

Chinese auspicious signs: Tiaofu and Duilian

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Abstract

Chinese auspicious signs are a single sign (Tiaofu) and a couplet sign (Duilian). The use of these signs is to offer blessing for good health, good business, successful daily activities, good fortune in new experiences in life and a good life in general. The semantic representation presents figurative and non-figurative language. The use of these signs is different among the older and the younger generations. Decoration and material of signs have also changed. There used to be many more sets of them in the past. Nowadays, the unpopular ones are ignored and not reproduced. Due to lack of knowledge and belief among the new generation, the future usage and number of available sign sets are likely to decline.

Many Chaozhou Chinese people migrated from Chaoshan City in China to Thailand during the Thonburi and early Ratanakosin periods (1768-1782). They settled in the Phranakorn area. Thereafter, they were moved by Buddha Yodfa Chulalok (King Rama 1) to the outer bounds of Phranakorn, an area now known as Yaowaraj.

For over two hundred years, aspects of Chaozhou Chinese language and culture have been passed on from generation to generation. Now Thai Chaozhou Chinese people still have their own language and culture which are reflected in their use of Chinese auspicious signs, or Tiaofu (條幅) and Duilian (對聯).

What are the Chinese auspicious signs, or Tiaofu and Duilian?

The Chinese auspicious signs, or Tiaofu and Duilian reflect the Chaozhou Chinese language and culture quite well. In Yaowaraj most of the Chaozhou Chinese houses and stores display red paper or Chinese auspicious signs which are normally hung on the front doors or on the walls of people's homes.

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The Chinese auspicious signs are written in Chinese characters that express happy and lucky pealings and are painted in black or gold ink on red paper. Thai Chaozhou Chinese people believe that red is an auspicious colour. Some of the Chinese auspicious signs are decorated with Chinese auspicious pictures such as the dragon and the kyllen. The dragon represents fortune, greatness and power. It also represents a king or a man. The kyllen is a Chinese unicorn. It is an imaginary animal and appears in the wedding ceremony to bless the couple who are to be married. Thai Chaozhou Chinese people also believe that these auspicious signs bring them good luck. One purpose of using Chinese auspicious signs is to offer blessings on various occasions, such as Chinese New Year, wedding ceremonies, and the opening of new businesses. They buy and hang the Chinese auspicious signs for themselves or give the Chinese auspicious signs to each other.

In this article, the phrase “Chinese auspicious signs” is a general term referring to both Tiaofu 條幅 and Duilian 對聯 in Chinese. “*Tiao*” refers to “a long, narrow item”, and “*fu*” means “a painting”. Hence, *Tiaofu* refers to “a vertically-hung scroll of painting or calligraphy”. For example,

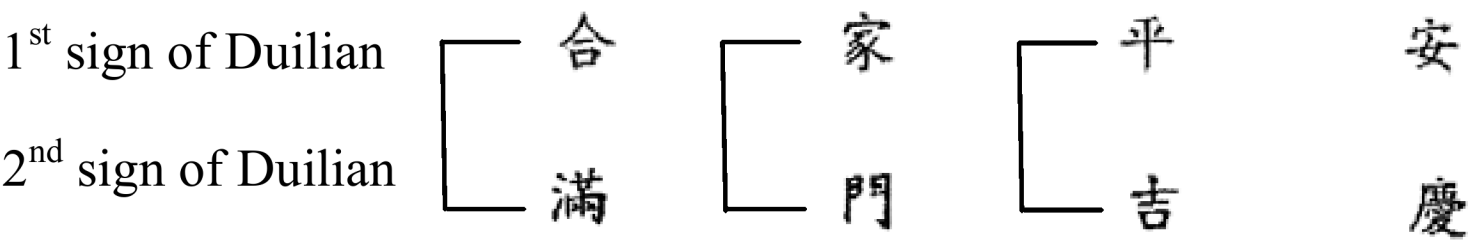
南	山	獻	頌
nán	shān	xiàn	sòng
south	mountain	give	praise

“A blessing for a long life.”

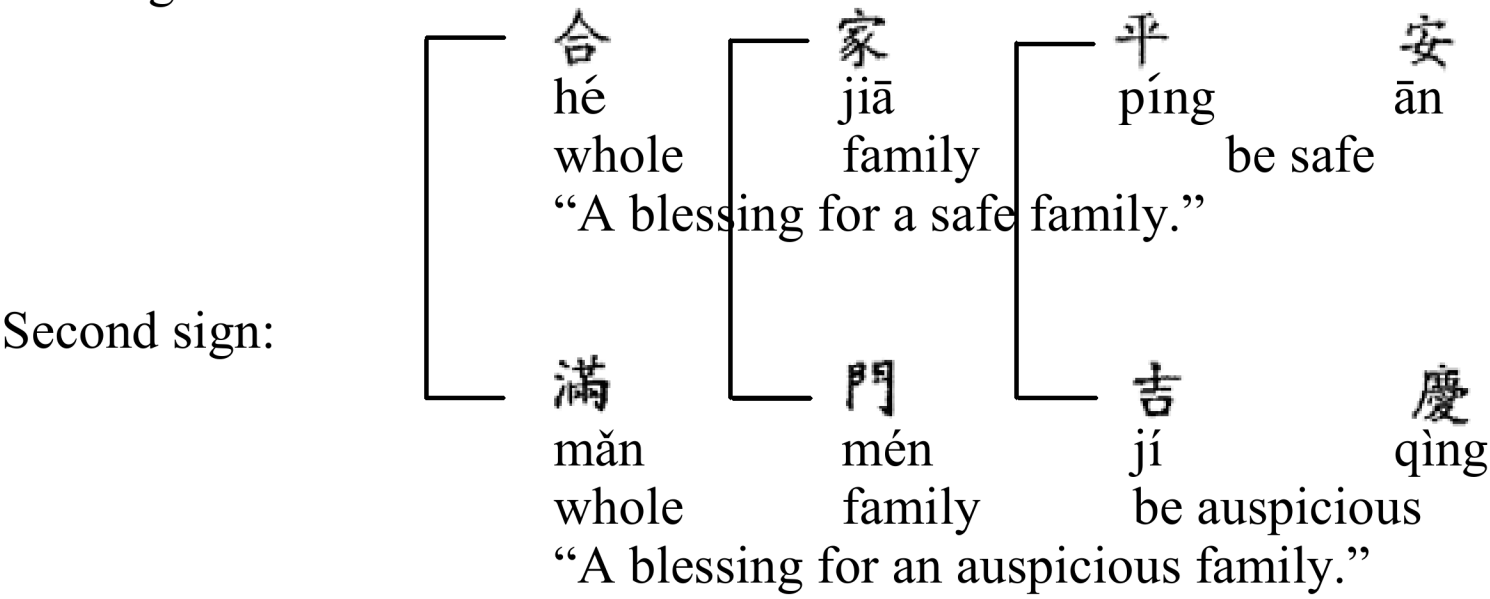
“*Dui*” means “a pair” and refers to “a couplet”, while “*lian*” means “relationship”. *Duilian* thus refers to “an antithetical couplet or parallel sentences written on scrolls”. *Duilian* is a couplet with two phrases or two sentences, which generally have the following standard characteristics:

- 1) Both signs have the same number of characters.
- 2) The characters in the corresponding position in both signs are related.
- 3) The characters in the same position of both signs belong to the same word class.

4) Each character is different and has related meaning to its pair. In the following example, the characters are to be read horizontally, left to right, and the correspondences are vertical.



First sign:



The combined meaning is:
“A blessing for an auspicious, safe and secure family.”

Semantic analysis of Tiaofu and Duilian

There are many ways to understand the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people, such as to stay with them in their community or to study the meanings of the Chinese auspicious signs. A Chinese word may have multiple meanings. The appropriate meaning may vary depending on the context and interpretation. In this research the word-to-word translation and general meaning of each Tiaofu and Duilian are based on the information gathered by interviewing several informants and reflect the knowledge of the Chinese language and culture of the Chaozhou Chinese people in general.

The informants were five Chaozhou Chinese. They are 蔡瑞凱 (Chua Sui Kai), 蔡璧煌 (Chua Pai Huang), 陈綏吟 (Tang Siw Gor), 王靜香 (Heng Jae Heng) and 張蝶 (Tea Teak). They are all over 65 years old and are able to read Chinese characters. The main reasons for selecting them are that they all migrated from China and have first-hand knowledge about the Chaozhou Chinese culture and language.

The Chaozhou Chinese people use Tiaofu and Duilian to offer blessings for good health, good business, successful daily activities, good fortune on special occasions, e.g., Lunar New Year and weddings, and a good life in general. The language used in Tiaofu and Duilian can be divided into two main categories: the use of direct words, and figures of speech.

The use of direct words for blessing

Blessings for good health

Some Tiaofu and Duilian are used for different special occasions, such as the Lunar New Year or birthdays, to offer blessings for good health. The blessings in this group include not only good health but also longevity, peace, vigor and fortune.

Tiaofu and Duilian show that the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people focus attention on being physically strong, mentally balanced and in high spirits. All of these are essential for good health. These people favor the idea of longevity because they believe that it indicates a life full of goodness and merit. Good health serves as a basis to achieve other important goals in one’s life.

歲	月	人	增	壽
sui	yuè	rén	zēng	shòu
	time	human	increase	age

“A blessing for longevity.”

Blessing for good business

Commonly used at the start of the business day of a shop, the first day of work, or the anniversary of the founding of a company, some Tiaofu and Duilian offer blessings for business, trade or occupation. The blessings in this group cover prosperity, fame, success, fulfilling one’s desires, having a good plan, solidarity, and capability in the work place.

Tiaofu and Duilian reflect the fact that most of the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people are business people and traders. In every kind of business, a good start is considered to be of huge importance for its success. Many Tiaofu and Duilian offer a blessing for the first day of business in order to achieve sustainable growth and success from the very beginning, as indicated in the following example:

開	工	大	吉
kāi	gōng	dà	jí
opening a business		be auspicious	

“A blessing for good fortune on the business’s opening day or the first day of work.”

Equally important are the business strategies, implementation plan and effective management, all of which propel the business toward further success.

一	本	萬	利
yī	běn	wàn	lì
one	investment	ten thousand	profit

“A blessing for a small investment to bring much profit.”

Many businesses are family-owned or partnerships. Children often work for their parents. People expect their descendents to maintain unity and support each other in their work. This tradition usually brings more success in business.

和	氣	生	財
hé	qì	shēng	cái
harmonious relationship		give birth	wealth

“A blessing for unity within the work place which makes many profits.”

A good location is also considered very critical for attracting potential customers and hence the continuation of business growth.

利	路	宏	通
lì	lù	hóng	tōng
beneficial	path	greatly	lead to

“A blessing for profitable business.”

Blessing for successful daily activities

For some activities such as gambling, meeting people, having a family, worshipping gods or setting up a shrine, the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people use Tiaofu and Duilian to offer blessings for wealth, longevity, rank, fortune, safety and happiness.

Gambling is one of the favorite pastimes of many people. It is a kind of social activity. During the Chinese New Year, people usually spend time with their families, playing cards or other games, and so may wish for good luck as in the following blessing:

橫	財	就	手
hèng	cái	jiù	shǒu
windfall		reach	hand

“A blessing for a windfall, especially from gambling.”

In their tradition lies a sense of cooperation. Even when not in need of any help, they like to be friends with people who may be potentially helpful in the future. During their early days in Thailand, this tradition of helping each other was especially instrumental for overcoming different barriers which would have caused difficulties without such collaboration. This idea of meeting someone who may be helpful is expressed in the following blessing:

東	西	南	北	遇	貴	人
dōng	xī	nán	běi	yù	guì	rén
east	west	south	north	meet		sponsor

“A blessing to meet sponsors everywhere.”

The Thai Chaozhou Chinese people travel by land and water. In the past they sailed across the seas for trading and so wished for safe journeys.

出	入	平	安
chū	rù	píng	ān
entering and exiting		be safe	

“A blessing for a safe journey.”

Tiaofu and Duilian indicate the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people's desire to establish a big family. Sons are usually favored over daughters and considered to be more helpful in the family business. Tradition also allows the sons to have more important roles in the family. When a daughter gets married, her surname is changed, and she has to join her husband's family. On the other hand, sons continue the lineage by maintaining the family's surname. A family without a son means the end of a lineage. Many people have large families with many generations often living in the same house.

丁	財	兩	旺
dīng	cái	liǎng	wàng
man	wealth	both	prosper

“A blessing to bring wealth and a son.”

老	少	平	安
lǎo	shǎo	pang	ān
the old	the young	be safe	

“A blessing for a safe family for both adults and children.”

The Thai Chaozhou Chinese people believe in and have faith in many kinds of gods, such as the gods of health, of luck, of rank and of clay stove. They build shrines for these gods and always seek blessings from them. They use firecrackers to drive ghosts away. They believe that the ghost is the spirit of a dead person who is unable to be reborn. It is assumed that such a ghost did bad things while living. It thus will bring bad luck into the house, causing the living to be sick and to fail in everything they do. Therefore, people use Tiaofu and Duilian to protect their house from the ghost.

安	龕	大	吉
ān	kān	dà	jí
installing a shrine		big	fortune

“A blessing, used when setting up a shrine, to bring great fortune.”

The five most desired aspects in one's life are said to be good health, longevity, wealth, conducting good deeds and a peaceful death. Understanding that the end of one's life is inevitable, they consider a peaceful death to be one of the five most desired aspects in life.

五	福	臨	門
wǔ	fú	lín	mén
five	happiness	arrive	family

“A blessing for happiness

Blessing for good fortune for new experiences in life

Tiaofu and Duilian are used on some special occasions, such as Lunar New Year and weddings to bring good fortune. Examples of Tiaofu and Duilian in this group express blessings for fortune, happiness, success, wealth, safety, power, rank, fortune and fulfilling one’s wishes.

Lunar New year

Tiaofu and Duilian, used for Lunar New Year celebrations, include blessings for fortune, happiness, success, wealth and longevity.

Tiaofu and Duilian for the Lunar New Year celebration indicate that the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people still follow China’s four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter. The beginning of the Lunar New Year signals the arrival of spring in the Chinese tradition. Spring is the first season and marks the beginning of a year. Even though Thailand has only three seasons, summer, rainy season and winter, four seasons and spring-related words are used in Tiaofu and Duilian. During the New Year ceremony, people light firecrackers in front of their houses so that the explosive sounds can dispel negative feelings and ghosts.

新	春	大	吉
xīn	chūn	dà	jí
the 10 or 20 days		big	fortune
following Lunar			
New Year’s Day			
“A blessing for a big fortune in the new year.”			

Wedding ceremony

Tiaofu and Duilian are used during wedding ceremonies to express blessings for happiness, longevity, and having a perfect family.

The Tiaofu and Duilian for the wedding ceremony indicate that the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people value honesty and long-lasting love between the wedding couple. The wedding hall is commonly decorated with pictures of the mandarin duck, kylen, dragon and phoenix to symbolize good fortune for the couple.

百	年	諧	老
bǎi	nián	xié	lǎo
hundred	year	harmonize	old couple
“A blessing for a couple to live together forever.”			

Blessing for good life in general

Some Tiaofu and Duilian offer blessings for good life in general. Samples of Tiaofu and Duilian in this group include blessings for fortune,

happiness, wealth, doing business without difficulties, safety, success, power, rank and fulfilling one’s wishes. All of these are important aspects of Thai Chaozhou Chinese people’s lives.

招	財	進	寶
zhāo	cái	jìn	bǎo
beckon	wealth	receive	treasure

“A blessing for wealth and treasure.”

Figures of speech

Instead of direct words, figures of speech are used in a number of Tiaofu and Duilian by making use of symbols and poetic language. A figure of speech can be a word or phrase which is used for special effect, and which does not have its usual or literal meaning. The two most common figures of speech are simile and metaphor, but there are many other less common ones.

Simile

A simile is an expression in which something is compared to something else by the use of a function word, such as ‘like’ or ‘as’.

貨	如	輪	轉
huò	rú	lún	zhuǎn
merchandise	be like	wheel	turning

“A blessing for smooth trading.”

The ‘wheel turning’ represents smooth trading in which it is easy to buy and sell goods.

1 st sign of Duilian	如	松	如	鶴
2 nd sign of Duilian	多	壽	多	福

First sign:

如	松	如	鶴
rú	song	rú	hè
be like	pine	be like	crane

“A blessing for longevity and good health.”

Second sign:

多	壽	多	福
duō	shòu	duō	fú
much	longevity	much	fortune

“A blessing for longevity and fortune.”

The combined meanings are:

“A blessing for longevity, good health and fortune.”

The ‘pine’ represents longevity and good health, as the pine is a perennial tree noted for its long life and evergreen leaves. The crane represents longevity as it is believed to be an auspicious animal with a long lifespan.

1 st sign of Duilian	福	如	東	海
2 nd sign of Duilian	壽	比	南	山

First sign:	福	如	東	海
	fú	rú	dōng	hǎi
	good fortune	be like	east	sea
	“A blessing for a big fortune”.			

Second sign:	壽	比	南	山
	shòu	bǐ	nán	shān
	longevity	be like	south	mountain
	“A blessing for a long life.”			

The combined meanings are:
“A blessing for big fortune and longevity.”

The ‘sea’ is wide and represents unlimited areas. The Thai Chaozhou Chinese people believe that the ‘east sea’ has gods. Gods offer a blessing to have lots of opportunities and good fortune as vast as the sea. The ‘mountain’ is high and strong, representing longevity and good health. Thai Chaozhou Chinese people believe the ‘south mountain’ is the axis of the earth and thus very strong.

Metaphor

Metaphor refers to the creative use of linguistic images that are based on a relationship of similarity between two objects or concepts.

A metaphor has two parts: a tenor and a vehicle. The tenor is the literal subject of the metaphor, and the vehicle is a figurative reference to which the literal subject is implicitly being compared. Tiaofu and Duilian use such vehicles as mountain, pine, horse, sea, river, green, crane, mandarin ducks, gold, jade, hall, sail, dragon, phoenix and kylan (Chinese unicorn). Tiaofu and Duilian use such tenors as fortune, longevity, business, benefit, health, wealth, rank, honesty, speed, power, fortune, prosperity, descendants, and trading.

南	山	獻	頌
nán	shān	xiàn	sòng
south	mountain	give	praise
“A blessing for a long life.”			

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘mountain’. The tenors are ‘longevity’ and ‘good health’. The mountain represents ‘longevity’ and ‘good health’ because the mountain is normally high and strong. The Chaozhou Chinese people believe the south mountain is an axis of the earth, and thus very strong.

福	海	壽	山
fú	hǎi	shòu	shān
fortune	sea	longevity	mountain

“A blessing for a long life and fortune.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicles are ‘sea’ and ‘mountain’. The tenor of sea is ‘fortune’. As it is wide, the ‘sea’ represents lots of opportunities and fortune. The tenor of mountain is ‘longevity’. Because of its height and stability, the ‘mountain’ represents longevity and good health. Because of its seemingly endless boundaries, the sea also represents a vast fortune.

利	達	三	江
lì	dá	sān	jiāng
benefit	reach	three	river

“A blessing for profitable business anywhere.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘three rivers’ which represents anywhere because in China there are three main rivers which are long and widespread. The tenor is ‘anywhere’.

松	柏	長	春
sōng	bǎi	cháng	chūn
pine		long	spring

“A blessing for good health and a long life in the new year.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicles are ‘pine’ and ‘spring’. The tenor of pine is ‘longevity’. The pine is a perennial tree noted for its long life and evergreen leaves. The pine represents longevity and good health. The vehicle of ‘spring’ shows vitality, which is the tenor. It represents good health.

松	鶴	遐	齡
sōng	hè	xiá	líng
pine	crane	live very long	

“A blessing for a long life and good health.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicles are ‘pine’ and ‘crane’. The tenor of pine and crane are ‘longevity’ and ‘good health’. The Crane is an auspicious animal believed to have a long lifespan, therefore representing longevity.

福	祿	鴛	鴦
fú	lù	yuān	yāng
fortune	rank	mandarin duck	

“A blessing for a couple to have good fortune, wealth, long-lasting love and honesty.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘mandarin duck’. The tenors are ‘fortune’ and ‘honesty’. Considered auspicious in Chinese culture, a mandarin duck usually stays with its mate until the end of its life. It therefore represents honesty between a married couple.

馬	到	成	功
mǎ	dào	chéng	gōng
horse	arrive	succeed	

“A blessing for immediate success.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘horse’. The tenor is ‘speed’. The nature of a horse is vigorous. It therefore represents speed.

龍	鳳	呈	祥
long	fèng	chéng	xiáng
dragon	phoenix	present	fortune

“A blessing for a couple to have good fortune.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicles are ‘dragon’ and ‘phoenix’. The tenor of dragon and phoenix are ‘fortune’. The Thai Chaozhou Chinese people believe that dragon is the king of all auspicious animals and phoenix is the queen of birds.

麒	麟	到	此
qí	lín	dào	cǐ
Kylen		arrive	this

(Chinese unicorn)

“A blessing, used in the wedding ceremony, for fortune and protection from bad things happening.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘kylen’ representing ‘fortune’, and it is the tenor. The kylen is a Chinese unicorn. The Thai Chaozhou Chinese people believe that the kylen is an auspicious animal from heaven. It thus always appears in wedding ceremonies to bless the couple.

壽

shòu

long-lived, the god of health

“A blessing for longevity and good health.” or “The god of health offers a blessing for health.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘the god of health’ representing ‘longevity’ and ‘health’, which are the tenors.

福

fú

good fortune, the god of fortune

“A blessing for good fortune.” or “The god of fortune offers a blessing for fortune.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘the god of fortune’ representing ‘fortune’, which is the tenor.

祿

lù

rank, the god of rank

“A blessing for rank.” or “The god of rank offers a blessing for rank.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘the god of rank’ representing ‘rank,’ which is the tenor.

財

cái

wealth, the god of wealth

“A blessing for wealth or the god of wealth offers a blessing for wealth.”

財

cái

the god of wealth

神

shén

到

dào

arrive

“The god of wealth offers a blessing for wealth.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘the god of wealth’ representing ‘wealth,’ which is the tenor.

定

dìng

decide

福

fú

happiness

灶

zào

the god of the clay stove

君

jūn

“The god of the clay stove offers a blessing for happiness.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘the god of the clay stove’ representing ‘happiness’, which is the tenor. “The god of the clay stove”, which is a symbolic word, represents good fortune. The Thai Chaozhou Chinese people believe that the god of the clay stove is the god of the kitchen. This deity takes care of and brings good fortune to household members, while also recording their behavior. When he visits the king of the gods, he reports on the behavior of people in the house. If someone in the house dies, the record is used to decide whether that one should go to heaven or hell.

黃

huáng

gold

金

jīn

年

nián

time

華

huá

“A blessing for a magnificent or golden period of life.”

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘gold’ as a simile word representing ‘prosperity’, which is the tenor.

金	玉	滿	堂
jīn	yù	mǎn	táng
gold	jade	fill	hall
“A blessing for more male and female descendants and wealth in the house.”			

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicles are ‘gold’ and ‘jade’ representing the tenors, ‘valuable things’, ‘wealth’ and ‘descendants’. Also, jade represents men, gold represents women, and the vehicle ‘hall’ represents ‘house’ as the tenor.

一	帆	風	順
yī	fān	fēng	shùn
one	sail	wind	follow
“A blessing for smooth trading.”			

In the above Tiaofu example, the vehicle is ‘sail’, representing the tenor, ‘business’. The Chaozhou Chinese people sailed for trading. It therefore represents business.

How do Thai Chaozhou Chinese people use the Chinese auspicious signs?

Thai Chaozhou Chinese people use Tiaofu and Duilian to offer blessing on various occasions such as Chinese New Year, a wedding ceremony or opening a business. They buy and hang Tiaofu and Duilian for themselves or give Tiaofu and Duilian to each other. Tiaofu and Duilian are normally hung on the front doors or on the walls on many occasions. Some people leave the Tiaofu and Duilian hung up year-round, while others take them down after the ceremony is finished. Sometimes two Tiaofu signs are hung, and sometimes only one piece of a couplet is hung. Some Duilian signs follow the standard format mentioned earlier in this article, while others are non-standard. Non-standard Duilian signs may have an incorrect number of characters, may mix word classes, or form couplets with unrelated meanings. There are two Duilian styles which are hung. Some hang Dulian’s with standard characteristics². However, some hang Dulian’s with non standard characteristics which normally have different numbers of characters. Moreover, the characters in the corresponding position in both signs are not related in meaning, or are different in word class.

The use of non-standard Duilian signs suggests that the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people may not have a complete knowledge about the standard characteristics or that they pay attention to the meaning of signs more than to the rules. They may not be able to read Chinese characters, but they buy or hang the signs based on advice from Chinese auspicious signs sellers or friends.

²See Dulian’s standard characteristics at page 165.

What is the Chinese dialect of the Chinese auspicious signs?

The Chinese people in Thailand speak various Chinese dialects, such as Chaozhou (Tae Tsiw), Xiamen (Hokkien), Kejia (Hakka), Yue (Cantonese), and Hainan. The question may be asked, “What is the Chinese dialect of the Chinese auspicious signs?”

Tiaofu and Duilian cannot be divided according to Chinese dialects, although there are many Chinese dialects in Thailand. The researcher interviewed many Chinese professionals, such as educators, experts in the Chinese language and Chinese education, Chinese journalists and Thai Chaozhou Chinese people. They gave the same answer. The Chinese language that is used to write the Tiaofu and Duilian cannot be divided according to dialect, because all Chinese dialects use the same characters to write Tiaofu and Duilian; the only difference is in their pronunciation. According to Sawai Visavanun (personal communication, January 7, 2002), historically China had a Royal Institute examination which tested a scholar’s ability to compose Duilian. The rules for composing the signs were defined by literature and prosody. This was done with standard characters and therefore was unaffected by dialect differences.

What are designs and materials of the Tiaofu and Duilian?

Thai Chaozhou Chinese people in Yaowaraj hang Chinese auspicious signs on the front doors or on the walls. There are various designs and materials, which have changed over time. Influenced by many factors throughout history, Tiaofu and Duilian have evolved from being hand-written to machine-made. The decoration has also changed from Chinese pictures on red paper or velvet to include cartoon characters from the United States of America. Some are made of wood or plastic. Only those words that convey the key message appear in Tiaofu and Duilian.

福
fú
fortune
This sign offers a blessing for good fortune.



Figure 1. A hand-written Tiaofu painted in black or gold ink on red paper.



出 入 平 安
chū rù píng ān
entering and exiting be safe
This sign offers a blessing for a safe journey.

Figure 2. A machine-made Tiaofu painted in black and gold ink on red paper and decorated with Chinese auspicious pictures.

In the past, Tiaofu and Duilian were written on red paper. Nowadays, they may also be painted on red velvet or made of wood.

財 源 廣 進
cái yuán guǎng jìn
financial resource widely enter

This sign offers a blessing to receive financial resources from many directions.



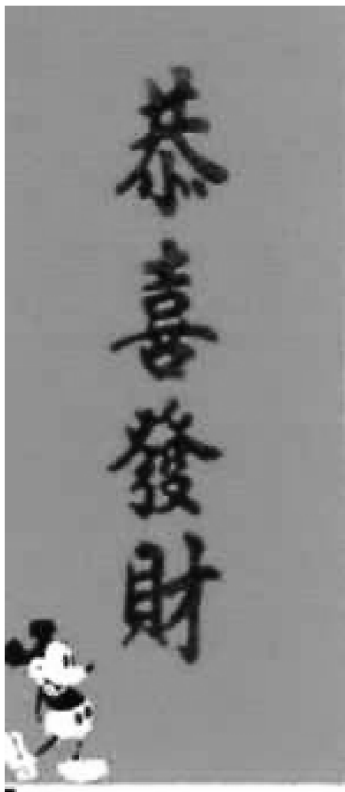
Figure 3. A machine-made Tiaofu painted in black and gold ink on red velvet. This sign is also decorated with Chinese auspicious pictures.



興
xìng
prosper
This sign offers a blessing for prosperity.

Figure 4. A machine-made wooden Tiaofu.

In the past, Tiaofu and Duilian were decorated with auspicious Chinese pictures. Nowadays, some Tiaofu and Duilian include cartoon characters from the United States of America.



恭 喜 發 財
gōng xǐ fā cái
respectably congratulate wealth
This sign offers a blessing for wealth.



Figure 5-6. Machine-made Tiaofu signs decorated with cartoon characters.

Tiaofu and Duilian are traditionally written in Chinese. Nowadays, Thai alphabet transcriptions are often used alongside Chinese characters. This type of sign seemed to increase in popularity after 2004.

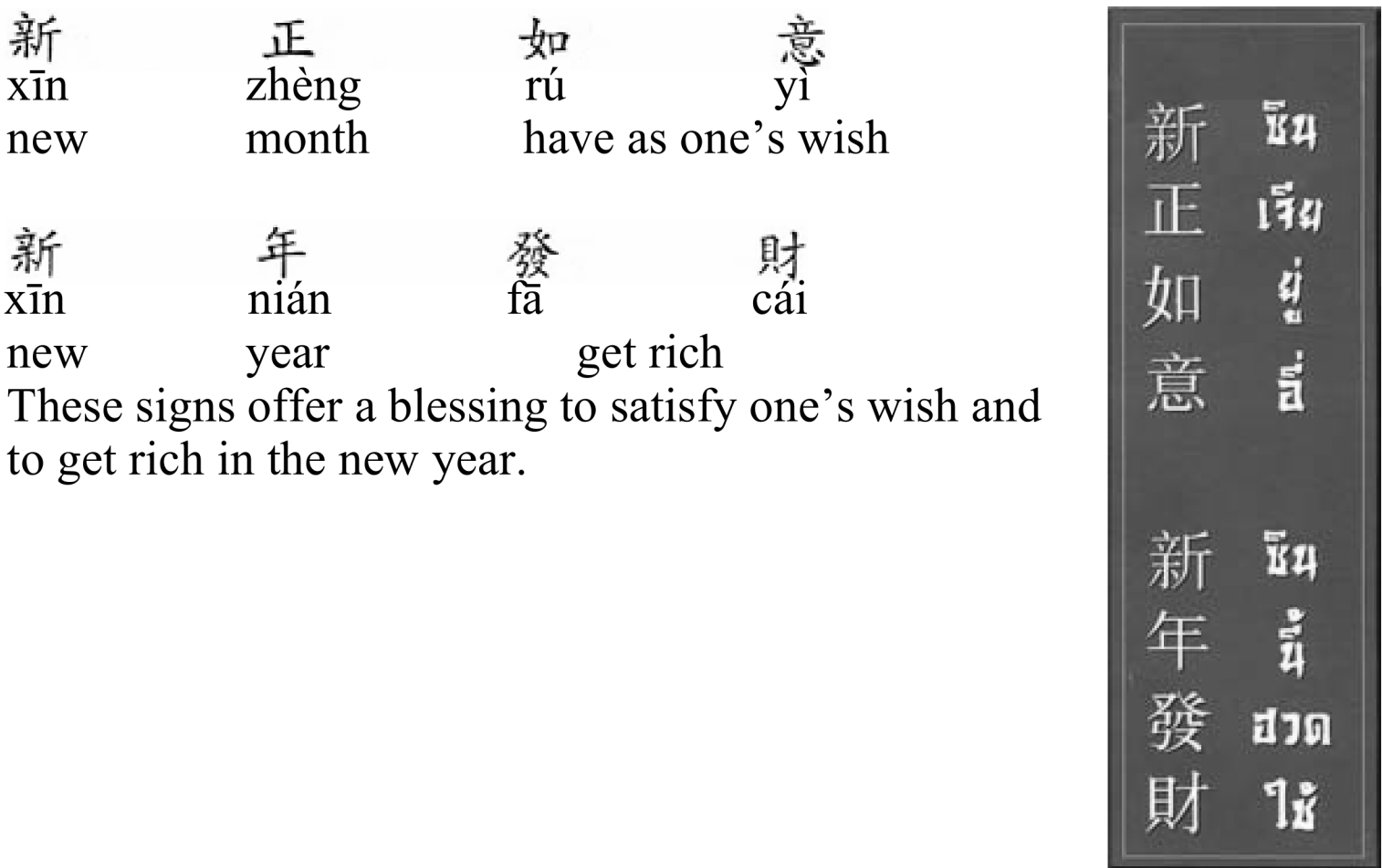


Figure 7. Chaozhou Chinese words transcribed into Thai script.

Some signs have deleted Chinese characters in favor of Thai transcriptions.

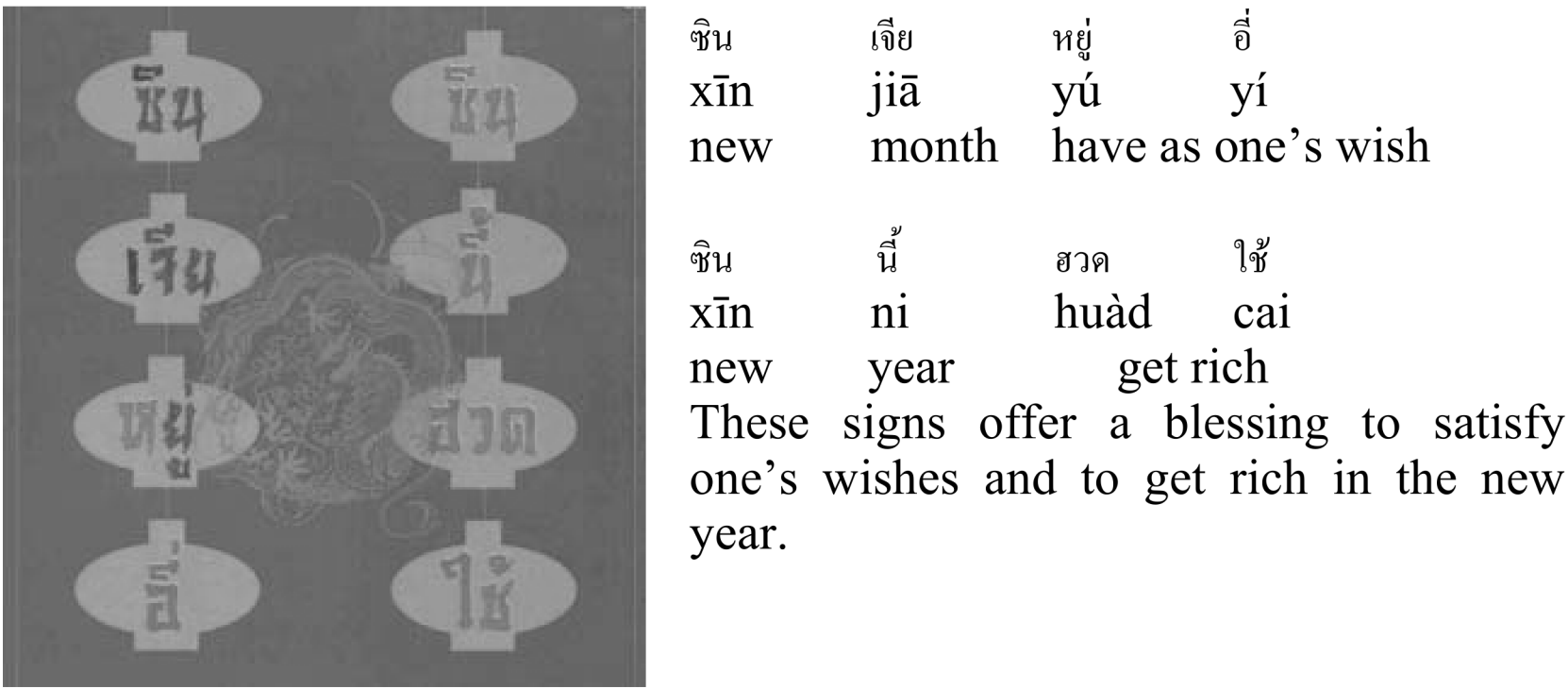


Figure 8. A machine-made Duilian written on red paper with Thai transcriptions.

The frequent use of Thai transcriptions in Tiaofu and Duilian also indicates the declining knowledge in reading Chinese characters among the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people, especially for the younger generation.

In the past, the Chaozhou Chinese people could write Tiaofu and Duilian by themselves but now they cannot. This allows some people who can write Tiaofu and Duilian to create and sell the signs.

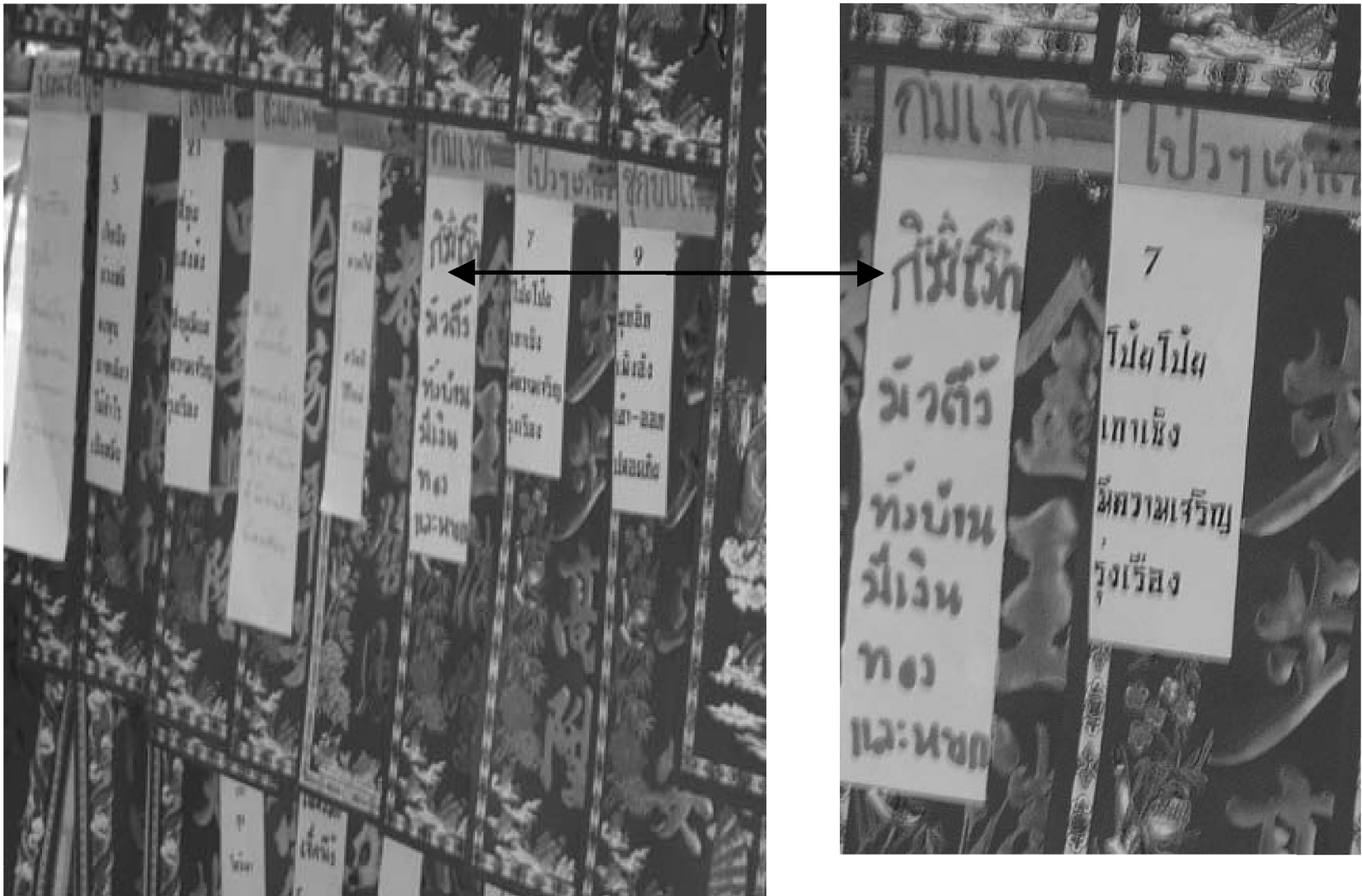


Figure 9. A customer hires a writer to reproduce an old Duilian.



Figure 10. Printed Chinese signs sold in a store.

There used to be many more sets of Tiaofu and Duilian in the past. There were also more people who could write Tiaofu and Duilian. Now the popular sets of Tiaofu and Duilian are produced by both hand and machine. The unpopular ones are ignored and no longer reproduced, thus disappearing from the Chaozhou Chinese people's lifestyle.



金	玉	滿	堂
jīn	yù	mǎn	táng
gold	jade	fill	hall

This sign offers a blessing for more male and female descendants and wealth in the house.”

Figure 11. Chinese signs with Thai transcriptions of Chaozhou Chinese pronunciations, no Chinese characters, and Thai translations.

Some signs are written completely in Thai.



ร้าน นี้ ดี ค้าขาย รวย
raan nii dii khāa khàay rūay
This sign offers a blessing for business prosperity.

Figure 12. An auspicious sign in Thai.

Some products other than Tiaofu and Duilian signs use Chinese auspicious words.

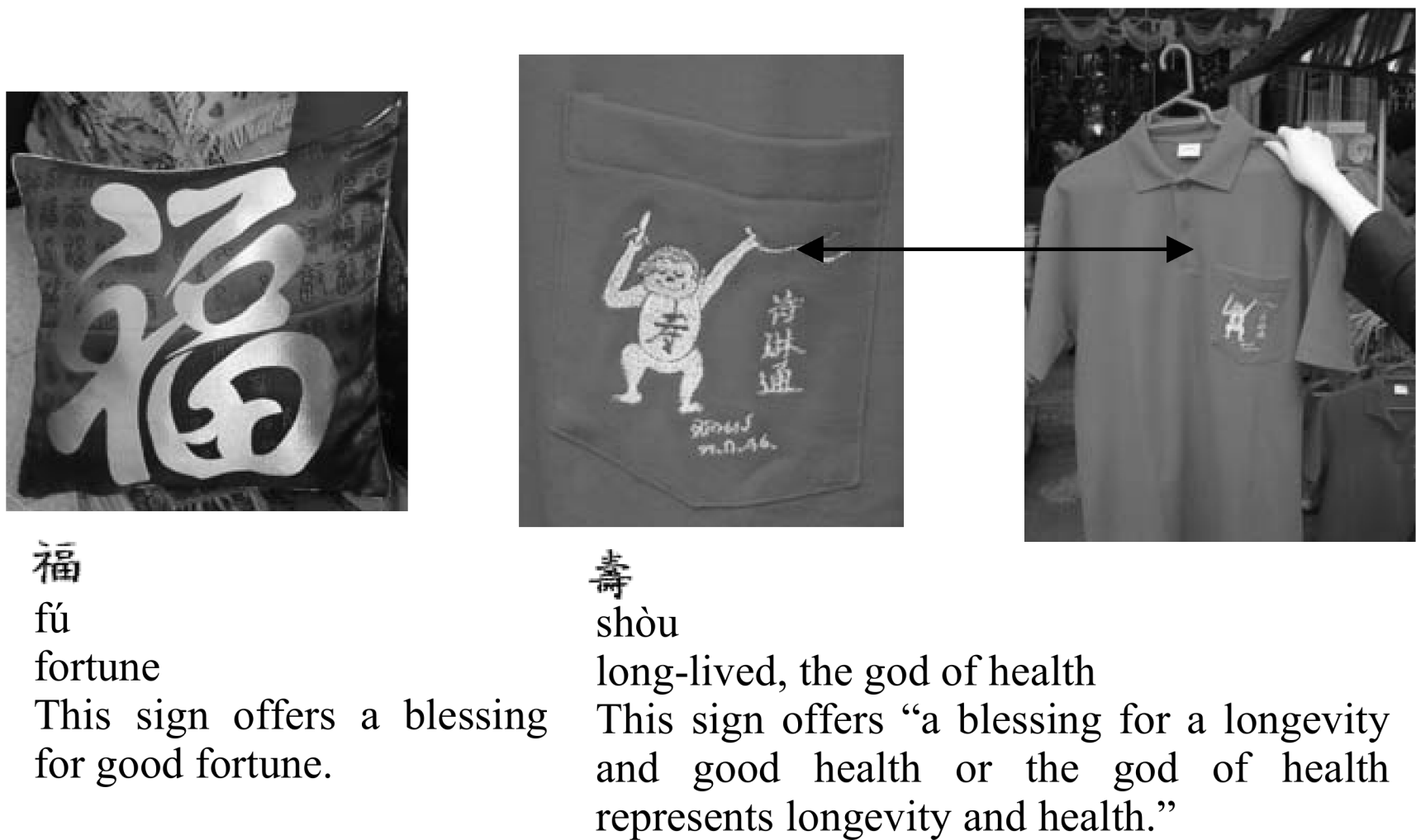


Figure 13. Other products that use Chinese auspicious signs.

Knowledge, usage and attitude towards the Tiaofu and Duilian of Chaozhou Chinese people

Data for this study is based on personal observations, as well as interviews with one hundred Thai Chaozhou Chinese people in Yaowaraj. The interviewees can be divided into three generational groups: the older generation (55-65 years old, 33 interviewees), the working generation (35-45 years old, 34 interviewees), and the younger generation (15-25 years old, 33 interviewees). Information gathered from all of these groups reflects on their linguistic abilities, as well as their attitudes toward and usage of Tiaofu and Duilian.

Knowledge of the language has deteriorated from one generation to another. The older generation has a good knowledge of the language of traditional Tiaofu and Duilian auspicious signs. Most members of the older generation can read, pronounce properly, and describe the meaning of Tiaofu and Duilian words and signs. The working generation has some knowledge of the above, but not nearly on the level of their parents’ generation. Some of them cannot read Chinese, and they often had to guess the meaning of the signs on their own. Most of the younger generation did not have any knowledge of Tiaofu and Duilian.

The usage of Tiaofu and Duilian is different among the old, the working and the young generations. Most of the elderly buy and hang the signs in front of the doors or on the walls by themselves. Some working generation people buy and hang the signs in front of the doors or on the walls. The working generation does not care whether they have signs or not, whereas some young people do not want to have them at home at all because some of them are shy or embarrassed when their friends come over. The old and working generations always use Tiaofu and Duilian for the Chinese New Year.

Nowadays, the older Thai Chaozhou Chinese hold on to their culture and use Tiaofu and Duilian more than younger people. The researcher’s use of some Tiafu and Duilian signs among elderly people is restricted. For example, the medical clinics and the coffin’ shops do not use the Tiaofu and Duilian signs which offer a blessing for a prosperous trade, such as the following Tiaofu example:

開	張	駿	發
kāi	zhāng	jùn	fā
opening a business		progressively	develop

“A blessing for a fast-growing business used on the opening day.”

Therefore, the medical clinic owner and the coffin’ shop owner avoid using these signs and use Tiaofu and Duilian which offer a blessing for a safe journey or for good fortune instead, as in the following example:

出	入	平	安
chū	rù	píng	ān
entering and exiting		be safe	

“A blessing for a safe journey.”

Attitudes toward Tiaofu and Duilian vary. The older generation holds on to their culture and believes that the signs can grant success, safety and happiness. They think it is good to have the signs in their homes, and would feel a sense of loss if the signs were no longer used. The signs do not embarrass them at all. The working generation maintains some of the values of the older generation, but their feelings on the subject are not as strong. Some feel they can have good fortune without the signs, as a result of their own deeds. Some use Tiaofu and Duilian for decorative purposes, and see them as part of their Chinese heritage. Many would also feel a sense of loss if the signs were no longer used. The younger generation, however, does not put much faith in the signs. Some are embarrassed to have the signs in their homes, as they feel they are not attractive. Still, the younger generation regards the signs as part of their Chinese heritage, although they would not feel a sense of loss if they disappeared.

Conclusion

Tiaofu and Duilian are written in Chinese characters with happy and lucky connotations, and are used to offer blessings on various occasions. They are painted in black or gold ink on red paper. Some of them are decorated with Chinese auspicious pictures. Tiaofu and Duilian signs are hung on doors or walls. The syntactic features of Tiaofu and Duilian mostly follow an SVO word order.

Semantic analysis of Tiaofu and Duilian recognizes two main categories: figurate and non-figurative language. The five most important types involve blessings for good health, good business, successful daily activities, good fortune in new life experiences, and a good life in general. All of these reflect the world-view and way of life of the Thai Chaozhou Chinese people.

As is often the case with traditional practices, the elderly have a greater knowledge of, and a greater commitment to Tiaofu and Duilian auspicious signs. The younger generations have lost much of this commitment and, as a result, the number and variety of Tiaofu and Duilian signs available are likely to decline.

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