

# An Analysis of Chinese Buzzwords in the Snake's Year

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## ABSTRACT

The past Chinese Snake's year witnesses the wild spread of hundreds of Chinese hot words throughout the country. Chinese internet users are the main contributors to the creation and broadcasting of these hot words. In this short article, the authors will try to bring together the hottest words in 2013, explaining the meaning of them and analyzing the culture behind them. Finally, we shall discuss Chinese buzzwords' way into English.

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## Introduction

The past Chinese Snake's year witnesses the wild spread of hundreds of Chinese hot words throughout the country. The creative Chinese internet users are the main contributors to the creation and broadcasting of these hot words. In fact, Chinese buzzwords are not just wildly popular within China. Many of them have drawn attention of the foreigners. The new addition of Oxford dictionary has included more than 120 Chinese-linked words and BBC even produces a short video clip which is about the Chinese buzzword Tuhao. In this short article, the authors will try to bring together the hottest words in 2013, explaining the meaning of them and analyzing the culture behind them. Finally, we shall discuss Chinese buzzwords' way into English.

## I. The buzzwords in the Chinese Snake's year

Different information sources provide us with different summary of the hottest words in China. According to Chinese New Agency, China Daily and many other official mass media, some hot words in 2013 can be listed as follows:

The Chinese dream: the term of "Chinese dream" was put forth by Chinese President Xi Jinping, in the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2013. The dream is to build a moderately prosperous society and realize national rejuvenation.

Eight-point code: it is "an eight-point code to cut bureaucracy and maintain close ties with the people", according to the report in the plenum of the Central Committee of CPC.

Shen Zhou-X: China launched Shen Zhou-X manned spacecraft into space successfully this year. The crew of the Shenzhou-X spacecraft (including a female astronaut Wang Yaping, sent back a greeting to the Chinese people in celebration of the Dragon Boat Festival from the space. Shenzhou-X spacecraft and three crew members safely returned to Earth on June 26, 2013.

"Clear your plate" campaign: it has been a bad tradition for Chinese guests to leave over some food in the plate to show the respect to the host and hostess. The Chinese host and hostess, on the other hand, always order or prepare more than needed to show their hospitality. The "clear your plate" campaign is to fight against waste of food.

Strictest-ever traffic rules: China's strictest traffic laws ever took effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013. Although some car drivers complain about the troublesome of the new traffic law, most Chinese citizens accept it with satisfaction.

Heavy smog: the problem of air pollution has become the top concern of Chinese citizens. Beijing and many other cities in southeast of China are all become well-known for the heavy smog.

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LuShan earth quake; The Lushan earthquake or Ya'an earthquake (Tibetan: Yak-ngaiSayom) occurred at 08:02 Beijing Time (00:02 UTC) on April 20, 2013. The magnitude of the earthquake was placed at Ms 7.0 by China Earthquake Data Center ("2013 Lushan earthquake", 2014).

H7N9; H7N9 is a bird flu strain of the species Influenza virus A (avian influenza virus or bird flu virus) ("Influenza A virus subtype H7N9", 2014). This kind of bird flu swept some cities in China, causing the death of more than 100 victims in 2013.

"I have been here!"; Jinhao, DING, a Chinese tourist wrote a graffiti of "I HAVE BEEN HERE!" on a column of Luxor temple in Egypt, which arouses a heated discussion among Chinese internet users. Most of them blamed DING and took it as a shameful thing.

Chinese internet users have different ideas about the hottest words in 2013. According to Sohu, Sina, QQ and many other Chinese influential websites, some hot words can be summarized as follows:

Positive energy (zheng neng liang); It refers to anything that is positive, healthy and active, giving people hope and power.

Elegant, graceful and exquisite (gao, da, shang); these words refer to something of great taste and high grade. However, a sense of mockery and humor was lost when the term is translated into English.

Why should you give up medical treatment? (he, qi, liao); It just seems to be a simple question to a patient. But the implied meaning is that you are mentally ill and should accept medical treatment. Again, a sense of humor is carried in the words.

Wo-man or ladyboy (nv han zi); it refers to a woman who has an independent, manly and strong personality. The word has positive meaning instead of negative one.

The second baby in the family (dan du er tai); CPC decided to relax the rules by allowing couples to have a second child if one of the parents is an only child at the end of 2013. This means the typical form of many Chinese families will change from "one child, one family" to "two children, one family." A mini baby boom lasting five or six years will be expected after the change of the rule.

## **II. Tu Hao, Dama and Xiao San**

Among all these hot words, two of them deserve to be picked up for special analysis. The first one is Tu Hao, or "uncouth rich" and "nouveau riche". The joke of the hot word is widely spread on line. An unhappy second-generation rich man went to a monk, asking for a way to be happy. The monk said, "Tu Hao, let's be friends." The word is used to describe somebody who is rich but not knowledgeable or elegant, or something that is unnecessarily luxurious as the new gold-colored iPhone 5. The word Tu Hao was composed of two Chinese characters, meaning that something or somebody of a peasant background (Tu) becomes rich suddenly (Hao). A Tu Hao person may have a lot of money, but may not be happy and respectable. A Tu Hao apartment may be very spacious but not very warm and comfortable. A typical example of a Tu Hao village in China is in Liang Zhou, south China. The village chief piled to-be-shared bonuses of 13,000, 000 RMB in cash in front of 30 families of the village. The picture of the cash piles was put on internet and caused immediate attention of millions of internet users. People have a mixed feeling of envy, sarcasm and admire about the villagers. "It is really a Tu Hao village," they say.

Dama, or big (da) mother (ma) is another hot word. The term is explained by the Wall Street Journal as "bargain-hunting middle-aged Chinese woman who keep a tight grip on family purse and an eagle eye on gold prices". This explanation is not complete at least. Dama refers to those female housewives and retirees who are not young any more, wearing unfashionable clothes, hogging together to do morning exercises in the neighborhood park, and being wisely economical. Dama normally has the final say in the family about making investment on gold or other property when the prices of them are comparatively low. Dama is not a negative word, although the meaning has been slightly changed when the term was translated into English.

Back to 30 years ago, Xiao San (or the home-wreckers) can hardly found in Chinese society. But with the rapid development of economy, the moral standard of Chinese people deteriorates quickly. The mistress or the other woman entered some Chinese families. Actually, Xiao means little or small, San means the third.

This is definitely a negative word, carrying people's scornful attitude towards them. Xiao San not only destroys families, but also breed corruption. Thousands of Chinese government officials are found taking bribes to satisfy their greedy mistress. Chinese president Xi Jinping has already showed his decision in fighting against corruption; he says "In the battle against corruption, it is as important for us to go after flies or low-rank officials as it is to fight the tigers or top officials" (Beijie, 2013). The fast development of Chinese economy should not be at the cost the declination of Chinese people's moral standard.

Ever since 17<sup>th</sup> century, more than 120 words have already made its way into Oxford dictionary, among them kung fu (a primarily unarmed Chinese martial art resembling karate) and guan xi (the system of Chinese social networks and influential relationships which facilitate business and other dealings) are not strangers for foreigners. erhu, pi pa (two typical Chinese musical instruments) and many other words that relate to Chinese traditional culture are also included in English lexicon now. However, to date, not many Chinese words have become commonly-used in English. Many factors can be listed as the reasons why Chinese words entered English language so difficultly. Some experts take the awkward pronunciation of Chinese characters as the main reason for this phenomenon (Global Times, 2013), which cannot convince us. For most people in the western countries, "made in China" can be found here and there in their daily life, but China, Chinese language, and Chinese culture are still far away from them.

Chinese Buzzwords are like countless shining mirrors reflecting different aspects in Chinese society, gaining increasing publicity in the foreign media and drawing growing attention both domestically and internationally.

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