, that is, “the language of God”. Oracles played an essential role in European cultures:

Some oracles, according to the record, come directly from “god himself”: in *The Book of Genesis*, the deity God sends out a series of commands (such as “let there be light!”), thus creating the world; Some oracles come from god's agents: in *King Oedipus*, the sibylline oracle that means “kill the father and marry the mother” is spoken by the priest.

Moreover, all oracles carry a high status:

“The oracle is intimately connected with the mode of democracy peculiar to Greece. Whenever a colony is to be established, whenever the worship of a foreign god is proposed, or whenever a general is to be prepared for a decisive battle, they will consult with an oracle.” (Hegel, 2001)

Just as Hegel said, in the context of European Christian culture and ancient Greek mythology and polytheism, all the oracles were venerated: god's words are still regarded as the standard by Christians, Catholics and other believers and the oracle that “kill the father and marry the mother”

was trusted and caused a series of tragedies. (Hegel, 2001)

Even though according to the European religious texts, the originator of oracles is different, but the origin of the divine power is the same, that is “god”, thus we can still draw similar views with India: the oracle is as a voice of worship, its divine power comes not from the language, speech itself, but from “god”.

In addition, there are also distributed in Eurasia and North America in the northern regions of ethnic shamanism. “Shaman” is not only the special name of shamanist but also understood as the agent and incarnation of shaman god in the clan. Shamans make the gods adhere to the body of the shaman in the so-called “possession” way, and through the body of the shaman to complete the communication with the mortal, in which the “oracle” is worshiped, also because of god.

1.2.1.2 The worship of “spirit of speech” (P Li, 2013)

In this kind of worship, one of the most representative examples took place in Japan, belonging to its original Shinto belief system.

As its name suggests, the worship of “spirit of speech” worships “the spirit of speech” and “the god of speech”, that is, they believe that language itself has a kind of magic power. This worship takes speech itself as an objective existence of the gods, strictly monitoring the people who speak, even if the gods offend the spirit of the speech, will still be punished.

In traditional Japanese mythology, there are often similar stories. In the story named *Hairohiko and Yamanohiko* (《海幸彦と山幸彦》) recorded in the book called *The Ancient Records (Kojiki, 《古事記》)*, Yamanohiko (山幸彦) used the Kotodama (means “the spirit of speech (言霊)” in Japanese) “The trouble hook, the hurry hook, the poverty hook, the dull hook! (此鉤者、淤煩鉤、須須鉤、貧鉤、宇流鉤)” to punish his brother Hairohiko (海幸彦), and the Kotodama achieved the request of Yamanohiko, Hairohiko was punished at last. (Oonoyasumaro, 2018)

And the writer of Waka literature, Hatta Tomonori (八田知紀), also gave the following explanation for “Kotodama”: “...We in Japan have beautiful scenery, clean food, and a clear voice to connect with the gods. It is our good fortune to believe in it, and it is called ‘Kotodama’. By the spirit of the voice into a tune, is a Waka literature.” (Wang, 2017)

Compared with the above two situations, the worships of “the spirit of speech” occurs in more everyday situations, such as blessing and curse, etc., and are mostly delivered in the form of face-to-face interaction, which is a kind of Verbal worships because of the divine nature of the language itself.

1.3. The character worship

In Chinese society, the worship of written language, or “character worship”, has always been an important part of traditional culture.

First of all, this worship of characters is closely related to the tradition of ancient Chinese society to attach importance to culture. From the study of Confucius and Mencius (孔孟之学) and Jixia Academy (稷下学宫) to the imperial examinations in Sui and Tang dynasties (隋唐科举取士), the Song dynasty’s emphasis on literature over military force (宋朝重文轻武), and the Ming and

Qing Dynasties' way to select scholars for public office (明清八股取士), the emphasis on the cultural tradition has never stopped.

1.3.1 The "divinity" of the "character worship"

It is because of the continuity of the culture, from the origin of the wordage, the importance of it has not been ignored: *Huai Nan Tzu* (《淮南子》) recorded in "Long time ago, Cang Jie (仓颉) created the wordage, and therefore the sky rains millet and ghosts cried all night long." This recordation reflects a form of "character worship". Through the legend that Cang Jie created the wordage, people deified the process of the invention of the wordage. And through this kind of apotheosis, words became sacred and showed by "startle the universe and move the gods". So that, as a result, the status of words in traditional Chinese culture became more and more significant.

Besides the addition to the source of the "divine", the "divine" of words also reflected in many all kinds of aspects: such as the ancient Chinese literati cherish wastepaper with characters written, even though the Chinese traditional culture is always "the different places have different customs (十里不同音, 百里不同俗)", but "cherishing written paper (敬惜字纸)" is also a kind of nationwide and legitimate folk beliefs. People through a variety of established rules, such as *Precepts of Yan Family* (《颜氏家训·治家》) have the opinion that "When I read the book of Confucius, I respect the book and feel solemn. This book has the meaning of the Five Classics and all the sages' names, so I will never use the paper of this book to do something foul and filthy. (吾每读圣人之书, 未尝不肃敬对之; 其故纸有《五经》词义, 及贤达姓名, 不敢秽用也。)" And Shi Daoxuan, a famous monk who lived in the Tang dynasty, wrote a book named *Teach the New Learning Bhikkhu to Protect the Law of Buddhism* (《教诫新学比丘行护律仪》) and the book said: "We have to prepare wood chips in the toilet and never use the wastepaper with characters written! (常具厕筹, 不得失阙……不得用文字故纸)" (Yang, 2007). All of these rules constitute a new type of folk belief system.

1.3.2 The phenomenon of "taboo words"

Based on "character worship", the emergence of "character taboo" appears.

"Literary inquisition" is a kind of embodiment of "character taboo". *The Chinese Dictionary* (《汉语大词典》) defines "Literary inquisition" as "in the old days, it was said that the rulers deliberately took words and sentences from their works to persecute intellectuals and made them into crimes".² For example, In the event named "the case of Huang Pei's poems", the poem belonging to Huang Pei which said "no sun or moon is shining on the Sea of Shandong province (一自蕉符纷海上, 更无日月照山东。)" was considered having the thought of anti-Qing dynasty, because the Chinese character "sun (日)" and "moon (月)" can combine into the character "Ming (明)", which is the name of the former dynasty of the Qing dynasty. In addition to such superficial reasons as "deliberate political persecution" and "sarcasm", this seemingly overly sensitive behavior is also motivated by the belief that others (agents) can exert some influence on people and things (recipients) of reality through the written word.

Until now, the "golden chain letters" that were widely circulated in the past, as well as the threatening talk that is circulated in the QQ zone "forward it within 10 seconds", are also such "taboo

2. "Chinese Dictionary" version 2.0, The Commercial Press (Hong Kong) Limited, Chinese Dictionary Press.

words” phenomenon. Because of its similarity with the expression form of “character worship”, it can be incorporated into the discussion of “Fu (符 , talisman) and “Zhou (咒 , incantations)” later.

2. “Spells (符咒)” and their forms of expression

“Fu (符 , talisman)” and “Zhou (咒 , incantations)” are often regarded as derivations of language worship. There are two definitions in a broad sense and a narrow sense.

The term “Spells (符咒)”, in the narrow sense, include “Fu (符 , talisman)” and “Zhou (咒 , incantations)”. “Fu (符 , talisman)” and “Zhou (咒 , incantations)”, not only appear in Taoist spells but also have a great influence all over the world, including Tibetan Buddhists, Tantric spells, Voodoo and so on.

2.1. “Fu” and “Fushu” (the use of Fu)

“Fu”, which originally means an object used by the ancient imperial court to convey an order or to transfer troops, with each party holding half of the object to verify the truth or fallibility. It also means a mark or sign that represents something. In witchcraft activities of an official or folk nature (private or local worship), this meaning is extended and is widely known as a magic appliance for the mobilization of supernatural spirits, gods, or other non-human elements by writings a “Fu”.

2.1.1 “Fu” and “Fushu (the use of Fu)” in the narrow sense

In the narrow sense of “Fu”, we define them as follows: in witchcraft activities, people write words with different purposes which are recorded on such writable objects as paper or cloth, and supernatural spirits, gods or other non-human elements are mobilized, to achieve their purpose. Fushu, on the other hand, refers to the methods of making and using Fu.

Even in the narrow sense, Fu and Fushu are widely distributed around the world, such as the “amulet (お守り , 護身符)” and “Ema (えま , 繪馬)” in Shinto shrines of Japan, as well as the notes with names which are written on the “voodoo doll” mentioned above. Some of them are confined to organized religion, while others are the practice of witchcraft within private or relatively small local worships.

The most familiar example of this term is the Taoist “Fu-lu (符箓)”. For Daoists, the “Fu-lu” is one of the primary and fundamental aspects of its sorcery system. The “Fu-lu” is derived from the ancient wizard. One of the books named Weishu (纬书 , divination studies) in the Han Dynasty, *The Chart of Dragon, Bass and Galaxy* (《龙鱼河图》, 汉代讖纬书) contains the legend of the Yellow Emperor (黄帝) being conferred by the Queen Mother of the West (西王母):

“The Sky sent the fairy to assist the Yellow Emperor, who believed in the divine “Fu” and wanted to subdue Chi You. The Yellow Emperor went to the chariot and said: “Chi You was tyrannical.” The Yellow Emperor started to attack Chi You and the Queen Mother of the West gave him a “Fu” in his dream. When the emperor waked up, he set up an altar and prayed in it. A black tortoise emerged from the water and put the “Fu” which appeared in his dream on the altar. And since then, the Chinese start to use “Fu-lu”. (Sun, 1999)

As *The Chart of Dragon, Bass and Galaxy* is one of the divinatory books of the Han Dynasty, the recordation that the “Fu-lu” was used in the Yellow Emperor period is not entirely credible, but it is

speculated that the “Fu-lu” had been used by wizards as early as the Han Dynasty (earlier than *The Chart of Dragon, Bass and Galaxy*).

In the early years of Daoism, the “Fu-lu” was included in the Taoist sorcery system and was divided into “Fu” and “Lu”. Among them, “Fu” is known as “words of phoenix” and “words of jade”, etc. According to the records of Li Yuanguo, “it is constituted by something like words but not words and some pictures with words.”

And the “Lu”, which known as “Fa-Lu (法篆)”, was recorded in *A Preliminary Study of Taoist Fu-lu and Incantations* by Li Yuanguo:

“It usually refers to the notes about the official of gods, the name of the ten gods, the summoning of god officials and the execution of magic, which mainly include the names, shapes and charms of gods. Daoism believes that the Taoist ‘Lu’ is derived from innate Aura... The Taoist practice and use magic which relies mainly on the gods in the ‘Lu’ to save the suffering and evils. A Taoist master must be familiar with the ‘Lu’.” (Y Li, 1991)

The Taoist believes that both “Fu” and “Lu” are information channels between gods and humans and a carrier of ideas and spirits - the Taoist also believes that the “Fu-lu” has the function of bringing Numen, dispelling evil spirits and making themselves become gods.

Examples of the medical use of the “Fu-lu” are familiar to Daoist and even Buddhist practitioners: in the early years of Emperor Guangxu period, a mad monk who lived in The Zhuming Temple in Suzhou treated people by burning a prescription to ashes and drinking it. At the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Zhang Jiao, the founder of the Taipingdao sect (太平道), and his disciples also recorded that “‘Fushui(the water which ‘Fu’ burned in it)’ was used to cure the sick, and the people believed in it.” In this way, the function of the prescription and the written name of the medicine are equal, so that “Fushui” can also have the function of medicine.

2.1.1.2 Witchcraft activities of “sorcery by all the people”

In private or relatively small groups or non-religious or local worship, the users of “Fu” and “Fushu” are wizards. As for the literature meaning of wizards, *Chinese Dictionary* (《汉语大词典》) explains it as follows:” The people who engaged in prayer, augury, astrology and cure” (Chinese Dictionary. And “witchcraft” refers to “make one’s dream come true by using some supernatural power.” And as Zhan Yinxin records, we can be seen as” in the original thinking to control things produced under the guidance of the results of the occurrence, development and change of behavior” (Zhan, 2001).

It is not difficult to imagine that in ancient societies, where primitive thinking was so strong, there must have been a time when every family had wizards and everyone could “resort to magic arts”—that is, everyone can be a wizard. For example, in *the Book of the Later Han Dynasty* (《后汉书·方术传下·徐登》), the unusual person Xu Deng is recorded:” Xu Deng comes from Fujian province and changes his sex from female to male, also he is good at witchcraft.” Xu Deng was not a religious man, but he could perform his activities by using witchcraft. (Fan, 2012)

In addition, earlier inscriptions are also a type of “Fu”. They represent the roles of mediator between heaven and human.

When the oracle bone scripts are written on the bones of animals, the inscriptions with the meanings of blessing or divination have the meaning of sorcery, such as the inscriptions recorded in Chen Mengjia’s book named *the Summary of the Divination of Yin Dynasty’s Ruins* (陈梦家《殷虚卜辞综述》):

- “(1) 庚子卜争贞羽辛丑旯?”
- “(2) 贞羽辛丑不其旯?”
- “(3) 王囙曰：今夕其雨？羽辛丑旯?”
- “(4) 之夕允雨，辛丑旯。”

(Chen, 1998)

On the day of Gengzi (庚子), it was revealed whether the next day would be fine or not—in the process of ancient sorcery, the ancients regarded the oracle bone inscriptions and the cracks generated when they were burned as the will of heaven and therefore “sacred”.

For some bronzes, it can also be regarded as another kind of “symbol”, which is the “sacredness” given by the “solemnness” of the act of “making the tripod”, that is, based on the “sacredness” of the characters and the tripod itself, and produces the effect of stipulation or blessing. For example, the inscription “Mao Gong Ding (Duke Mao Tripod, 毛公鼎)” has such a meaning.

2.1.2 “Fu” and “Fu” in the broad sense: The extension of “Universal sorcery”

The term notation and notation, in the broader sense, is not limited to religions and wizardry. However, the use of the terms notation and notation is no longer limited to the formal functions of witchcraft.

By extension, it can be regarded as the broad sense of “character” and “character”, the most familiar is the “character(it is also called ‘Fu’ in Chinese)” in the verse “thousands of doors, every household is new peach for the old character (千门万户曈曈日，总把新桃换旧符)”—Spring Festival couplets. The content and form of the couplets are consistent with the above definition of “fu”: people write blessings on peach wood or rice paper in the hope that the wishes in their words will come true.

In modern times, in addition to the “Spring Festival couplets”, the folk “Fu” and “Fu shu” still exist in many areas, embodied in some inscriptions and inscriptions. Such as standing in Hunan province and other provinces of the rural intersection or family.

On the stele in front of the door, there would always be the words “General’s Arrow”, which was said to drive away evil spirits; For example, the words “Jiang Taigong is here (no taboos)” (姜太公在此(百无禁忌)) written on the walls of pigsty in Jiangxi and other provinces should be written for high yield. In recent years, there will be people going from street to street selling the god of wealth like plastic stickers, which are believed to be put on the wall to bless wealth; More regardless of the wide reach of the national “Taishan Stone Tablets” (泰山石敢当) culture.

These “expect to realize” ceremony is a “blessing or blessing words and pictures” and “the act

of writing or engraved” interact with each other and be able to finish the whole process, namely between “rune” and “operator” and the role of consistent, but because of it is not made by the professional wizard, and widely spread in the folk, what we call it as generalized “character”.

2.2. “Zhou (咒 , incantations)” and “Zhoushu (咒术)”

The original meaning of “Zhou (咒 , incantations)” is “a kind of pray or blessing”, while “Zhoushu (咒术)” refers to the methods to cast “Zhou”. “Zhou” is originally from the blessing given by witches and wizards when offering sacrifices to the gods. It is recorded as follows in *the Book of the Later Han dynasty* (《后汉书·独行传·谅辅》):

“When the summer drought, too keep out of prayer mountains and rivers, for days no drop. He came out of the court and said generously: ‘The auxiliary is humeral... Dare to pray, if the sun does not rain, begging the body plug no shape.’ (时夏大旱, 太守自出祈祷山川, 连日无所降。辅乃自暴庭中, 慷慨咒曰: ‘辅为股肱……敢自祈请, 若至日中不雨, 乞以身塞无状。’)” (Fan, 2012)

The sentence the person said in this context is “Zhou”, a kind of verbal sorcery.

With the expansion of Chinese semantics, besides the meaning of prayer, “Zhou” gradually took on a negative meaning, that is, “Zhou” and other oral witchcraft that would bring negative effects to others.

This paper defines “Zhou” as oral witchcraft which has no positive or negative meanings and holds that “Zhou (咒)” and its applied technology “Zhoushu (咒术)” have two categories of limits, narrow and broad.

2.2.1. “Zhou” and “Zhoushu” in the narrow sense: Confined to witchcraft activities

In the narrow sense of “Zhou”, we define them as follows: in witchcraft activities, the language with different purposes (curses or blessings) is spoken, and the contractual language with the divine sound or language is used to mobilize supernatural spirits, gods, or other non-human elements, to achieve one’s purpose. And “Zhoushu” are methods used to create and use “Zhou”.

They are more widely distributed than “Fu”, including the “oral speech worship” (including the external source of “oracle worship” and the internal source of “speech worship”), Taoism, the “Ode (《颂》)” in *The Book of Songs* (《诗经》), and so on.

In Taoism, “Zhou” are commonly known as “incantations”. Taoist incantations are usually used in the time of practice magic. According to Li Yuanguo’s description, “Fu is the induction of the combination of internal and external air, and Zhou is the new sound of sincerity” (Y Li, 1991). As the words recited when practicing magic, the purpose of the “spells” is to praise the gods and ask for wishes; When it comes to healing and exorcising evil spirits, they use “spells” to calm the mind and refine the spirit—there are corresponding “incantations” for different situations, and almost everyone ends with the phrase “obey orders presto! (急急如律令)”

Similar to the incantations in religion, there is the “Ode (《颂》)” part in *The Book of Songs* (《诗经》). The Ode Part consists of 31 chapters in *Zhousong* (= *The Ode of the Zhou*, 《周颂》), 4 chapters in *Lusong* (= *The Ode of the Lu*, 《鲁颂》) and 5 chapters in *Shangsong* (= *The Ode of*

the Shang, 《商颂》), a total of 40 chapters, collectively called “Three Odes”. In *Mao Shi Xu* (《毛诗序》), it is said that “the description of beauty and virtue is praised to the gods for its success.” (Anonymity, 8–7th century BC) (Anonymity, 2015)—The purpose of the poems in the “Ode (《颂》)” Part of *The Book of Songs* is to “upload” their contribution to the gods or ancestors with language during the sacrificial ceremony to the ancestral temples so that the gods can understand the virtues of the monarch and achieve the purpose of “blessing”.

2.2.2 General “Zhou” and “Zhoushu”

In a broad sense, “Zhou” and “Zhoushu” are not limited to the scope of religion and witchcraft, that is, their use is no longer limited to the so-called “formal witchcraft activities”.

One of its representatives is “abusive language (詈骂)”, which is a kind of abuse of others. When people have bad relations, they will make personal attacks on each other, which is a kind of “Zhou” in a broad sense. Such “Zhou” is a malicious attack based on the words themselves, and such mutual attacks are based on the situation that confuses the words with the facts.

For example, “Death is a kind of curse commonly feared, loathed and negated by human beings. Therefore, using ‘death’ to curse people has become one of the most common abusive languages.”—“Abusive language” is based on the assumption of “belief” that “language can affect people”. (S Guo, 2002) Through language, it introduces death and other horrible, disgusting and undefined disasters to all people. In addition, there are also language taboos represented by “homophony”, many of which are still circulating in society and interpersonal communication. Such is the tradition of giving clocks as gifts; On the contrary, there are also homophonic blessings, such as the reverse (倒) “fu (福)” character has the meaning of “the good luck has arrived (福到)”, just because of the same pronunciation of “reverse (倒)” and “arrive (到)” in Chinese.³

In the past, people believed that a good word or a bad word would convey the same meaning to the recipient through a verbal reading, while nowadays, although people have a certain amount of scientific knowledge and are not overly superstitious, they still have some vague feeling of “believe it or not” for this kind of behavior.

3. “Spells(符咒)”: The language worship and the phenomenon of symbolization

“Spells (符咒)”, we can think of it as a derivative of language worship, but more precisely, they are special kinds of language witchcraft symbols.

3.1. Symbol

In his book *C.S.Pierce: On Signs*, Peirce defined Semiotics as “a doctrine that studies the essential properties of possible symbolic processes and their basic kinds.” (Peirce, 2014) Saussure’s definition of “Semiotics is the Study of Signs” is used by western works as the general definition of “Semiotics”. (Saussure, 1959)

However, for the definition of “symbol”, there have been many opinions, many semioticians even think that “symbol cannot be defined”. Zhao Yiheng gives a relatively clear definition of symbols

3. “福倒” is read as “dao” and means “reverse”, and is equal to “福到”, read as “dao” and means “something has arrived”.

as the starting point of the discussion: Symbols are perceptions that are thought to carry meaning (Zhao, 2013). Meaning must be expressed in symbols, and symbols are used to express meaning. In short, “Symbols are used to express, transmit and explain the meaning. Any meaning can only be expressed by symbols, and no meaning can be expressed without symbols.” (Zhao, 2013)

Language is a complex symbolic system composed of words according to a certain grammar, including the phonetic system, the lexical system and the grammatical system. Language, as a symbolic system, has the function of giving meaning to everything. We can think that people give meaning to the world through language, or it can be seen as a process of preliminary cognition, classification and meaning assigning to all natural things through language. This process of classification is arbitrary, but once a fixed name, a fixed expression, and a fixed meaning are given to a fixed thing, the relationship cannot be changed at will.

3.2. “Spells(符咒)”: The product of “secondary symbolization” of language as a symbol

3.2.1 *Natural phenomena, primitive symptom sense and “symbolization” and “secondary symbolization” phenomenon*

In the view of modern semiotics, primitive omen sense has a great connection with signs: “primitive omen sense is the initial symbolic behavior of human beings, which confirms the comprehensibility of the world and belongs to non-verbal signs.” (Lei,1998)

Tradition of Zuo (《左传·昭公十七年》) has a record of “Heaven and gods always show themselves up as ‘Xiang’(天事恒象)” (Zuo Qiuming, 4th century BC). In Lei Hanqing’s view, the sense of omens treats the world as a symbol, transforms the cosmic phenomena into cosmic symbols, and establishes a world that can be understood by people. That is to say, “Xiang (象)” here are natural phenomena such as wind, rain, thunder and lightning. By endowing them with meanings, the ancients made them no longer pure natural phenomena, but gestures or signs of Gods giving orders—that is, natural phenomena were “symbolized” and became a kind of “signs” and “images”.

In Lei Hanqing’s opinion, “Bagua (八卦 , the Eight Diagrams)” is the secondary symbolic processing based on the “Xiang” above. In *I-Ching* (《易·系辞下》), there is a record of Fu Xi “looking up at the celestial phenomena and looking down at the geography”. Lei Hanqing pointed out in his article:

“Fuxi regarded the images (象 , Xiang) and rules of heaven and earth, and all the creatures as the object of Bagua, and got all the information from macroscopic to microcosmic between heaven and earth through his eyes, hands and brain. Then, he set up qian (乾), kun (坤), kan (坎), li (离), zhen (震), gen (艮), xun (巽) and dui (兑) to represent heaven, earth, water, wind, fire, thunder, mountain and bottomland—eight kinds of natural phenomena. On this basis, through a change formula of ‘Xiang(images and things)’, number (action, movement) and principle (nature), we have confirmed the universal connection of all things and even the pervasions and mutual transformation of opposite things, to depress or predict the principle of the cause and effect of good or evil among the proposers.” (Lei,1998)

As can be seen from this, the three forms a relationship as follows:

Natural Phenomenon—“Xiang” (Human beings give meaning to natural phenomena through

language, and natural phenomena are deified and symbolized for the first time)—Bagua (through the interpretation of the divine “Xiang”, symbolized for the second time)

In other words, Bagua is the second symbolization of the natural phenomenon with meaning (the symbol of pure natural phenomena).

3.2.2 “Fu Zhou”, “Language worship” and the symbolization of language

Language is a complex symbol system composed of words according to a certain grammar, including the phonetic system, the lexical system and the grammatical system. As a symbolic system, language has the function of endow everything with meaning. As Zhao Yiheng said, “Symbols are perceived to carry meaning”. We can think that people endow the world with meaning through language. as constant as the analysis of “Xiang” above, can also be regarded as a process in which human beings initially recognize, classify and give meaning to all-natural things through language. Such a classification process is arbitrary, but once fixed names and expressions are given meaning to fixed things, the relationship cannot be changed at will.

“Language worship” is the process of language symbolization, and “language worship phenomenon” represented by “Spells (符咒)” is essentially a symbolic language.

As for the relationship between “language worship” and language, we can follow the thought of Lei Hanqing above and make it an extension. We can think that “language worship” is a process of symbolization of “pure” languages.

“Death” in the objective description and “abusive language (詈骂)” were respectively as “ordinary words” and “Zhou”, and “ordinary words” and “Zhou” to the person’s influence is also different. “Language worship” phenomenon is affected by the different context and different populations, let the language in a specific time, specific people, has a special significance; let the language have other meanings once again. This kind of “meanings” are not attached on language represents the objective things, but to adhere to the language, be made as “Spells (符咒)”. At this time, the language (such as “the wind can’t read, why go through the book (清风不识字, 何必乱翻书)”⁴, etc.) on the logical meaning will be different changes.

Therefore, it can be considered that “language worship” is a kind of abstract symbolization process of language, and the result of this process is the symbol represented by “Spells (符咒)”, just as the “Bagua (八卦 , Eight Diagrams)” in the above article is the symbolization result of the “Xiang” as the symbol of natural phenomenon.

4. Conclusion

The charm of Language is infinite, giving the meaning of objective existence and therefore making itself has the function of classification, discrimination and cognition. Meanwhile, “language worship”, attached to it, plays an important role in social changes, and because of the diversity and persistence of the language (words, speech, semantic, etc.), this worship will continue to function, unnecessarily represented in the symbolic form of traditional Wicca, the narrow sense of “charms”—such as “homophones”, “Spring Festival couplets”, etc.—the contemporary form of this worship

4. This is a famous poem whose author was punished in the literary inquisition of the Qing dynasty.

still presents an active situation, and does not seem to be declining.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was reported by all authors.

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