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 I) 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.
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. That 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 kylen. The dragon represents fortune, greatness and power. It also represents a king or a man. The kylen is a Chinese unicorn. It is an imaginary animal and appears in the wedding ceremony to bless the couple who are to be married. That 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
nan  shan  xian  song
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.
1st sign of Duilian 合 家 平 安
2nd sign of Duilian 滿 門 吉 慶

First sign:
合 hé 家 jia 平 ping 安 an
whole family be safe
“A blessing for a safe family.”

Second sign:
滿 man 門 men 吉 ji 慶 qing
whole family be auspicious
“A blessing for an auspicious family.”

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 蔡瑞凯 (Chua Sui Kai), 蔡壁煌 (Chua Pai Huang), 陈綬吟 (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.

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sui  yuè  rén  zēng  shòu  
sui  yuè  rén  zēng  shòu  
time  human  increase  age
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“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 workplace.

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:

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kāi  gōng  dà  jì  
kāi  gōng  dà  jì  
opening a business  be auspicious
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“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.

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yī  bēn  wàn  lì  
yī  bēn  wàn  lì  
one investment ten thousand profit
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“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.

和气生财
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
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:

横财就手
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:

东西南北遇贵人
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.

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chū       rù      píng      ān
entering and exiting      be safe
“A blessing for a safe journey.”
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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.

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dīng   cái   liǎng   wàng
man   wealth   both   prosper
“A blessing to bring wealth and a son.”
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lào   shào   pang   ān
the old   the young   be safe
“A blessing for a safe family for both adults and children.”
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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.

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ān   kān   dà   jí
installing a shrine      big     fortune
“A blessing, used when setting up a shrine, to bring great fortune.”
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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.

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wǔ   fú   lín   mén
five   happiness   arrive    family
“A blessing for happiness
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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.

百年谐老
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 bào
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.

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

First sign:

如 松 如 鶴
rú sōng 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.

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

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

Second sign:
壽 比 南 山
shòu bì 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 kylen (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 献 颂
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.

福海寿山
fù 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.

利达三江
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’.

松柏长春
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.

松鹤遐龄
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.
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.

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

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

“A blessing for immediate success.”

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.

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

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.

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

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.”

財神到
cái shén dào
the god of wealth 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.

定福灶君
dìng fú zào jūn
decide happiness the god of the clay stove
“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.

黃金年華
huáng jīn nián huá
gold time
“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 Duilian’s with standard characteristics. However, some hang Dulan’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 Dulan’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.

![fu](image1.png)

This sign offers a blessing for good fortune.

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

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

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.

![A sign with Chinese characters](image)

Chinese: gōng xi fā cái
Respectable congratulation for 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  jǐn  玉  yù  滿  mǎn  堂  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 ที่ขาย 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.
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 Tiaofu 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:

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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.”
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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:

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出 入 平 安
chū rù píng ān
entering and exiting be safe
“A blessing for a safe journey.”
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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.

REFERENCES


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