

To Me China Is A Treasure-Trove Of Specialties

By: Jennifer (Congchen Dai)

China, an inclusive country, merges the diverse regional specialties ranging from dialects to architectures. Although I was born here and have lived here for nearly 20 years, I'm still fascinated by the continuous sparkling points deriving from the variety and extraordinary innovation of cultural elements.

Vernacular Expressions in Oral Chinese:

During the last 10 years, the proliferation of netizens in China has resulted in the continuously heated discussion online about the Chinese characters and an attempt to broaden the pragmatic meaning with one's imagination. Some of the characters which used to be “plain and ordinary” have been given a novel usage, especially the alternations of some homophones.

1. Duck = “Ya”



File photo: [Go for it](#), a duck-themed meme, has become popular on Chinese social media.

Ducks have become extremely popular creatures on social media in China these days.

Why, you may wonder? What did these wiggling and waddling things do to win the love of Chinese netizens? What can they contribute, apart from gracing restaurant tables or becoming down garments? They can, in fact, be repurposed as popular memes, as the pronunciation of duck is “ya”. This is the same as an interjection of exclamation in the Chinese language.

Such memes include “I don't want to work today”, “go for it” and “need to cheer up today”. Normal ducks, or duck-shaped cartoon characters and statues, are widely used. After coming out around mid-2018, they have dwarfed other animal emojis and have become the favorite of many young Chinese people on social media. Here is a widely used duck-themed meme, from which you can learn about humorous homophones in the Chinese language:



File photo: [Just off duty](#)

2. How Chinese Number Slang Works

Here are the digits 0-9 and some of their possible word equivalents:

(líng) — “Zero” can be used to mean 你 (*nǐ*) — “you.” Now, to me, they really don’t sound that similar! But in some Chinese dialects the *n* and *l* sounds are interchangeable, so this could be an explanation.

(yī) — “One” Another one that’s a bit tricky. The number one is indeed 一 (*yī*) in Chinese, but in some contexts, such as in addresses or phone numbers, the number is pronounced as *yao*.

(èr) — “Two” This one’s a bit easier! 二 (*èr*) sounds similar enough to 爱 (*ài*) — “[love](#).”

(sān) — “Three” is used in particularly sappy examples of internet slang as 生 (*shēng*) — “life.”

(sì) — “Four” The most unlucky number in Chinese, 四 (*sì*) sounds like 死 (*sǐ*) — “death.” Or 世 (*shì*) — “whole life”.

(*wǔ*) — “Five” sounds similar to 我(*wǒ*) — “I.” It’s also an onomatopoeia for crying.

(*liù*) — “Six” is used in one example below that is borrowed from Cantonese, and also as the grammar particle 了(*le*).

(*qī*) — “Seven” sounds the same as 气(*qì*) — “air,” as in 生气(*shēng qì*) — “to be angry.” Or 妻(*qī*) — “wife”.

(*bā*) — “Eight” Sounds like a transliteration of the English “bye-bye.” Or 发[*fā*] — “wealthy”.

(*jiǔ*) — “Nine” sounds the same as 久(*jiǔ*) — “endurable” to give best wishes to the stable and lasting friendship or marriage.

Now let’s dive into some examples of Chinese number slang in action!

Chinese Number Slang: Greetings, Insults and Declarations of Love

(*èr bǎi wǔ*) > 250 > Idiot

We’ll begin with a special case. While you’ve probably noticed that China is pretty big on homophones, similar sounds aren’t the only tools used to create Chinese number slang. Occasionally, half-forgotten [myths](#) from Chinese history have lent significance to certain numbers, as with the pretty common insult “250.”

The story stems from the fact that in ancient China, coins were strung together in stacks of 1000. It was considered modest and politely self-deprecating for scholars to refer to themselves as “half a stack”—in other words, “500.” Half of 500 is, of course, 250, so 二百五(*èr bǎi wǔ*) came to refer to someone who’s so dumb they aren’t even half a stack!

Most people who use this term probably aren’t aware of the origin story, so don’t worry if it’s a bit confusing! This number even has its own [Wikipedia page](#), with more details on the story if you’re interested. Let’s move on now to a few simpler examples.

/ (*bā bā liù*) > 886 > Goodbye

Apparently an example of Hong Kong Cantonese internet slang, this one actually seems to make more sense in Mandarin. Unlike the examples that follow, these numbers don’t sound like other Chinese words, but like other English words. Sort of... “*Bābāliù*” sounds close enough to “bye-bye *le*” the *le* being the Chinese grammar particle 了, which is used at the end of verbs to indicate past tense or a change in status. A (very) rough approximation of the English meaning would be “Bye-bye then!”

(*wǔ èr líng*) > 520 > I love you!

Now we are getting into the examples that draw directly upon what we learned above with the other Chinese words that numbers sound similar to. Let’s break this one down:

五 (wǔ) — 5 = 我 (wǒ) — “I”
二 (èr) — 2 = 爱 (ài) — “love”
零 (líng) — 0 = 你 (nǐ) — “you”
Put it all together, and you get 我 爱 你 (wǒ ài nǐ) — “I love you!”

(yī sān yī sì) > 1314 > Forever

When read in Chinese, 1314 (yī sān yī sì) sounds similar to 一生一世 (yī shēng yī shì) — “one life, one world.” This means “for the rest of my life” or “forever.”

Putting the last two examples together, we get what has to be the quickest way to declare undying love in any language: 520 1314!

/呜呜呜 (wǔ wǔ wǔ) > 555 > Crying noise!

If your numeric declaration of undying love was met with deafening silence and you were feeling a bit upset about it, you could express your emotions by writing 555. Read in Chinese, wǔwǔwǔ is onomatopoeia for crying. Not exactly high literature, but it makes sense!

(zhù jǐ jǐ) > 99 > Wish you happy all the time!

So you’re going to congratulate an envious relationship. Got to be a quick number slang way of expressing this, right?

Distinctive Arts & Dwellings in China

I was born in Anhui province in the middle part of China, which is mostly inhabited by Han Chinese. Thus the culture here tends to be moderate, in other words, lacking some exotic elements. Personally, I am keen on traveling, especially to visit the minority areas and explore the ways in which they live.

1. Miao Culture Celebrated at the Beijing Art Show



[Photo by Jiang Dong/China Daily]

Miao Vernacular, an exhibition at Beijing's Prince Kung's Mansion through Oct 24th, showcases the cooperation between Miao handicraft artisans and artists from Beijing by juxtaposing their works and collaborative pieces.

The exhibition is based on a research project about Miao culture sponsored by the Shenzhen-based Chen Yidan Charity Foundation and was carried out by Wu Jian'an, an artist and teacher of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and his students for a year spanning from 2017-2018. The exhibition looks at how the Miao people have sourced the material from nature while maintaining harmony with it.

The diversity of Miao ethnic customs and culture has always fascinated artists from big cities. And their studies of the music, dance, handicrafts, ceremonies, medicine and fairy tales of the group, largely inhabiting the mountainous areas of Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, have enriched their artistic creations.

During this time, Wu and his team traveled extensively in Miao villages in Guizhou, and looked for ways to blur the boundary between contemporary art and ethnic traditions by talking to local artisans and watching how they worked.

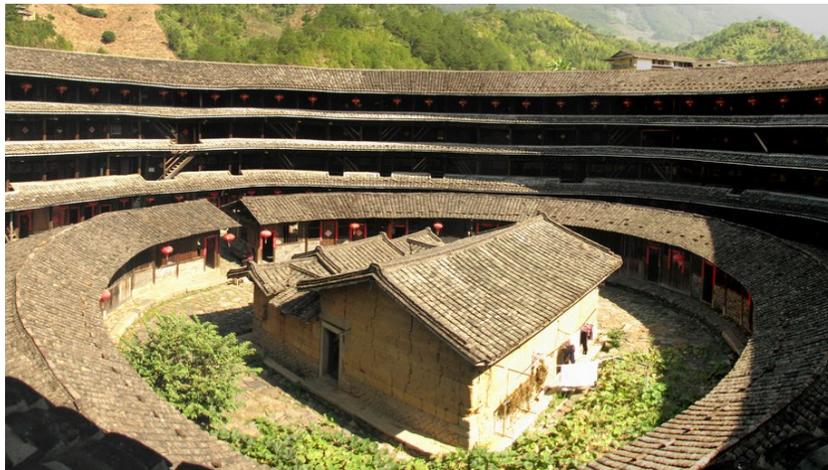
2. Traditional Architecture –Tu Lou

It refers to designs which find their primary influence in local conditions: in climate, in materials, and in tradition. In a country as diverse as China, with 55 state-recognized ethnic minority groups and widely varying climates and topographies, many different vernacular dwelling styles have evolved as pragmatic solutions that accommodate the unique needs and limitations of their sites.

Rapid urbanization in China has favored high-rise apartment towers over traditional housing because of their ease of construction and the population density they enable, making traditional dwellings increasingly rare throughout the country. Even if you aren't planning on building in China any time soon, the following housing styles have much to teach us about what it means to live in a particular time and place. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does encompass the main types of traditional dwellings seen throughout China.



The Southeastern province of Fujian is home to the tulou residences of the Hakka people. Compounded earth and wooden beams form thick, cylindrical walls that reach several stories high in a once-necessary effort to protect the interior from attack. The outward facing walls have only one entrance and no windows, and all balconies, doorways, and openings face inwards, further protecting the residents from potential danger. Each structure houses hundreds of people — an entire clan — and functions as a small village, with space for communal activities in the large, open interior.



Unlike the hierarchical structure of the siheyuan, individual residences within the tulou were divided equally: a reflection of the high value of community that can also be observed in the tulou's egalitarian round shape. In 2008, 46 tulous were designated as [UNESCO World Heritage Sites](#) because of their peaceful unity of defensive and residential architecture, and will be protected should their neighborhoods in rural Fujian ever become urbanized.

I feel lucky to have been born in this treasure-trove of specialties, enjoying the great amount of horizon-broadening knowledge. Welcome to China!

