

# A Comparative Study on the Meaning of Chinese Verbs “洗 / 刷” and Korean Verb “씻다”

Jingru Chen, Qinghao Wu

## Abstract:

Polysemy verbs are common in Chinese and Korean, but this does not mean that corresponding words in the two languages possess the exact same meanings. Based on the example sentences in the dictionary and their daily usage, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences in the basic meanings, extended meanings, and specific usage between the Chinese verb “洗 / 刷” and the Korean verb “씻다”. In the basic meaning, “洗 / 刷” “씻다” share a common meaning of “making dirty things disappear”. However, their extended meanings are quite different, and there exist complex corresponding relationships between them. In terms of usage, the Chinese word “洗 / 刷” is mostly used to express negative emotions. For example, “洗” has the extended meaning of “robbing or killing” and “刷” has the extended meaning of “eliminating”. In contrast, “씻다” is mostly used to express positive emotions and has the intention of “getting rid of injustice, misunderstanding and guilt”. In addition, from the field of their usage, “洗 / 刷” is wider than “씻다”, and it is commonly used in the field of science and technology.

**Keywords:** Korean; verb; 洗 / 刷 ; 씻다 ; meaning; contrastive analysis

中图分类号: gOR 文献标识码: ‘

**Classification number of National Library of China:** H03 **Reference code:** A

**Date of submission:** 2023-02-04

## About the author:

Chen Jingru (2001-), female, Han nationality, from Zibo, Shandong province, undergraduate study, University: Beijing Foreign Studies University, major: Korean (language), Research direction: (Korean) linguistics.

**Address:** East Campus of Beijing Foreign Studies University, Haidian District, Beijing

**Postal code:** 100081

**Tel.:** 13953302019

Wu Qinghao (2002-), male, Mongolian, from Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, undergraduate, university: Beijing Foreign Studies University, major: Korean (language), Research direction: (Korean) linguistics.

**Address:** East Campus of Beijing Foreign Studies University, Haidian District, Beijing

**Postal code:** 100081

**Tel.:** 13522554674

## 1. Introduction

Language plays an indispensable role in cross-cultural communication. Today, when China-Korea exchanges and cooperation are deepening, the study of Chinese and Korean languages, especially the study of verbs, is of great significance. This study aims to compare the meaning of the common verbs “洗 / 刷” (wash, brush) and “씻다” (wash) in Chinese and Korean, and to analyze the similarities and differences between the two words. At present, in the field of Chinese and Korean linguistics, there are many comparative studies on certain groups or groups of words in Chinese and Korean. But most of these studies are limited to the study of adjectives, and there is

almost no research on “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”. “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” have rich extended meanings in Chinese and Korean, and there are great differences between the extended meanings of both. Therefore, “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” can serve as research objects in order to analyze the cultural differences between China and South Korea in the use of language, which has high research value. Meanwhile, this study also has certain reference values for verb teaching in Chinese and Korean education.

## 2. The comparison of the basic meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”

Table 1 shows the basic meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “

씻다” included in the Modern Chinese Dictionary (the sixth edition)<sup>1</sup> and the Standard Language Dictionary (the

electronic edition)., and the basic meanings of the two are partially corresponding.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1. Basic meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”**

	씻다 (wash)(v.)	洗 (wash)(v.)	刷 (brush)(v.)
基本含义 B a s i c meanings	1. 물이나 휴지 따위로 때나 더러운 것을 없게 하다 . <sup>3</sup> To make stainless with water or tissue. <例>얼굴을 씻다 ./ 때를 씻다 ./ 쌀을 씻어 안치다 .Eg.: Wash face / dirt / rice.	1. 洗脚。Footbath <例>洗去足垢。/ 王方踞床洗。Wash the feet / The Emperor squatting the bed washing his feet. 2. 用水或汽油等去掉物体上的泥污。Remove mud from objects with water or gasoline. <例>洗衣服。/ 洗零件。 Eg.: Wash the clothes / wash the accessory.	1. 用刷子清除或涂抹。 Clear or apply with a brush. <例>刷牙。/ 刷鞋。/ 刷锅。/ 用石灰浆刷墙。Eg.: Brush one's teeth./ brush shoes./ Brush the pot./ Brush the walls with lime slurry.

As shown in Table 1, the basic meaning of “씻다” in the Standard Language Dictionary (electronic version) is “물이나 휴지 따위로 때나 더러운 것을 없게 하다” (To make stainless with water or tissue). The Korean-Chinese Dictionary of Korea University<sup>4</sup> classifies the basic meaning of “씻다” in more detail and explains the meaning of “씻다” from two perspectives. The first is “(people) wipe the body or objects with water so that the dirty things disappear” . The second is “(people) wipe away tears or sweat and make them disappear”<sup>5</sup>. The former highlights actions such as ‘얼굴을 씻다’<sup>6</sup> (wash face), meaning use a liquid to remove dirt from the surface.<sup>7</sup> The latter emphasizes wiping the liquid attached to the surface of the object, similar to the meaning of ‘닦다’<sup>8</sup>(wipe).

The Modern Language Dictionary (2015) also explains the basic meaning of “洗” from two levels. The first is “洗脚” (footbath), and the second is “用水或汽油等去掉物体上的泥污” (Remove mud from objects with water or gasoline). From this, it can be analyzed that the second basic meaning of “洗” completely covers its meaning in the first layer, and in fact, the second basic meaning is expanded from the first meaning of “洗脚” from ancient

Chinese.

By comparison, the corresponding relationships between the basic meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” are clear: “洗” only corresponds to the first meaning of “씻다” , while “刷” is difficult to form a correspondence with “씻다” in the application. The second basic meaning of “씻다” actually corresponds to “擦” (wipe). In the Modern Chinese Dictionary, the basic meaning of “刷” (brush) is “to clear or smear with a brush” . It can be seen that Korean “씻다” and Chinese “洗 / 刷” both have the basic meaning of “decontamination” . However, in applications, the usage situation of “刷” (brush) is very different from the Korean language “씻다” , so it is difficult to find examples of translating “刷” into “씻다” . In fact, when used as the original meaning, “刷” is more closely related to the Korean language ‘닦다’ (wipe). The correspondence mentioned above can be seen in the following examples.

(1) 가 . ( 사람이 몸이나 물체 따위를 ) 물 따위로 닦아 때나 더러운 것이 없어지게 하다 (Human body or object) Wipe something with water to make dirt disappear.

깨끗이 씻은 얼굴 —— 洗干净的脸 Washed face.

洗手。—— 손을 씻다 . Wash hands.

나 . ( 사람이 눈물이나 땀 따위를 ) 닦아 내서 없어지게 하다

눈물을 씻다 . —— 擦眼泪。Wipe tears.

他用手擦了擦额头上的汗，继续干活。—— 그는 손으로 이마의 땀을 씻어 가며 일을 계속했다 . He wiped the sweat on his forehead with his hand and continued his work.

On the whole, the basic meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” have a relatively complex partial correspondence, and because of the incomplete correspondence of their meanings, their actual using fields are also different. Specifically, the basic meaning of the Korean verb “씻다” is more widely used than the Chinese “洗” . Besides

1 『표준 국어대사전』 ( 전자판 )

2 由字典可知,韩语中的“씻다”词性为动词,而中文的“洗 / 刷”除了动词词性外还有名词词性。本研究将仅考察“洗 / 刷”做动词时的含义。

3 使用水、抽纸等让污垢消失。

4 『[ 고려대학교출판부 ] 한중사전』

5 ( 사람이 눈물이나 땀 따위를 ) 닦아 내서 없어지게 하다

6 洗脸。

7 액체를 사용하여 물체 표면에서 더러운 것을 제거하다

8 擦。

corresponding to “洗”, “씻다” can also correspond to other Chinese characters like “擦”(wipe), “淘”(cleanout). In addition, the Chinese “刷” and the Korean “씻다” are only partly similar in basic meaning, and there are great differences in their usage, without obvious correspondence.

### 3. The comparison of the extended meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”

As mentioned above, there is a partial correspondence

between the basic meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”, in that both have the basic meaning of “decontamination”, but in actual use, the corresponding relationship of the extended meaning of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” is much more complicated. In the following discussion, the extended meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” are elaborated.

Table 2 shows the extended meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” included in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (the sixth edition) and the *Standard Language Dictionary* (the electronic edition).

Table 2 Extended meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”

	씻다 (wash)(v.)	洗 (wash)(v.)	刷 (brush)(v.)
引申含义 Extended meanings	<p>1. 누명, 오해, 죄과 따위에서 벗어나 다른 사람 앞에서 떳떳한 상태가 되다. Get rid of injustice, misunderstanding, guilt, etc., in front of others. &lt;例&gt; 치욕을 씻다. / 저의 억울한 누명을 씻어 주세요. / 세무 조사에 대한 일부의 의혹을 씻기 위해서는 그 조사 과정이 투명해야 한다. Eg.: In order to dispel some doubts about tax investigations, the investigation process must be transparent.</p> <p>2. 원한 따위를 풀어서 마음속에 응어리가 된 것을 없애다. Eliminate resentment, or the knot in your heart. &lt;例&gt; 그에게 천추에 씻지 못할 원한이 맺혔다. Eg.: He had forged a lasting and of resentment.</p> <p>3. (주로 ‘인연’ 따위와 함께 쓰여) 관계 따위를 끊다. 断绝关系 Break off (relations with ...) &lt;例&gt; 그는 속세와의 인연을 씻고 산으로 들어갔다. Eg.: He washed away fate with the world and entered the mountains.</p> <p>4. (주로 ‘걱정’, ‘부진’ 따위와 함께 쓰여) 현재의 좋지 않은 상태에서 벗어나다. Get rid of the current bad state. &lt;例&gt; 여행은 당신의 걱정을 씻어 줄 것입니다. / 그는 한동안의 부진을 씻고 다시 활동을 시작했다. / 음악을 들으면서 하루의 피로를 씻는다. Eg.: Travel will dispel your concerns. / He swept his slump and started again. / Listen to the music, and sweep away the fatigue of the day.</p>	<p>1. 清除 Clean up &lt;例&gt; 清洗. Eg.: Wash.</p> <p>2. 像用水洗净一样抢光或杀光 Grab or kill everything like washing it away with water. &lt;例&gt; 洗劫. / 洗城. Eg.: Loot. / massacre the inhabitants of a captured city.</p> <p>3. 印相的显影、定影 Development and fixing of the impression phase. &lt;例&gt; 洗相片儿. Eg.: Develop a film.</p> <p>4. 把磁带上的录音、录像去掉. Remove the recording and video from the tape. &lt;例&gt; 洗带. Eg.: Remove the recorded video.</p> <p>5. 革除 Abolish &lt;例&gt; 洗伐. / 洗手奉职. / 洗心. Eg.: get rid of / be devoted to one's duty / Remove evil thoughts or distractions.</p> <p>6. 整治; 雕琢 Remediation; carving &lt;例&gt; 洗竹. / 洗玩. / 洗削. Eg.: cut bamboo / play / abolish</p> <p>7. 琢磨, 提炼 Think about, refine &lt;例&gt; 洗句. / 洗补. Eg.: Refine the sentence / modify and supplement.</p>	<p>1. 清扫; 揩拭; 冲洗. Clean; wipe; rinse &lt;例&gt; 刷刮. / 刷涂. / 刷刨. / 刷剃. Eg.: scratch / clean / brush / shaving.</p> <p>2. 清除; 洗雪. Clear; wipe off disgrace. &lt;例&gt; 刷抹. / 涂抹. Eg.: Brush and wipe / smear.</p> <p>3. 选取. Select &lt;例&gt; 刷选. / 刷充. Eg.: choose / choose to be.</p> <p>4. 查, 查核; 查究. Check; investigate. &lt;例&gt; 刷照. / 刷卷. / 刷问. / 刷磨. / 刷目. Eg.: Check up on / investigate / look into / make a thorough investigation of.</p> <p>5. 搜括. Loot. &lt;例&gt; 刷刮. / 刷洗. Eg.: raise / brush.</p> <p>6. [口]: 开除; 淘汰. [spoken] Discharge; eliminate. &lt;例&gt; 他经常破坏劳动纪律, 让厂里给刷了. / 今年高考他被刷了. Eg.: He often broke labor discipline and was discharged by the factory. He was eliminated in the college entrance examination this year.</p> <p>7. &lt;方&gt;: 犹打扮. &lt;localism&gt; Dress up. &lt;例&gt; 刷饰. / 刷扮. Eg.: Brush ornaments. / Brush.</p>

By comparing the extended meanings of " 씻 다 " and " 洗 / 刷 ", the corresponding relationship between the two can be roughly divided into the following three types. First, " 씻 다 " and " 洗 / 刷 " have exactly consistent extended meanings; second, " 씻 다 " has completely different extended meanings to " 洗 / 刷 ", with some meaning appearing in one certain language; third, there is some antagonistic relationship within the extended meanings of " 씻 다 " and " 洗 / 刷 ", but their meanings are not completely consistent, and there are other better translation versions. These three corresponding relationships are analyzed through dictionary definitions and daily examples as follows.

Comparing the extended meaning of " 씻다 " and " 洗 / 刷 ", we can find that there are roughly three kinds of corresponding relationships between the two extended meanings. First, there is completely consistent correspondence between " 씻다 " and some of the extended meanings of " 洗 / 刷 "; second, the extended meanings of " 씻다 " and " 洗 / 刷 " are completely different, and there is a non-corresponding relationship; thirdly, there is a part corresponding relationship between " 씻다 " and the extended meaning of " 洗 / 刷 ", but the meanings between the two are not completely consistent, and there are better translation methods. The following is an analysis of these three correspondences through dictionary definitions and daily example sentences.

The first is when " 씻다 " and " 洗 / 刷 " have the exact same extended meaning, as shown in (2).

(2) 가 . 치욕을 씻다 . — 洗刷耻辱 . Wash away shame.

나 . 저의 억울한 누명을 씻어 주세요 . — 请雪洗我的冤屈 . Please wash away my grievances.

다 . 보이그룹 멤버들 , 학교 갑질 의혹 씻었다 . — 男团成员洗清针对校园霸凌的疑惑 . The boy band members cleared their doubts about school bullying.

라 . 혐의를 씻어 떨구다 . — 洗脱嫌疑 . Get rid of suspicion.

It can be seen from (2) that both " 씻다 " and " 洗 / 刷 " have the extended meaning of " getting rid of injustice, misunderstanding, and evilness ", which completely correspond to each other.

The second is that the extended meaning of " 씻다 " and " 洗 / 刷 " is completely different, as shown in (3).

(3) 가 . 그는 속세와의 인연을 씻고 산으로 들어갔다 . — 他了却尘缘上了山 . He washed away fate with the world and entered the mountains.

나 . 그에게 천추에 씻지 못할 원한이 맺혔다 . — 跟他结下了千秋难解的怨恨 . Forged a lasting resentment with him.

As can be seen from (3), " 씻다 " cannot correspond

to " 洗 / 刷 " in the two extended meanings of " 원한 따위를 풀어서 마음속에 응어리가 된 것을 없애다 " (bring sth. out in its entirety) and " 관계 따위를 끊다 " (break off all relations with ...), but should be translated as " 解除 / 抛却 " (release/discard).

The third is that there is a partial correspondence between the extended meanings of " 씻다 " and " 洗 / 刷 ", as shown in (4).

(4) 가 . 피로를 씻다 . — 洗去 / 缓解疲劳 . Wash off / relieve fatigue.

나 . 여행은 당신의 걱정을 씻어 줄 것입니다 . — 旅行将会为你洗去 / 摆脱烦恼 . Travel will relieve your fatigue.

다 . 자신의 잘못을 씻다 . — 洗刷 / 改正自己的错误 . Correct your own mistakes.

From (4), it can be seen that " 씻다 " can also be translated into " 洗 / 刷 " when being used in " 현재의 좋지 않은 상태에서 벗어나다 " (Get rid of the current bad state), but this kind of collocation is not common. In fact, it can be noticed from the example that in this case, the translation into " 洗 / 刷 " is endowed with a certain literary color, and there is no complete correspondence between the two.

If we compare the extended meanings of " 씻다 " based on " 洗 / 刷 ", we can find that the number of extended meanings of " 洗 / 刷 " is much more than that of " 씻다 ", and there are more meanings that cannot be corresponding, as shown in (5) (6). It should be noted that this study's analysis only covers the extended meanings used in daily life, not the part of intentions that only appear in ancient Chinese.

(5) 가 . 敌人把该城洗劫一空 . — 적은 이 마을을 몽땅 약탈했다 . The enemy ransacked the city.

나 . 冲洗照片 — 사진을 현상하다 . Develop films.

다 . 洗磁带 — 테이프에서 리코핑을 지웠다 . Remove the record video from the tape.

라 . 洗心革面 — 改观천선하다 Cleanse one's heart and order one's behavior.

(6) 가 . 刷选 — 새로 뽑다 Select.

나 . 刷刮路费 . — 노자를 변통하다 . Ask for the travel expense.

다 . 刷问 — 캐묻다 Investigate.

라 . 今年高考他被刷了 . — 올해 대학 입시에서 그는 떨어졌다 . He was eliminated in the college entrance examination this year.

As can be seen from (5) and (6), " 씻다 " cannot correspond to most of the extended meaning of " 洗 / 刷 ". Overall, there exist many differences between the extended meanings of " 洗 / 刷 " and " 씻다 ", which may be related to different ways of thinking in China and South Korea, as well as their different cultures and histories.

#### 4. The comparison of the use of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”

Due to the complex relationships between “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”, their use fields and descriptive effects are also different.

In terms of the using fields, compared with “씻다”, “洗 / 刷” is more often used in the field of science and technology, such as “冲洗照片”(develop photos) and “洗磁带”(remove the video from the tape), while “씻다” cannot be used in the field of science and technology.

In terms of descriptive effects, “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” have their own emphases respectively. In Korean, “씻다” is mostly used to express the refreshing feeling produced by eliminating or getting rid of something, such as ‘인연을 씻다’(cutting off marriage), which

emphasizes “斩断姻缘”(cutting off marriage). On the contrary, the Chinese “洗 / 刷” puts more emphasis on the result of an action, such as “洗劫”(loot), with the emphasis on “财物像水被水冲走一样”(property is like being washed away by water). Therefore, with different thinking modes, cultures, and histories, the usage of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” also present huge differences.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study presents a comparative analysis of the meaning of “洗 / 刷” with “씻다” by elaborating on the sentences in the dictionary and discourses in daily life. Table 3 and Table 4 show the comparison of the basic and extended meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다” respectively.

**Table 3 Comparison of the basic meaning of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”**

	the same meaning	different meanings
씻다 wash	씻다:( 사람이 몸이나 물체 따위를 ) 물 따위로 닦아 때나 더러운 것이 없어지게 하다. (Wipe the body or object with water, etc.) to make dirt disappear. 洗 : 1. 발을 씻다.( 의미 2 에 완전히 포함됨 ) footbath (included in the second meaning) 2. 물이나 휘발유 등으로 물체의 진흙을 제거하다 . Use water, gasoline, etc., to remove the mud from the objects.	( 사람이 눈물이나 땀 따위를 ) 닦아 내서 없어지게 하다 .Wipe away (People's tears or sweat, etc.).
洗 wash		
刷 brush		브러쉬로 지우거나 발라주다 .Wipe off or apply with a brush.

**Table 4 Comparison of the extended meanings of “洗 / 刷” and “씻다”**

	The same meaning	Similar meaning / partly same meaning	Different meanings
씻다 wash	누명 , 오해 , 죄과 따위에서 벗어나 다른 사람 앞에서 떳떳한 상태가 되다 Free from injustice, misunderstanding, guilt and be dignified in front of others 洗 : 清除 Clean up 刷 : 清除; 洗雪 Wipe out (a disgrace)	( 주로 '걱정', '부진' 따위와 함께 쓰여 ) 현재의 좋지 않은 상태에서 벗어나다 . (Mainly used together with “worry”, “malaise”, etc.) to get rid of the current bad state.	원한 따위를 풀어서 마음속에 응어리가 된 것을 없애다 . Eliminate resentment, eliminate the knot in your heart.
洗			( 주로 '인연' 따위와 함께 쓰여 ) 관계 따위를 끊다 . Break off (mainly used with relations)
刷			像用水洗净一样抢光或杀光 Grab or kill everything like washing it with water. 印相的显影、定影 Development and fixing of the impression phase. 把磁带上的录音、录像去掉 Remove the recording and video from the tape. 革除 Abolish 清扫 ; 揩拭 ; 冲洗 Clean; wipe; rinse 选取 Select 查 , 查核 ; 查究 Check; investigate 开除 ; 淘汰 Discharge; eliminate

In the final analysis, the following three conclusions can be drawn. First of all, in terms of basic meaning, “ 씻다 ” has more meanings than “ 洗 / 刷 ”, and the basic meaning of “ 씻다 ” is quite different from “ 洗 / 刷 ”. Secondly, in terms of extended meaning, “ 洗 / 刷 ” and “ 씻다 ” are quite different, with three complex corresponding relationships, namely of total, none, and part correspondence. Thirdly, in terms of their actual usage, “ 씻다 ” puts more emphasis on the feeling brought about by the action, while “ 洗 / 刷 ” puts more emphasis on the result of the action. Besides, “ 洗 / 刷 ” is more often used in the field of science and technology than “ 씻다 ”.

The significance of this research to the field of teaching Chinese and Korean as a foreign language is as follows. First of all, most of the comparative studies on Chinese and Korean vocabulary in the academic circle are limited to adjectives, so this study makes up for the lack of research on verbs to a certain extent, which generates certain theoretical value for further research. Secondly, practically speaking, this study serves as a reference for Chinese and Korean teachers to help learners understand more deeply the different meanings of “ 洗 / 刷 ” and “ 씻다 ” in Chinese and Korean language environments, and improve the accuracy and quality of language use.

## Reference

- [1] Dictionary Editorial Office, Institute of Language, *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Modern Chinese Dictionary* (6th edition) [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015:1213; 1396-1397.
- [2] Su Xinchun. *The Modern Chinese Classification Dictionary* [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2013:5-9.
- [3] Luo Yunyan. A study on the significance of “ 高 / 低 (矮) ” and “ 높다 / 낮다 ” in China and South Korea [J]. *Korean Language Teaching and Research*, 2018, (02): 31-38.
- [4] Liu Tong. Comparative study of the semantic correspondence and usage status of the space adjectives “ 大 / 小 ” and “ 크다 / 작다 ” between China and South Korea [D]. *Dalian Foreign Studies University*, 2020:88-92.
- [5] Li Minger. Cognitive meaning analysis of warm words in Chinese and Korean idioms [J]. *Studies on Chinese and Korean Literature*, 2019 (65): 247-272.
- [6] Zeng Wu, Han Rong. A Comparative study of “ 따뜻하다 ” and “ 温 / 暖 ” under the cultural differences between Korea and China [J]. *Philosophy, thoughts and culture*, 2019, No.29:139-158.
- [7] The National Language Academy. *Standard Language Dictionary* (electronic version) [EB/OL](2022-11-01)[2023-02-04]. <https://stdict.korean.go.kr/search/searchView.do?pageSize=10&searchKeyword=%EC%94%BB%EB%8B%A4>.
- [8] Gaoda Institute of Ethnic Culture, Chinese Language Dictionary Compilation Office. [Korea University Press] *Korean-Chinese Dictionary* [M]. Seoul: Korea University Press, 2018: 123-124.