



Shén (神) in Modern Chinese

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Abstract

In modern Chinese, a new degree adverb *shén* 神 is emerging. Expressions such as *shénhǎochī* 神好吃 and *shényǒuqù* 神有趣 are found in colloquial Chinese, and they even appear as headlines to get readers' attention. *Shén* originally refers to the dominator and creator of the universe. In modern Chinese, along with the original meaning, people frequently use *shén* to modify things (e.g., *shén jīyīn* 神基因) or actions (e.g., *shén huí* 神回). How many senses does *shén* have? How did *shén* derive the use of degree adverb? The paper targets on *shén* in modern Chinese, aiming to study its senses, to work out the relations among the various usages, and to find out how it generated the use of degree adverb. The conclusion shows that the senses of *shén* were derived from its original meaning either directly or indirectly through reanalysis, inference, metaphorization, and metonymization. The use of degree adverb was generated through metaphorization and reanalysis.

Keywords

semantic feature, polyseme, degree adverb, metaphor, metonymy

1. Introduction

The concept of degree is closely related to human life. Therefore, degree words are indispensable to human language. Among the multiple methods used to express extent in Chinese, the adverbs of degree are the most common. Notably, although degree adverbs are by definition regarded as open-class words,¹ they are less productive than the other three types of content words (namely, nouns, verbs, and adjectives) in that degree adverbs are not added readily. However, multiple new degree adverbs, especially in colloquial Chinese, have emerged in recent years. Lately, using *shén* (generally meaning God) as a degree adverb has become common in newspapers and magazines and even more so in web articles and videos.

- (1) 乾 咖哩 真的 神 好吃。 這次 去 臺北 實在
 gān gālǐ zhēnde shén hǎochī zhècì qù táiběi shízài
 dry curry really SHEN delicious this time to Taipei really
 太 開心 了!!!!!!!!!!!!²
 tài kāixīn le
 very happy PAR³

‘The dry curry really tastes very good. The trip to Taipei this time is very happy.’

(Source: <http://www.ipeen.com.tw/comment/612356>)

- (2) 這個 網站 神 有趣!!! 用 滑鼠
 zhège wǎngzhàn shén yǒuqù yòng huáshǔ
 this website SHEN interesting use mouse
 隨便 拉撇 幾筆 都 超 美的 耶!!!
 suíbiàn lāpiě jǐbǐ dōu chāo měide ye
 random draw several all super beautiful PAR

‘This website is extremely fun! Random strokes with the mouse produce extremely beautiful illustrations!’

(Source: <http://www.plurk.com/m/p/jsx38z>)

1 The distinction between function (closed class) words and content (open-class) words were proposed by Charles C. Fries (1952). Content words include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and most adverbs; function words might be prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, articles, or particles. In the open-class words, new words may be added readily, whereas it is uncommon to have new words created in the closed class of words.

2 In this paper, every Chinese example composes five parts. The Chinese characters are at the first line, the second line displays *pinyin*, and the third line presents English translations. The complete meaning is enclosed with “ ”. Some abbreviations are used to indicate function words: GN (genitive), PAR (particle), and PASS (passive). Since the examples are collected from Google search engine but not limited to a certain database, the source of each example is indicated.

3 In Chinese, there are two *le* (了). One appears as an aspect particle and the other as a modal particle. The type of *le* is not directly related to the issue discussed in the present paper; therefore, the authors did not distinguish the two *le*s and used only PAR to include both aspect particle and modal particle.

- (3) 最近 姨媽 在 看 他 播 的 烽火 佳人，
 zùjìn yímā zài kàn tā bō de fēnghuǒ jiārén
 recent aunt ADV see he release PAR a moment of romance
 尼瑪，那個 歌 配的 太 噁心 了。
 nímǎ nàge gē pèi de tài ǎxīn le
 damn that song underscore too disgusting PAR
 不是⁴ 說 電視 原本的 歌，是 電視臺 自己
 bùshì shuō diànshì yuánběnde gē shì diànshìtái zìjǐ
 not say television original song be TV station self
 配 的 那種，神 噁心。
 pèi de nàzhǒng shén ǎxīn
 insert PAR that kind SHEN disgusting
 ‘Recently, my aunt was watching the television series *Beauties at the Crossfire*. My goodness, were the songs gross. Not the original songs from the series, but those inserted by the television station. They were extremely gross.’
 (Source: <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-funinfo-4950623-1.shtml>)
- (4) 穿 這樣子 神 迷人
 chuān zhèyàngzi shén mírén
 dress this way SHEN attractive
 ‘Dressing in this style is extremely attractive.’
 (Source: https://www.facebook.com/misscatlovekorea/posts/420475208052752?stream_ref=5)

How did *shén* become a degree adverb? What are the similarities and differences between the degree adverb *shén* and other degree adverbs? This study examined the use of *shén* in modern Chinese. By analyzing various senses and usages of the word *shén*, the authors pinned down the associations among its various meanings and further identified possible derivation routes of *shén* as a degree adverb. The results of this study clearly presented the derivation routes of all the senses of *shén* and the operation of meanings in human cognition. In addition, the patterns identified in this study may be conducive to Chinese learning and teaching.

2. Literature review

2.1 Derivations of degree adverbs

In Chinese, degree adverbs always catch scholars’ attention such that there have been many papers working on this issue. Yang (2005) stated that syntactic

4 In Chinese, the citation tone of *bu* 不 is 4th tone (*bù*). There is a tone sandhi rule stating that *bù* becomes 2nd tone when followed by another 4th tone (e.g., 不對 *bù + duì > bú duì*.) As a result, *bùshì* 不是 becomes *búshì* after applying the tone sandhi rule. However, in order to maintain consistency, the authors marked only the citation tone but not the sandhi tone in this paper.

context was a crucial factor for the derivation of a degree adverb. If a content word always appears before a predicate to modify it, the content word will lose its lexical meaning and gradually grammaticalize to a degree adverb. Such a mechanism is reanalysis. Reviewing the papers on degree adverbs, it is obvious that many of Chinese degree adverbs were derived from content words. According to Wang (2007), in the Pre-Qin era, *fēi* 非 ‘not’ and *cháng* 常 ‘ordinary’ were monosyllabic words. *Cháng* modified the following noun, and *fēi* modified the whole phrase, with the internal structure *fēi* + [*cháng* N]. *Fēi* and *cháng* always appeared together, and the close syntactic relation enabled the two words to become a degree adverb. Liu (2008) studied *tǐng* 挺 ‘straight’ and concluded that it generated the use of degree adverb through reanalysis. At first, the adjective *tǐng* appeared with a synonymous adjective, forming a [Adj + Adj] construction (e.g., *tǐngyìng* 挺硬 ‘hard’). Later, the balance between the two adjectives got lost, and *tǐng* became a modifier. In Zhao’s (2006) study, *jí* 極 originally referred to “the pillar of roof”. It then generated the sense of “the top/peak/end of something” and eventually derived the use of degree adverb through metaphorization.

Reanalysis and metaphorization appear to be the main mechanisms for the generation of degree adverbs. The degree adverb *shén* has newly emerged in modern Chinese; therefore, there has not yet been research on it. This paper has presented a discussion on the degree adverb *shén* to see whether it adopted the same mechanisms as other degree adverbs.

2.2 Senses of *shén*

According to oracle bone script, the set of incised ancient Chinese characters found on oracle bones, the original form of *shén* was 𩇛, which indicated “thunder”. In modern Chinese, *shén* is a polyseme. Based on *Hanyu Dacidian* (Chinese big dictionary) (Luo, 1986) and *Dacidian* (Big dictionary) (Liu, 1985), the authors summarize the following senses and the source:

- (a) The god that creates all creatures, displays supernatural phenomena and produces blessings as well as disasters,⁵ from *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explaining graphs and analyzing characters): *Shén*, *tiānshén*, *yǐnchū wànwù zhě yě* (神，天神，引出萬物者也 ‘*Shén* is a heavenly god who brings out tens of thousands of things’).
- (b) Gods and spirits, from *Shijing*, *Xiao Ya*, *Beishan Zhi Shi*, *Da Tian* (Book of songs, minor ode of the kingdom, decade of Bei Shan, da tian): *Tián zǔ yǒu shén* (田祖有神 ‘The spirit of our field, the father of husbandry’).

5 *Shuowen Jiezi* was published in the Eastern Han; however, according to Kuo (2006), *shén* indicated both thunder and the dominator of the universe in the Zhou dynasty.

- (c) The human soul after death,⁶ from *Jiu Ge, Guo Shang* (Nine songs: hymn to the fallen): *Shēn jì sǐ xī shén yǐ líng* (身既死兮神以靈 ‘When warrior bodies die, their spirits remain’).
- (d) The mysterious and the unpredictable, from *Xicizhuan* (Commentary on the appended judgments): *Yīnyáng bùcè zhīwèi shén* (陰陽不測之謂神 ‘The phenomenon that Yin and Yang are unfathomable is deemed a mystery’).
- (e) Spirit and consciousness, from *Zhuangzi: Jīxīn cún yú xiōng zhōng, zé chún bái bùbèi; chún bái bùbèi zé shén shēng bùdìng* (機心存於胸中，則純白不備；純白不備，則神生不定 ‘When a cunning mind dwells in a person’s head, this person cannot maintain a pure and clear soul. Consequently, the spirit of the person becomes restless’).
- (f) The appearance and expressions of a person, from *Hong Lou Meng* (The dream of the red chamber): *Jùnyǎn xiūméi, gùpàn shén fēi* (俊眼修眉，願盼神飛 ‘The lady has beautiful eyes and long eyebrows. When she looks around, her expressions are lively and cheerful’).
- (g) Magical/miraculous, from *Mengxi Bitan* (Dream pool essays): *Ruò yìn shù shí bǎi qiān běn, zé jīwéi shénsù* (若印數十百千本，則極為神速 ‘When technology is applied to print dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of books, the speed is amazingly fast’).
- (h) Supernaturally efficacious, from *Yanzi Chunqiu* (Tales of Yanzi): *Shàngdì shén, zé bùkě qī, shàngdì bùshén, zhù yì wú yì* (上帝神，則不可欺；上帝不神，祝亦無益 ‘If the Lord-on-High is efficacious, then he cannot be deceived; if he is not efficacious, then praying is useless’).
- (i) A knowledgeable or high skilled person, from *Shiyiji, Hou Han* (Records of picked-up leftovers: later Han): *Jīngshī wéi kāngchéng wéi jīngshén* (京師謂康成為“經神” ‘People in the capital city called Zhengxuan the expert of Confucian classics’).

Hanyu Zidian (Chinese dictionary) lists the following senses:

- (a) the appellation of the creator and the spirits of people who have died and are worshipped by their believers;
- (b) incredible, marvelous;
- (c) extraordinary, superb;
- (d) thoughts, efforts, attention;

6 According to the *Kangxi Zidian* (Kangxi dictionary), *yáng* (陽 ‘the sunny side’) souls become God, whereas *yīn* (陰 ‘the shady side’) souls develop into ghosts. Those whose *qì* (氣 ‘breath’) expands are gods, whereas those whose *qì* bends are ghosts.

- (e) (facial) expressions; and
- (f) vigor.

In *Jiaoyubu Guoyu Cidian* (Chinese dictionary of the ministry of education), the definitions are reduced to the following three items:

- (a) the creator and dominator of the universe, such as *tiānshén* (天神 ‘god of the sky’), *hǎishén* (海神 ‘god of the sea’), and *shānshén* (山神 ‘god of the mountains’);
- (b) human vigor or attention, such as *liúshén* (留神 ‘being attentive’), *shāngshén* (傷神 ‘distracting’), and *jùjīnghuìshén* (聚精會神 ‘attentively’); and
- (c) scarce, mysterious, and extraordinary, such as *shéntóng* (神童 ‘child prodigy’), *shénqí* (神奇 ‘magical’), and *shénjīmiàosuàn* (神機妙算 ‘extraordinary strategies’).

Hanyu Dacidian and *Dacidian* provide the most detailed meanings and sources, serving as the optimal base for analyzing the routes of meaning derivations. However, the authors discovered that in the two dictionaries, the word *shén* was adopted to explain *shén*. For example, *shénqí* (神奇 ‘magical’) and *shényì* (神異 ‘miraculous’) were used to explain *shén*. This was inappropriate for clarifying meanings. To avoid such recursion, metalanguage is a good alternative. How can *shénqí* and *shényì* be explained in metalanguage? *Hanyu Zidian* provides a satisfactory answer: *bùkěsīyì* (不可思議 ‘incredible’). *Jiaoyubu Guoyu Cidian* puts all the adjectival uses of *shén* together. This simplification decreases the memory burden; nonetheless, the derivational order of the senses and the semantic relationships become unperceivable.

In summary, the four dictionaries indicate that *shén* possesses the following meanings:

- (a) the creator and dominator of the universe;
- (b) gods and spirits;
- (c) souls;
- (d) mysterious and unpredictable;
- (e) spirit and consciousness;
- (f) appearance and expressions;
- (g) incredible/miraculous;
- (h) supernaturally efficacious;
- (i) extraordinary; and
- (j) a knowledgeable or high-skilled person

Undoubtedly, the prototypical meaning of *shén* is “the creator and dominator of the universe”. How the other meanings were derived is a great concern. To Chinese people, *shén* is also an abstract component of human body. Both Chinese medicine and the Taoist notion regard *jīng* 精, *qì* 氣, and *shén* 神 as the three main essential factors for human life, and *shén* refers to spirit, as shown in (5).

- (5) 神者， 生 之 制 也
 shénzhě shēng zhī zhì yě
 SHEN life PAR control PAR
 ‘Spirit, life is controlled by it.’
 (Source: *Huainanzi*)

This *shén* does not show a direct or indirect relationship with the dominating creator. Therefore, two semantic routes were observed in *shén*: one from the human body and the other from the creator and dominator of all beings in heaven and on earth. Along these two routes, other meanings were derived (Figure 1).

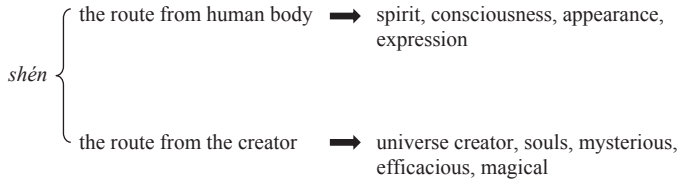


Figure 1 Two derivational routes of *shén*

According to the Taoist notion, *jīng*, *qì*, and *shén* are the essential abstract components of humans, where *shén* represents the spirit, a component that affects consciousness and attention. The external manifestations of *shén* are facial expressions. Therefore, a person’s spiritual status can be observed from his or her looks or facial expressions. Because the meanings on this route are irrelevant to all other meanings and because they show no direct or indirect associations with contemporary uses, no further investigation on this semantic route was conducted.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical background

As to language change, Traugott and Dasher (2002) mentioned some mechanisms: reanalysis, analogy, borrowing, metaphor, and metonymy. According to them, metaphor and metonymy are usually recognized as mechanisms of semantic change, and most changes in meaning are motivated by the associative flow of speech and conceptual metonymy. Through observation, some of *shén*’s senses were generated through metaphor and metonymy. What is more, this study analyzed the meanings of *shén* by using semantic theories such as the prototype theory, radial structure, and semantic features.

3.1.1 Metaphor and metonymy

Both metaphor and metonymy are figures of speech. Metaphor frequently appears in poems, and for some people, metaphor is a device mainly for rhetorical effect. Nonetheless, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggested that metaphors are not merely stylistic but cognitively important as well. In *Metaphors We Live By*, they argued that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life. Metaphors are not just in language but also in thought and action. Conceptual metaphor makes an implicit mapping between two conceptual domains that have similar conceptual structures in a systematic way. The mapping between time and money makes time behave like money so that words referring specifically to money are systematically used to refer to time (Figure 2). The following examples are given by Lakoff and Johnson.

How do you spend your time these days?
 You need to budget your time.
 I've invested a lot of time in her.

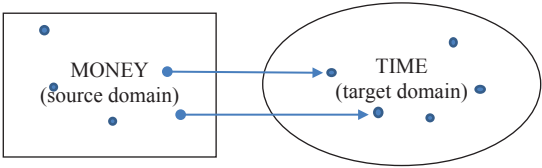


Figure 2 The mapping of time and money

According to Lakoff and Johnson, since money is experienced as a limited resource and limited resources are valuable commodities, the metaphorical concept “time is money” then entails the conceptual metaphor “time is a limited resource”, which further entails that “time is a valuable commodity”.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) defined metonymy as “using one entity to refer to another that is related to it”. Therefore, metonymy has primarily a referential function.

Through a metonymy, we are able to conceptualize one thing by means of its relation to something else. For example, in the sentence “The ham sandwich wants his check”, the *ham sandwich* stands for the customer who ordered a ham sandwich. Unlike a metaphor that creates new links between distinct domains, a metonymy relies on the existing links.

There are functional differences between metaphor and metonymy. According to Anttila (1989) and Traugott (1988), metonymy works by the contiguity between two concepts, whereas metaphor is based on their analogous similarity. Basically, metaphor involves the mapping of two domains, whereas metonymy involves shifts within the same domain. *Shén* generated the prototypical meaning “god” through the metonymy “object used for the user” and other meanings through metaphorization.

3.1.2 Prototype and radial structure

The Prototype Theory, formulated in the 1970s by Eleanor Rosch and others, is an approach of categorization that could be used to study semantic diffusion. The theory argues that among the various meanings of a polyseme, one of the meanings is the most salient, fundamental, and commonly applied; this is the prototypical meaning. Other meanings are extended on the basis of the prototypical meaning. In addition, the Radial Structure Theory accounts for the meaning derivation process. Lakoff (1987) considered that other meanings extended radially from the prototypical meaning. A characteristic of the radial structure is that the derived meanings are not necessarily mutually related. Because the meanings were derived according to different characteristics, it might be difficult to find direct relations among meanings derived in different directions even though the extensions can still be traced to the core of the structure. According to *Hanyu Dacidian* and *Dacidian*, *shén* involves more than ten meanings in Chinese. All of these meanings could not possibly be derived linearly. By using the Prototype Theory and Radial Structure Theory, the authors first determined the prototypical meaning of *shén* and then identified the relationships among all its derivative meanings according to closeness.

3.1.3 Semantic feature

A semantic feature is the minimal meaning unit that comprises a meaning, a distinguishing feature of the meaning, and a key component used to decompose the meaning. Using semantic features to decompose meanings is considered scientific; furthermore, relationships among related words can be clearly represented. *Shén* is a polyseme; therefore, each derivative meaning emanates from the different semantic features of the original meaning. Seemingly irrelevant meanings would be revealed to be related after a semantic feature analysis. This study decomposed all the senses of *shén* through feature decomposition. Subsequently, relationships among the various meanings were identified according to semantic features, comprehensively manifesting the derivational routes of *shén*.

3.2 Source of data

This study is based on an analysis of secondary data. The analysis was conducted, and inferences were made according to the various sources collected from the following data pools: dictionaries, newspapers, Scripta Sinica database, Sinica Corpus, and the Google search engine. Specifically, novel usages of *shén* were collected through the Google search engine. Since Google provides multiple types of data including informal colloquialisms, these data are more representative of the current state and changes in a language than in dictionaries. Only the character 神 was keyed in to probe the predicates that could be modified by the degree adverb *shén*. To find out the possible emerging time of the use of degree adverb, the popular combinations (e.g., *shénhǎochī* 神好吃, *shényǒuqù* 神有趣, *shénhǎowán* 神好玩, etc.) were keyed in and the appearing time of each example was taken into consideration. The combinations appeared frequently in titles of articles written

by bloggers to attract readers. The examples without clear appearing time were excluded. Since there might be ambiguities, the authors carefully read every sentence to get the data available for the study. The modern data were collected until August 2016. In addition, descriptive grammar was adopted in this study to present the current usages of *shén* as a degree adverb from the real corpus. No distinctions were made regarding whether the data collected conformed to correct or formal Chinese grammar.

4. Discussion

4.1 Novel usages of *shén*

In modern Chinese, *shén* has the following usages that are not listed in the dictionaries. The major difference of the new usages lies on its syntactic aspect.

(a) Adjective (incredible/amazing)

In the Song dynasty, *shén* was used as an adjective to mean “magical, miraculous”. In contemporary Chinese, *shén* can either appear alone or be modified by degree adverbs such as *hěn* 很 and *chāo* 超.

- (6) 超 神! 棒球K 倒 保齡球 網友 直呼
 chāo shén bàngqiú K dǎo bǎolíngqiú wǎngyǒu zhíhū
 very SHEN baseball fall boiling web users call
 奇蹟
 qíjī
 miracle
 ‘Super incredible! Web users witness a baseball striking a bowling ball, calling the event a miracle.’
 (Source: <http://leestube.co/watch/68N0sH4jxJs/k-.html>)

(b) Adverb (magically)

In (7) and (8), *shén* modifies action verbs, and the meaning of it is “magically”.

- (7) 韓 噓 台人 吃飯 像 乞丐!
 hán xū tái rén chīfàn xiàng qǐgài
 Koreans belittle Taiwanese eat like beggars
 網友 不爽 神 回……被 讚
 wǎngyǒu bùshuǎng shén huí……bèi zàn
 web users unhappily SHEN reply PASS admire
 民族 英雄
 mínzú yīngxióng
 nation hero
 ‘Koreans belittled the Taiwanese for dining like beggars! An enraged web user replied magically [...] and was deemed a national hero.’
 (Source: <http://buzzlife.com.tw/article/1442131891/>)

- (8) 警 飛 車 追逐 同仁 攔截 “神 支援”
 jǐng fēi chē zhuīzhú tóngrén lánjié shén zhīyuán
 police fly car chase colleague stop SHEN assist
 ‘The police officer drove very fast to chase the gangster, and his colleague, magically offering assistance, stopped the gangster.’
 (Source: <http://news.tvbs.com.tw/local/670404>)

(c) Degree adverb (extremely)

To mean ‘extremely’, *shén* is syntactically a degree adverb. Such a use has recently emerged. The term *shénhǎochī* (神好吃 ‘extremely tasty’) has been widely adopted in web articles. To emphasize tastiness, several food bloggers incorporated *shénhǎochī* in their article titles to attract readers. Gradually, an increasing number of similar phrases appeared.

- (9) 神 忙 神 開心 的 今天 就 不 走
 shén máng shén kāixīn de jīntiān jiù bù zǒu
 SHEN busy SHEN happy PAR today ADV not go
 球 裝 小屁仔 路線 啦！
 qiú zhuāng xiǎopizǐ lùxiàn la
 ball suit child style PAR
 ‘Today, I am extremely busy but happy! So let’s not dress up like a kid!’
 (Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/sxFRwRNvtI/>)
- (10) 遇到 佳君 神 神 神 神 神 神 開心 的
 yùdào jiājūn shén shén shén shén shén shén kāixīn de
 meet Jiajun SHEN happy PAR
 ‘I’m very very very very very happy to meet Jiajun.’
 (Source: <http://websta.me/tag/%E9%81%87%E5%88%B0%E4%BD%B3%E5%90%9B%E7%A5%9E%E7%A5%9E%E7%A5%9E%E7%A5%9E%E7%A5%9E%E7%A5%9E%E9%96%8B%E5%BF%83%E7%9A%84>)
- (11) 神 好笑 的 八歲 簡 赫言 超厲害
 shén hǎoxiào de bā suì jiǎn hè yán chāo lìhài
 SHEN funny PAR eight years old Jian Heyan very smart
 ‘Extremely funny eight-year-old Jian Heyan is impressive.’
 (Source: <http://blog.udn.com/mouse12172001/13019454>)
- (12) Rena 的 台 曆 雖然 迷你 但 真的
 Rena de tái lì suīrán míní dàn zhēnde
 Rena GN Taiwan calendar although tiny but really
 神 可愛 啊 啊 啊！！ [抓狂][抓狂]
 shén kěài a a a
 SHEN cute PAR (crazy) (crazy)
 ‘The desk calendar of Rena is tiny but extremely cute!’
 (Source: <http://tw.weibo.com/sora5251/3799367175736290>)

It seems that the degree use of *shén* appeared only in modern Chinese. As for *shénsù* 神速 in *Shiji*, *shén* functioned as an adjective meaning “unpredictable”, whereas *sù* was a noun that meant “speed”.

- (13)

奏

行

不

過

兩、三

日……

，

zòu

xíng

bù

guò

liǎng sān

rì

document

approve

not

over

two three

day
- 以為

神

速
- yǐwéi

shén

sù
- thought

SHEN

speed
- ‘Two or three days after the official document was approved and implemented [...]

people believed that the implementation was with an unpredictable speed.’
- (Source: *Shiji*, *Kuli Liezhuan* [Records of the grand historian: biographies of ruthless officials])

4.2 Meaning derivation of shén

On the basis of the dictionary definitions, the emergence era for each meaning is identified in Table 1.

Table 1 Emergence eras of *Shén*’s senses

Era	Sememes first emerged
Xia, Shang, and Zhou	Creator/dominator of the universe, gods and spirits, mysterious and unpredictable
Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period	Spirit and consciousness, souls, supernaturally efficacious
Wei, Jin, and North-South dynasties	Extraordinary; a knowledgeable or high-skilled person
Song dynasty	Incredible/miraculous
Qing dynasty	Appearance, expression

This table serves as a reference for inferring derivation routes. However, the chronological order does not indicate that the meaning derivation was a linear process. For example, the meanings of “appearance” and “expressions” used in the Qing dynasty do not exhibit any association with the meanings of “incredible” and “miraculous” emerged in the Song dynasty. Therefore, the senses in the Qing dynasty could not possibly be derived from those in the Song dynasty. What is more, Table 1 indicates the time a sense first emerged in Chinese but not the only era it was used. There was no meaning of substitution. Basically, the senses appeared previously were used continually in the following eras. This is the reason why many senses of *shén* are still used in modern Chinese.

Semantic derivation involves multiple routes: a few derivative meanings inherit their attributes from the original meaning, whereas the rest are derived through metaphor, analogy, and inference. In the following section, the senses of *shén* were grouped according to their parts of speech. Possible derivation routes of each meaning were identified. First, the original meaning of *shén* was determined. Subsequently, the original meaning was decomposed into semantic features. The derivational routes were then reconstructed on the basis of semantic similarities.

4.2.1 Nouns

(a) Creator and dominator of the universe

According to dictionaries, *shén* originally refers to the creator and dominator of the universe. To decompose the sense, the semantic features of dominance, supremacy, omnipotence, and intangibility are used. The features are given based on Chinese people's common knowledge of *shén*. To describe *shén*, Chinese people always use *wànnéng* 萬能, *wúxíng* 無形, and *zhìgāowúshàng* 至高無上. In addition, the feature [– human] is important to Chinese *shén*. Even though it is always personified and has human figure in stories and movies, *shén* is different from human beings in that it is immortal. In fact, numerous other characteristics can be listed;⁷ nonetheless, the simple definition is kept to reduce the memory burden (Figure 3).

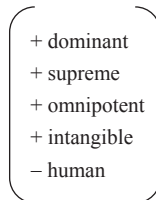


Figure 3 Semantic features of *shén*

(b) Souls, gods, and spirits

To some extent, the senses “human souls after death” and “gods and spirits” are related and homonymous. Gods that are converted from human souls are the opposite of ghosts. Not everyone is considered a god after death; only the souls of extraordinary people who are being worshipped are deemed as gods. Hence, being an individual of excellence in life is the requirement for souls to be deified. However, souls that turned into gods cannot control everything. Generally, their powers are restricted to specific areas, as is the case for river gods and mountain gods.

7 According to Brinton and Brinton (2010), since no one has yet determined all the possible semantic components of one language, there is no list of universal semantic features.

(c) A knowledgeable or high-skilled person

The creation of this sense can easily be explained by using the theory of projection. *Shén* was projected to human beings; hence, human beings were compared to God, thus indirectly degrading⁸ and anthropomorphizing the character of God. Specifically, the feature [+intangible] was transformed to a tangible one, consequently altering the value of the other features. The only feature retained after projection was the status of being the highest, namely, [+supreme]. Being the highest among a crowd entails unmatched excellence (Figure 4).

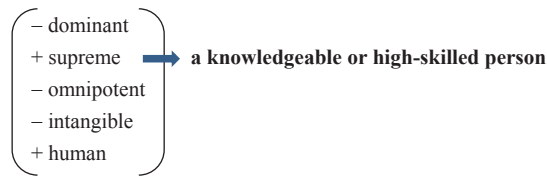


Figure 4 Generation of the sense “high-skilled person”

This use is popular in modern Chinese. People use *shén* to refer to people who achieve exceptional success in specific areas or possess a prominent status or prestige. *Dǔshén* 賭神 refers to a person who wins every gambling game, *qiúshén* 球神 means a person with exceptional skills in ball games, *gēshén* 歌神 is a person who sings well, and *wǔshén* 舞神 is a person who masters dancing skills.

4.2.2 Adjectives

In Chinese, it is common to convert adjectives from nouns. This study found that the uses of *shén* as adjectives did not retain all the semantic features of the original meaning; instead, these adjectives were inferred from one of the five features. The examples presented in Section 2.2 are repeated here for ease of reading.

(a) Mysterious and unpredictable

京師 謂 康成 為 “經 神”
Jīngshī wèi kāngchéng wéi jīng shén
capital call Zhengxuan be classics SHEN
‘People in the capital city called Zhengxuan the expert of Confucian classics.’
(Source: *Shiyiji*, *Hou Han*)

This meaning exhibits no direct association with any of the five attributes of the original meaning. Nonetheless, it can be considered as indirectly related to the feature [+intangible]. Because *shén* is intangible, it is enigmatic and unforeseeable.

8 The process could also be considered as an upgrading process in which human beings were deified. However, because the attributes of the gods were affected by those of human beings, this study adopted the explanation of the anthropomorphisation of gods.

Therefore, the word is applied to describe things that are mysterious and unpredictable (Figure 5). The inference is:

If a thing is intangible, it is unforeseeable.
If a thing is unforeseeable, it is unpredictable.

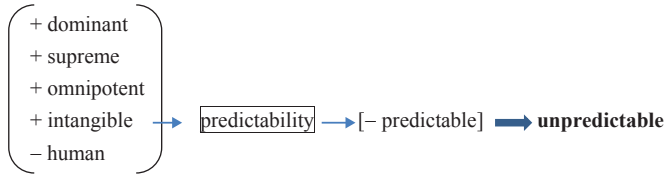


Figure 5 Generation of the sense “unpredictable”

(b) Incredible/miraculous/magical

若 印 數 十 百 千 本， 則 極 為 神 速
 ruò yìn shù shí bǎi qiān běn zé jíwéi shén sù
 if print dozen hundred thousand book then extremely SHEN speed
 ‘When technology is applied to print dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of books, the speed is amazingly fast.’
 (Source: *Mengxi Bitan*)

The sense “incredible” is related to prediction. When an outcome is out of expectation, it is magical and incredible. This is a further extension of the sense “unpredictable” (Figure 6).

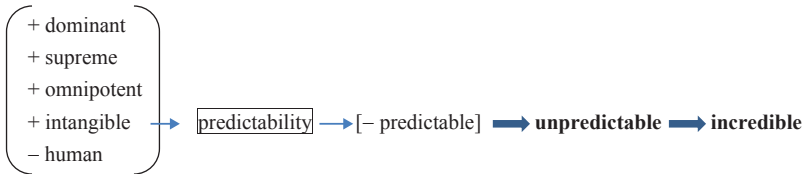


Figure 6 Generation of the sense “incredible”

(c) Supernaturally efficacious

上 帝 神， 則 不 可 欺； 上 帝 不 神， 祝 亦
 shàngdì shén zé bùkě qī shàngdì bùshén zhù yì
 god SHEN then cannot deceive god not SHEN pray still
 無 益
 wúyì
 useless
 ‘If the Lord-on-High is efficacious, then he cannot be deceived; if he is not efficacious, then praying is useless.’
 (Source: *Yanzi Chunqiu*)

Meaning that everything wished for and predicted is realized, the sense “supernaturally efficacious” contrasts with that of “incredible”. Basically, “supernaturally efficacious” is also related to predictability. When someone’s prediction comes true, he is said to be efficacious (Figure 7).

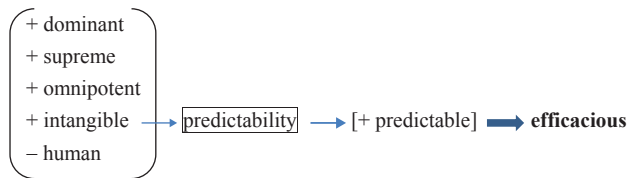


Figure 7 Generation of the sense “efficacious”

(d) Extraordinary

Although the sense “extraordinary” is listed in neither *Hanyu Dacidian* nor *Dacidian*, upon closer examination, the word *shénjùn* 神俊 in *Dacidian* was found to include the meaning of “extraordinary”. The word first appeared in the Southern dynasties.

- (14) 生 而 神 俊， 必 為 美 器。
shēng ér shén jùn bì wéi měi qì
born and SHEN talent must be beautiful utensil
‘Born with extraordinary talent, you were destined to grow into a capable person.’
(Source: Jiang Yan’s *Shang Aizi Fu Xu* [Prelude to ode of my beloved late son])

Table 1 shows that the sense of “extraordinary” appeared before that of “incredible”. Therefore, “extraordinary” could not be derived from “incredible”. It is not difficult to comprehend that *shén* possesses the sense of “extraordinary”. Humans always see the world from their own angles. The inference is as follows: humans are ordinary mortals, and God is *extra*-ordinary because it transcends humans. The sense “extraordinary” was then generated from the semantic feature [– human] (Figure 8).

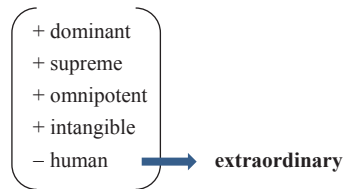


Figure 8 Generation of the sense “extraordinary”

4.3 Derivation routes of new usages

Shén has the following new usages:

- (a) incredible/amazing;
- (b) magically; and
- (c) extremely.

How were these usages derived? Are they further derivations of the aforementioned meanings, or is this contemporary *shén* a brand new word? According to this study's observations, new usages of *shén* are related to the aforementioned meanings.

(a) Magically

As to *shénhuí* 神回, *shén* is used as a general adverb that modifies the verb *huí*. *Shénhuí* was derived from *shénhuífù*, which means that the reply or comment is extremely classical, profound, humorous, and infused with a connotation of praise. *Shénhuífù* was later abbreviated as *shénhuí*, which means “responding magically”. The meaning was retained, but *shén* was converted from an adjective to an adverb.

神	回覆	神	回覆	神	回覆	神	回
<i>shén</i>	<i>huífù</i>	\Rightarrow	<i>shén</i>	<i>huífù</i>	\Rightarrow	<i>shén</i>	<i>huí</i>
ADJ N	V		ADV	V		ADV	V

Such a reanalysis is data supported. The Scripta Sinica database contains almost all the important Chinese classics. In this database, the compound *huífù* is not found until the Ming dynasty. It was always used as a verb.

- (15) ……今番 又 不曾 教 我 來 廝殺，
jīnfān yòu bùcéng jiào wǒ lái sīshā
 now again never ask me come kill

只得 將 他 言語 回覆，另 候 裁奪 便了。
zhǐděi jiāng tā yányǔ huífù líng hòu cáiduó biànlǎo
 only can PREP his word reply and wait instruction PAR

‘... and I have no orders to kill, I can only return with this reply and ask further instructions.’

(Source: *Sanguo Yanyi* [Romance of the three kingdoms])

- (16) ……那個 去尋， 只 在 寺 前 寺 後 閒蕩
nàge qùxún zhǐ zài sì qián sì hòu xiándàng
 that go seek only at temple front temple back fool around

了個把 時辰， 來 回覆 道： “沒處 尋， 想 他去 得
le gèbǎ shíchén lái huífù dào méichù xún xiǎng tā qù de
 several hour come reply say nowhere seek think he go PREP

遠 了。”
yuǎn le
 far PAR

‘One went out to look for Monk Danzi, but he only fooled around the temple for hours and replied: “Nowhere to find him. He has already gone far away.”’

(Source: *Sansui Pingyao Zhuan* [The three sui quash the demons])

The nominal use of *huífù* does not appear in the Scripta Sinica database but Sinica Corpus.⁹

- (17) ……如果 上面 不能 給 合理的 回覆，
 rúguǒ shàngmiàn bùnéng gěi hélǐde huífù
 if boss cannot give reasonable answer
 工會 不 排除 在 五月 一日 發起 集體 休假
 gōnghuì bù páichú zài wǔyuè yīrì fāqǐ jítǐ xiūjià
 union not eliminate on May first initiate team vacation
 ‘If the company cannot give reasonable answers, the union might go on strike on May 1st.’
 (Source: Sinica Corpus)

It is supported by the corpus that verbal *huífù* appeared earlier than nominal *huífù*. However, it is unnecessary to conclude that *shénhuífù* takes the ADV + V structure. The phrase *shénhuífù* is not found in Sinica Corpus; however, from the data collected from Google search engine, *shénhuífù* first appeared in 2012 as a nominal phrase.

- (18) 央視 逢 人 便 問 “你 幸福 嗎？”
 yāngshì féng rén biàn wèn nǐ xìngfú ma
 China Central Television meet people then ask you happy PAR
 得到 無數 網民 認為 的 “神 回覆”
 dédào wúshù wǎngmín rènwéi de shén huífù
 get many netizen think PAR SHEN answer
 ‘The China Central Television asked people the question “Are you happy?” and got magical answers from many netizens.’
 (Source: <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/12/10/5/n3698605.htm>)

Example (18) tells that the internal structure of *shénhuífù* is ADJ + N. Such a structure is possible in that *shén* could be used as an adjective and *huífù* has already generated the use of a noun before 2012. The phrase *shénhuí* appeared in 2013, which indicates that it is possibly an abbreviation from *shénhuífù*.

- (19) 老媽! 這 話 根本 神 回 呀(ㄞˊ ㄉㄞˊ)……
 lǎomā zhè huà gēnběn shén huí ya
 mother the word simply SHEN answer PAR
 ‘Oh, my god! This is absolutely a magical answer.’
 (Source: <http://home.gamer.com.tw/creationDetail.php?sn=2249753>)

9 Sinica Corpus is a representative sample of modern Chinese language since it includes articles from 1981 to 2007 from different areas and is classified according to five criteria: genre, style, mode, topic, and source.

This reanalysis is a natural and common grammaticalization phenomenon. Numerous nouns in Chinese can be used as verbs. When a word changes its part of speech, other words in collocation are simultaneously affected. It is no doubt that the sense “magically” was derived from the sense “magical” through reanalysis (Figure 9).



Figure 9 Generation of the sense “magically”

(b) Incredible/amazing

Strictly speaking, “incredible” is not a new emerging sense of *shén*. However, the behavior of *shén* carrying this meaning is not totally the same as that in classical Chinese. In ancient time, it appeared as a modifier to modify a head noun; in modern Chinese, *shén* can stand alone as the main predicate. In colloquial language, the composition of a degree adverb with *shén* appears with a high frequency.

- (20) 籤 王！ 他 好 神 好 神…… 連續
 qiān wáng tā hǎo shén hǎo shén liánxù
 lottery king he very SHEN very SHEN continue

中 中 中中中…… 再來一支！
 zhòng zhòng zhòng zàiláiyīzhī
 hit hit hit more one

‘King of lottery! He is very very amazing, continuously getting the prize. One more!’

(Source: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1140958835917727&id=1083982968281981)

- (21) 蒸 大蒜 水 治 小兒 哮喘 奇
 zhēng dàsuàn shuǐ zhì xiǎoér xiàochuǎn qí
 steamed garlic water cure son asthma magic

效！ 非常 神！！
 xiào fēicháng shén
 effect very SHEN

‘The magic effect of the steamed garlic water, it cured my son’s asthma. Very amazing!!!’

(Source: http://www.360doc.com/content/10/0605/20/690229_31470028.shtml)

In (20) and (21), *shén* refers to “incredible”, “miraculous” or “amazing”. It is actually an abbreviation of *shénqí*.

(c) Extremely

When *shén* refers to “extremely”, it is undoubtedly a degree adverb. Both *Dacidian* and *Jiaoyubu Guoyu Cidian* explain *shényǒng* 神勇 as “very brave”, and *shénsù* 神速 as “very speedy”. The example of *shénsù*¹⁰ provided by *Jiaoyubu Guoyu Cidian* emerged in the West Jin, and the sentence of *shényǒng*¹¹ appeared in the work of the Tang dynasty. However, according to *Dacidian* and Scripta Sinica database, *shénsù* appeared much earlier; it first appeared in the Western Han dynasty (see example (13)). Table 2 displays the first appearance of *shénsù* and *shényǒng* as well as the other senses emerged in each era. The Tang dynasty is not listed in Table 1 as there was no sense generated in this era. If *shén* in *shényǒng* indicated “very”, the use of degree adverb probably would be generated in the Tang dynasty since *shényǒng* first appeared in the literary work in this era.

Table 2 First appearance of *shénsù* and *shényǒng*

Era	Sememes first emerged	Example
Xia, Shang, and Zhou	Creator/dominator of the universe, mysterious, and unpredictable	
Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period	Supernaturally efficacious	<i>shénsù</i>
Wei, Jin, and North-South dynasties	[Extraordinary], a knowledgeable or high-skilled person	
Tang dynasty	VERY?	<i>shényǒng</i>
Song dynasty	Incredible/miraculous	

It has been mentioned in Section 4.2 that *shénsù* in *Shiji* referred to “unpredictable speed”. Then, did *shényǒng* in the Tang dynasty mean “very brave”? In Wei, Jin, and North-South dynasties, the sense “extraordinary” was derived. Such a sense could generate the use of degree adverb for the reason that the popular degree adverb *fēicháng* was derived from the combination of *fēi* (非 ‘not’) and *cháng* (常 ‘ordinary’). *Shényǒng* first appeared in the Tang dynasty, and at that time, the sense of “extraordinary” had already emerged. Therefore, it is possible that the adjective *shén* indicating “extraordinary” further became a degree adverb. However, the authors did not consider *shén* in *shényǒng* as a degree adverb

10 The sentence appeared in *Sanguozhi* (Records of the three kingdoms). The whole expression is *Bīngguì shénsù. Jīn qiānlǐ xí rén, zī zhòngduō, nányǐ qù lì* (兵貴神速。今千里襲人，輜重多，難以趣利) ‘Celerity is the most important matter in war. Today, if we attack the enemies after rushing about 500 meters with heavy baggage, it will be difficult to get a good opportunity immediately.’

11 It appeared in *Nanshi* (The history of the Southern Dynasties). The whole sentence is *Zhōurén jiē yǐmiǎn, lì rén tàn fú, xiānchéng shényǒng* (洲人皆以免，吏人歎服，咸稱神勇) ‘The residents in Bingzhou were all saved from the flood, and the officials admired Xiaodan for his courage.’

for three reasons. First, if *shén* in *shényǒng* was a degree adverb, this usage would have been included in dictionaries. However, none of the four dictionaries referred in this paper mentions this usage. In fact, no dictionary, even none of the ones published currently, has ever listed *shén* as a degree adverb. Second, different dictionaries might paraphrase the same word differently. *Shényǒng* is paraphrased as “extraordinary courage” in *You Yang Zazu, Zhong Zhi* (A table full of miscellaneous writings from south of Mt. You, records of loyalty).¹² Hence, *shén* in *shényǒng* can be explained as “extraordinary”. According to the emergence era and the meaning derivational routes, it is more reasonable to consider *shén* in *shényǒng* as an adjective. Third, in contemporary Chinese, *shényǒng* is a compound word that allows premodification with degree adverbs, such as *tā hěn shényǒng* (他很神勇 ‘He is extremely brave.’). If *shén* indicated “very” in the Tang dynasty, it would be recognized as a degree adverb that is not inseparably fixed to *yǒng* in modern Chinese. However, *shényǒng* is still regarded as a compound adjective now. On the basis of these three reasons, this study concluded that the degree adverb *shén* was not derived in the Tang dynasty.

The degree adverb *shén* must be collocated with adjectives or adverbs of manner. According to a Google search, the first instance of *shén* as a degree adverb appeared in April 2012, in the combination of *shénhǎochī* (神好吃 ‘extremely delicious’).

- (22) 小飛象 的 牛排 神好吃 的!!
 xiǎofēixiàng de niúpái shénhǎochī de
 Dumbo GN steak SHEN delicious PAR
 推薦 妳
 tuījiàn nǐ
 recommend you

‘The steak at Dumbo is extremely delicious. I recommend you.’

(Source: <http://www.backpackers.com.tw/forum/showthread.php?t=645467>)

By comparison, *shénnkěài* (神可愛 ‘extremely cute’) was first found in August 2012.

- (23) 老皮 阿寶 神可愛 的 我的
 lǎopí abǎo shénnkěài de wǒde
 Laopi A-bao SHEN cute PAR my

¹² It first appeared in the Tang dynasty. The whole expression is *Gāozǔ shào shényǒng, suí mò, chángyǐ shìer rén pò cǎozéihào* ‘wúduānér’ shùwàn (高祖少神勇，隋末，嘗以十二人破草賊號‘無端兒’數萬 ‘The emperor Gaozu was with extraordinary courage when he was young. In the late years of the Sui dynasty, he defeated tens of thousands of robbers, called *Wudianer*, with twelve people.’)

天 啊
tiān a
god PAR
'Oh, my god! Laopi and A-bao are extremely cute.'
(Source: <http://www.plurk.com/p/gzb8d4>)

Shénlihài (神厲害 'extremely impressive') appeared a little late in 2014. The findings indicate that *shén* has been widely used as a degree adverb since a few years ago.

How did *shén* develop a meaning of extreme degree? Since *shén* possesses the feature [+supreme] in its original meaning, developing a sense of extreme degree is reasonable and predictable. However, the use of extreme degree was not derived from the original meaning "the creator and dominator of the universe"; instead, it emerged in contemporary Chinese only after numerous other meanings were gradually derived. There are two possible derivations for the use of degree adverb: metaphor and reanalysis. In Chinese, people use the level of God to indicate the highest extent of an attribute, such as *hǎochī dào shén de jìngjiè* (好吃到神的境界 'so delicious that it reaches the extent of God'). By comparing the tastiness of food with God, the domain of God was mapped to that of tastiness in concept. Nonetheless, the mapping was not overall; not all the features in the source domain were mapped to the target domain. *Hǎochī* is a scalar adjective with a range of values of the variable property lying between those covered by the opposite terms. In comparing the extent of qualities to the height of God, the feature [+supreme] was a pivotal element. Through mapping, the supreme position of God in the universe stands for the supreme point of the scale of tastiness (see Figures 10 and 11).

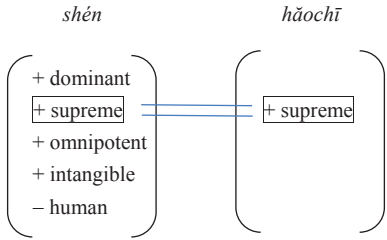


Figure 10 Mapping of god and tastiness

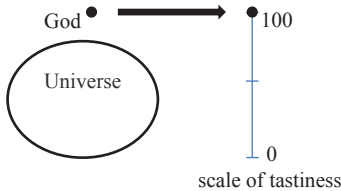


Figure 11 Conceptual mapping of god and tastiness

Such a metaphor was found in 2008.

- (24) 只要 想到 五 燈 獎 的
 zhǐyào xiǎngdào wǔ dēng jiǎng de
 if only think of five light award POSS

豬腳， 我 就 快要 瘋了， 好吃到
 zhūjiǎo wǒ jiù kuàiyào fēngle hǎochīdào
 pig's knuckles I will almost crazy PAR delicious to

神 的 境界
 shén de jìngjiè
 god POSS extent

'I'm almost crazy only if I think of the stewed pig's knuckles of Five Light Award. The tastiness could be compared to the extent of god.'

(Source: <http://nakama5061.pixnet.net/blog/post/39473163%E4%BA%94%E7%87%88%E7%8D%8E%E8%B1%AC%E8%85%B3>)

Through metaphor, the generation of the meaning "excessiveness" is comprehensible. However, the change of part of speech is left unsolved. In (24), *shén* appears after *hǎochī* and the two words are separated by *dào*. It is difficult to explain why *shén* suddenly appeared before *hǎochī* to be a degree adverb in 2012. Example (25) helps to solve the problem. The sentence appeared in 2005, and it might lead to ambiguities.

- (25) 老實 說 這家店 Amy 應該 是 不會
 lǎoshí shuō zhèjiā diàn Amy yīnggāi shì bùhuì
 honest speak this restaurant Amy must be not

再 來 了……但 若是 覺得
 zài lái le dàn ruòshì juéde
 again come PAR but if feel

鍋神 好吃……或許 可以 來 嚐
 guōshén hǎochī huòxǔ kěyǐ lái cháng
 GUOSHEN delicious maybe can come taste

嚐 看。
 cháng kàn
 taste see

'Honestly speaking, Amy will not come to this restaurant again ...but if you feel Guoshen is delicious...maybe you can come to have a try.'

(Source: <http://amy0313.pixnet.net/blog/post/32325153-%E5%9A%90%E8%B6%A3%E6%97%A5%E6%9C%AC%E6%AD%A3%E7%B5%B1%E9%8D%8B%E6%96%99%E7%90%86>)

In 1991, Guoshen (鍋神 'God of Hotpot'), the name of a restaurant selling Japanese hotpots, appeared in Taiwan. Afterward, similar names such as Mianshen

(麵神 ‘God of Noodles’) and Tangshen (湯神 ‘God of Soup’) were created. The name Guoshen provides a syntactic context for reanalysis. As to the string *zhèjiāguōshénhǎochī* 這家鍋神好吃, there are possibly two readings,¹³ and people who do not know the hotpot restaurant might parse it as *zhèjiāguō, shénhǎochī* 這家鍋, 神好吃 (‘The hotpot in this restaurant is extremely delicious’), which makes *shén* a degree adverb without movement.

Among various combinations, *shénhǎochī* seems to be crucial to trigger reanalysis, which generates the use of degree adverb. In the past, there were examples of *shénkǎi* and *shénlihai*, in which *shén* represents God modified by *kǎi* and *lihai*. However, the combination of *shén* with *hǎochī* was impossible in that God is not edible and cannot be predicated by *hǎochī*. Guoshen created the syntactic context for *shén* to be followed by *hǎochī*, which then initiated reanalysis. This also well explains why *shénhǎochī* appeared much earlier than other combinations. Since Guoshen is a restaurant, it allows the predication by the adjective *hǎochī*. After *shén* derived the use of degree adverb from *shénhǎochī*, it began to modify a variety of qualities other than the tastiness of food. In summary, to generate the use of degree adverb, metaphor works to link the domain of God with abstract quality and reanalysis brings to the change in syntactic category.

Figure 12 presents the overall derivational routes of the senses of *shén*.¹⁴ It is necessary to note that *shén* originally indicated “thunder” but referred to “the creator and dominator of the universe” through metonymization. People in the

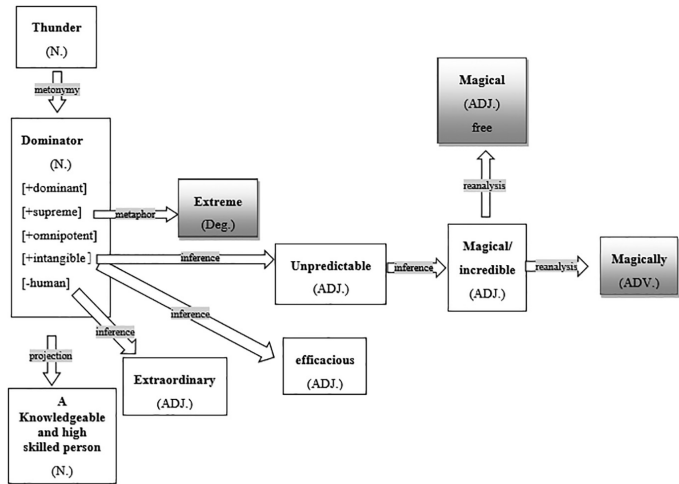


Figure 12 Derivational routes of *shén*

13 One of the reading treats *guōshén* as a proper name, resulting ‘This branch store of Guoshen is delicious’, and the other regards *guō* and *shén* as separate elements.

14 In the figure, □ stands for the sense listed in dictionaries, whereas the shading square indicates a novel use in modern Chinese. The arrows show the direction for meaning generation, and the words on the arrow explain the mechanism adopted for semantic change.

ancient time thought that God used thunder to show his anger, so they worshipped God to get peace. The thunder-God association is a part-whole metonym. As the creator/dominator of the universe, *shén* carries many features. The feature [– intangible] plays an important role to generate the uses of adjectives, including “unpredictable”, “incredible” and “efficacious”. The novel usages in modern Chinese are mainly derived through metaphor and reanalysis.

5. Collocations of the degree adverb *shén*

Regarding collocation competence, *shén* previously collocated with fewer words than other degree adverbs did. However, data from 2014 to 2016 revealed that the collocation competence of *shén* developed rapidly; increasingly more words were used in collocation with *shén*. Both monosyllabic and polysyllabic words were used in conjunction with *shén*.

- (26) 女神 最近 神 忙， 除了 處理 TIWA
 nǚshén zuìjìn shén máng chúle chùlǐ TIWA
 goddess recent SHEN busy besides deal with TIWA
- 和 關 廠 工人 事務 之外， 勞心
 hé guān chǎng gōngrén shìwù zhīwài láoxīn
 and close factory worker affair besides labor mind
- 勞力 之 虞 還要 照顧 期中考
 láoli zhī yú hái yào zhàogù qīzhōngkǎo
 labor body PAR worry also take care mid-term exam

‘The diva was extremely busy recently. Amidst her tremendous efforts in handling the affairs of the Taiwan International Workers Association and the workers of unjustly closed factories, she had to prepare for her midterm exams.’
 (Source: <https://zh-tw.facebook.com/shuchingchuangpublicgoods/posts/458579920888181>)

- (27) 他 長 得 神 高 神 大， 體魄 健碩。
 tā zhǎng de shén gāo shén dà tǐpò jiàn shuò
 he grow PREP SHEN tall SHEN big physique well-built
 ‘He is extremely tall and strong, and physically well built.’
 (Source: <https://books.google.com.tw/books?isbn=9996580903>)

- (28) 觀 課 完了， 時間 過得 神 快，
 guān kè wánle shíjiān guòde shén kuài
 observe class finish time pass SHEN fast
- 覺得 好 空虛
 juéde hǎo kōngxū
 feel very empty

‘I finished auditing the course. Because time flew extremely fast, I felt empty inside.’

(Source: <http://www.plurk.com/m/u/Hilery?offset=1387103407>)

- (29) 長 的 雖然 不是 帥 但是 他 長
 zhǎng de suīrán bùshì shuài dànshì tā zhǎng
 grow PREP although not handsome but he grow
 得 神 可愛 超 像 監獄 兔
 de shén kěài chāo xiàng jiānyù tù
 PREP SHEN cute very like prison rabbit
 的 普京
 de pǔjīng
 GN Pujing
 ‘Although he is not handsome, he looks extremely cute, just like Putin in *Usavich*.’
 (Source: http://a24250308.blogspot.tw/2013/10/blog-post_4192.html)
- (30) 明明 我 認真 的 跟 甚麼 鬼
 míngmíng wǒ rènzhēn de gēn shénme guǐ
 obviously I serious PAR and what ghost
 一樣 大家 笑得 神 開心 是 怎樣
 yīyàng dàjiā xiàode shén kāixīn shì zěnyàng
 same everyone laugh SHEN happy be what
 ‘I am certainly very serious, but why is everybody extremely happy?’
 (Source: <https://www.ptt.cc/bbs/Sagittarius/M.1349107340.A.DA8.html>)

In terms of commendatory and derogatory senses, *shén* has been collocated with derogatory words such as *màn* (慢 ‘slow’), *chǒu* (醜 ‘ugly’), and *tǎoyàn* (討厭 ‘hate’) in the past two years.

- (31) 訂 書 來 的 神 慢, 舊 書
 dìng shū lái de shén màn jiù shū
 order book come PREP SHEN slow old book
 也 就 算 了, 連 新 刊 都 會 慢
 yějiù suànle lián xīn kān dōuhuì màn
 then forget PAR even new issue will slow
 至少 一個月 就 說不過去 了。
 zhìshǎo yīgè yuè jiù shuōbùguòqù le
 at least one month then hardly justifiable PAR
 ‘The ordered books were delivered extremely slowly. Never mind the old books; delivering new issues a month late is unacceptable.’
 (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/firely.soul/activity/933859533307275>)
- (32) 最 可氣 的 是 有些 女的 長得
 zuì kěqì de shì yǒuxiē nǚde zhǎngde
 most angry PAR be some female grow
 神 醜 不帶 拐彎 滴 能
 shén chǒu bùdài guǎiwān dī néng
 SHEN ugly without difficulty PAR able

嫁出去 鬥 不錯 了 還 挑挑挑
 jià chūqù dòu bùcuò le hái tiāo tiāo tiāo
 marry out already not bad PAR still picky

‘The most annoying part is that even though some women are frankly extremely ugly, they pick on their dates. They should be grateful if they can get married.’

(Source: <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/2995911052>)

- (33) 神 討厭 那些 自己 穿 地攤貨，
 shén tǎoyàn nàxiē zìjǐ chuān dītān huò
 SHEN hate those self wear stall goods

卻 鄙視 別人 穿牌子 衣服的
 què bǐshì biérén chuānpáizi yīfú de
 but despise others wear brand clothes

‘I despise people who scorn others wearing designer clothes when they themselves wear clothes bought from stalls.’

(Source: <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-funinfo-5843857-1.shtml>)

- (34) 老闆娘 臉 神 臭 盤子 狂
 lǎobǎnniáng liǎn shén chòu pánzi kuáng
 boss lady face SHEN unhappy dish crazy

摔 不 破
 shuāi bù pò
 throw not break

‘The boss lady had an extremely unhappy facial expression. She threw the dishes violently but none of them broke.’

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/100000441471153/activity/815109961847045>)

- (35) 情人節 單身 神 難過 一篇篇
 qíng rén jié dānshēn shén nánguò yīpiānpiān
 valentine single SHEN sad every

閃 文 看了 就 羨慕 鳴。
 shǎn wén kànle jiù xiànmù wū
 affection article read then envy PAR

‘Being single on Valentine’s Day was extremely sad. I could not help envying others who posted articles expressing affection for their lovers.’

(Source: <http://lineq.tw/q/2493290>)

- (36) 老媽 神 嘮叨 逼 瘋 兒子
 lǎomā shén láodāo bī fēng érzi
 mother SHEN harp force crazy son

‘The extremely nagging mom drove her son crazy.’

(Source: <http://toutiao.com/i4734070513/>)

Such a collocation might cause the negative connotation of *shén*. Indeed, *shén* as an adjective began to develop negative meanings. Example (37) was a title of an article.

- (37) 神 翻譯 不斷 中 共 黨 報
shén fānyì bùduàn zhōng gòng dǎng bào
SHEN translation continue Chinese Communist Party newspaper
- 怒 了
nù le
angry PAR
- ‘The People’s Daily, an official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, criticized the excessive amount of extremely terrible translations.’
(Source: <http://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20150112003028-260409>)

The article mainly discussed a large quantity of weird translations appearing in Mainland China. For example, *gāncàilèi* (乾菜類 ‘dried vegetables’) was translated as “fxxkvegetables” and *qǐng zài yī mǐ xiàn wài děng hòu* (請在一米線外等候 ‘Please wait one meter away’) as “Please wait outside a noodle”. Instead of meaning “extremely excellent translations”, *shénfānyì* here indicated “extremely terrible translations”. *Shén* implies “extreme”; however, instead of indicating the extreme of excellence, it emphasizes the extreme of terribleness in this sentence. The example tells the ongoing disappearance of the positive connotation of *shén*. However, the positive and negative connotations are mainly from the context instead of being part of the meaning of *shén*, especially in the cases in which *shén* modifies a noun. *Shénchē* refers to either a very good car or a bad car, and only from context can the correct meaning be got.

It seems that *shén* behaves quite the same as the other degree adverbs. It collocates both monosyllabic and bisyllabic predicates with either positive or negative senses. Nonetheless, a trisyllabic predicate (e.g., *bù gāoxìng* 不高興) or a quadrisyllabic predicate (e.g., *líng yá lì chǐ* 伶牙俐齒) makes *shén* distinct from the other degree adverbs in that *shén* fails to modify neither a trisyllabic predicate nor a quadrisyllabic one. In Table 3, it is obvious that the trisyllabic and quadrisyllabic predicates could be modified by many degree adverbs such as *hěn* and *fēicháng*, but the modification of *shén* is unacceptable.

Table 3 Collocations of degree adverbs with trisyllabic and quadrisyllabic predicates

Excessive degree adverb	Predicate	
	bù gāoxìng 不高興 (unhappy)	líng yá lì chǐ 伶牙俐齒 (clever and eloquent)
hěn 很	hěn bù gāoxìng 很不高興	hěn líng yá lì chǐ 很伶牙俐齒
fēicháng 非常	fēicháng bù gāoxìng 非常不高興	fēicháng líng yá lì chǐ 非常伶牙俐齒

Excessive degree adverb	Predicate	
	bù gāoxìng 不高興 (unhappy)	líng yá lì chǐ 伶牙俐齒 (clever and eloquent)
yǒugòu 有夠	yǒugòu bù gāoxìng 有夠不高興	yǒugòu líng yá lì chǐ 有夠 伶牙俐齒
hǎo 好	hǎo bù gāoxìng 好不高興	hǎo líng yá lì chǐ 好伶牙 俐齒
wúdí 無敵	wúdí bù gāoxìng 無敵不高興	wúdí líng yá lì chǐ 無敵伶 牙俐齒
tǐng 挺	tǐng bù gāoxìng 挺不高興	tǐng líng yá lì chǐ 挺伶牙 俐齒
guài 怪	guài bù gāoxìng 怪不高興	guài líng yá lì chǐ 怪伶牙 俐齒
shén 神	*shén bù gāoxìng 神不高興	*shén líng yá lì chǐ 神伶牙 俐齒

To explain this discrepancy, the possible reason is *shén* is so new that it has not yet had an overall generalization. However, the more convincing reason is that the prototypical meaning of *shén* has been so deeply rooted in people's mind that it would be parsed as the subject when being followed by a long expression, resulting in “*Shén, bù gāoxìng*” ‘God is unhappy’. A speaker himself might feel confused when uttering *shénbùgāoxìng*; in consequence, such a combination would be abandoned.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the usage of the word *shén* in modern Chinese from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Through a review of diachronic literature, the derivational routes of various meanings were identified. The study found that most of the metaphorical meanings were derived directly and indirectly from the prototypical sense of *shén*, showing that seemingly unrelated meanings were subtly associated. Furthermore, different levels of closeness regarding the relationships among the meanings were determined according to derivational routes and the chronological order of the meanings. In addition, by exploring synchronic data, the authors observed the collocations and productivity of *shén* when used as a degree adverb. The derivation of *shén* as a degree adverb identified the natural progression of human cognition: from concrete to abstract and from known to unknown. Figure 13 presents the derivation of *shén* from God to a degree adverb. In the chronology of its meanings, *shén* was first used to metaphorize human beings before it was extended to describe abstract qualities such as tastiness, cuteness, and impressiveness. Since the qualities modified by *shén* are all gradable, there is a scale involved. The attribute of *shén* as the highest point corresponds to the topmost point of the scale, consequently leading to the excessive meaning.

EX. *Shén ài shìrén* *Tā shì dǔshén* *Shénhǎochī*
'God loves everyone.' 'He is an expert of gambling.' 'Extremely delicious!'

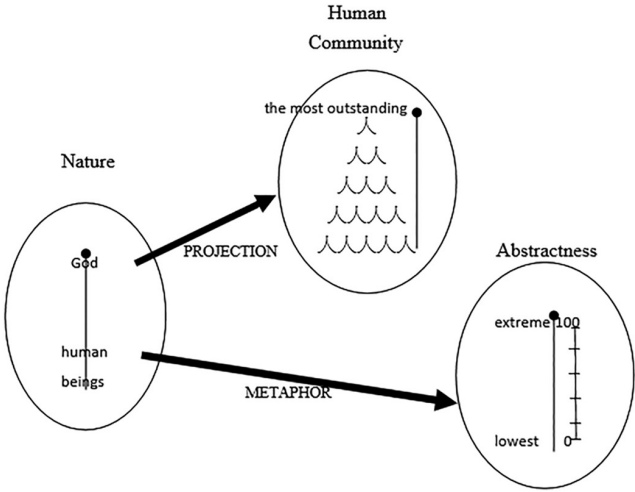


Figure 13 The derivation of *shén* from God to degree adverb

Polysemy is popular in every language; however, how to memorize the multiple senses of a polyseme might be a challenge. Through knowing the development of the usages of *shén*, it is revealed that semantic change is mostly not accidental but triggered by some mechanisms such as reanalysis, inference, metaphor, and metonymy. Trying to trace the relations among the various meanings of a word would benefit the learning of polysemy.

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現代漢語的“神”

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提要

現代漢語最近出現了一個新興的程度副詞——“神”，“神好吃”、“神有趣”的用法不僅出現在口語中，更常被用來當作標題吸引讀者的眼光。“神”原指萬物的創造者與主宰者。在現代漢語，除了原義之外，人們也經常使用“神”來修飾事物（如：神基因）或動作（如：神回）。“神”究竟有多少意義？它又是如何衍生出程度副詞的用法？本文章將以“神”為對象，研究它的義項與詞類並找出各個用法之間的關係，再進一步探討程度副詞用法的衍生途徑。結論說明了“神”的各個意項是透過重新分析、推論、比喻、換喻等機制直接或間接從原始義衍生而來，其程度副詞的用法則是透過比喻與重新分析產生。

關鍵詞

語義屬性、多義詞、程度副詞、比喻、換喻