

A Study of the Cultural Factors of Unique Romantic Love Metaphors in Chinese

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Abstract

The paper investigates the cultural factors of unique romantic love metaphors in Chinese according to Kövecses's cultural variation theory. It argues that the conceptualization of specific romantic love metaphor in the Chinese language is mainly influenced by the Yin Yang theory, Buddhism, Daoism, living habits and so on. Specifically speaking LOVE IS MOON metaphor is mainly influenced by the Yin-Yang theory and LOVE IS PREDESTINED AFFINITY metaphor is mainly influenced by the Buddhism, while the two other metaphors LOVE IS A SILK and LOVE IS VINEGAR are influenced by the living habits.

Key words: Conceptual metaphor; Romantic love metaphor; Cultural factor; The Yin Yang theory; Predestined affinity

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INTRODUCTION

According to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual theory, conceptual metaphors are based on embodied experiences. Conceptual metaphors of emotion are no exception. As emotion includes anger, fear, pride, respect, romantic love (Kövecses 1990), so conceptual metaphor

of romantic love is no exception, too. However, although human experiences of emotion are consistent, variation does exist in emotion concepts and metaphors (Kövecses, 2005). Kövecses gave some possible reasons for this, of which one is — variation as a result of differential cultural experiences — cultural variation. Kövecses (2002) gives two possible factors (causes) that bring about cultural variation: one is the natural and physical environment in which a culture is located; the other is the broader cultural context. Here broader cultural context simply means every aspect of a given culture—living habits, traditions and customs, religions—that may bring about cultural variation in the metaphorical use of certain love expressions. Comparing with romantic love metaphors in English, there are some unique romantic love metaphors in Chinese. What makes these unique romantic love metaphor used in Chinese? Our hypothesis is the different cultural factors that make these unique romantic love metaphors used in Chinese possible. Therefore, this paper attempts to make an empirical study of unique romantic love metaphors in Chinese in order to investigate what specific cultural factor makes (creates) the unique romantic love metaphor in Chinese respectively. This study will try to offer some evidence for the contemporary metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics from the viewpoint of Chinese, so as to help place the theory into a wider cross-cultural perspective. In the meanwhile, it can make people have a better and clearer understanding of the notion of romantic love, and also it is helpful to understand in some cultural problems in the foreign language teaching.

1. THE DEFINITION OF LOVE AND LOVE IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PAPER

In Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, the word "love" contains several meanings as follows (Hornby, 1997, p.883):

- (a) "Warm liking or affectionate devotion";
- (b) "Sexual affection or passion";
- (c) "God's benevolence towards mankind";
- (d) "Strong liking for something";
- (e) "Person who is loved; sweetheart";
- (f) "(Informal) delightful person or thing";
- (g) "(Informal) (form of address used by a man to a woman or a child (not necessarily a friend) or by a woman to either sex";
- (h) "(In tennis) no score".

The meanings only show a variety of related but distinct meanings of the word "love" in different contexts and reflect some aspects about features of love. According to the encyclopedia, "love" is "any of a number of emotions related with a sense of strong affection and attachment" and it refers to "a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes", ranging from generic pleasure, for instance "I love the book" to intense interpersonal attraction, for example "I love my husband". "Love" as an abstract concept often refers to a deep, ineffable feeling of softly caring for another person. Love also includes a lot of different feelings, from the passionate desire and intimacy of romantic love to the nonsexual emotional closeness of familial and platonic general love for the profound oneness or devotion of religious love. In this paper, we only discuss "love" in the narrow sense to refer to romantic love --love between couples.

2. METAPHOR AND METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe metaphor as a mapping across conceptual domains and introduce the term conceptual metaphor, which differs from the term metaphorical expressions--a system of coherent linguistic expressions governed by the conceptual metaphor. That is, conceptual metaphor is the abstract notion, which is a result of thinking, or our way of perceiving the world on the basis of our experience with and within the world, while metaphorical expressions are the concrete linguistic forms (a word, a phrase, or a sentence, etc.) that instantiate or make manifest the notions. The same concept may be conceptualized in different ways, depending on how the concept is understood and each of the conceptual metaphor can be expressed by a number of linguistic expressions. So in this paper in each conceptual love metaphor, there are some metaphorical expressions to instantiate it.

3. NINE SAME CONCEPTUAL LOVE METAPHORS AND THEIR EXAMPLE METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS BOTH IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

According to researches (Lakoff, 1980; Pan, 2006; Zhao, 2012; Liu, 2012) on love metaphor, there are about nine

conceptual love metaphors both in English and Chinese, though their correspondent metaphorical expressions are not altogether the same. Here are the nine conceptual love metaphors and their example metaphorical expressions both in English and Chinese.

3.1 Love Is Heart

- (1) My heart will go on. (Song of Titanic)
- (2) I love you with all my heart.
- (3) He held my heart in his hands.
- (4) I lost my heart the first time I saw him.
- (5) *Di yi yan kan jian ta, wo jiu peng ran xin dong liao.*
"I lost my heart when saw him at the first sight."
- (6) *Ta men yi jian qing xin, liang xin xiang yue.*
"They are heart to heart, when they first met."

3.2 Love Is a Unity

- (7) We are one.
- (8) She is my better half.
- (9) He is always my one and only love.
- (10) We were made for each other.
- (11) *Ta men nan she nan fen.*
"They can't separate from each other."
- (12) *Wo men ai de ru jiao si qi.*
"We are inseparable."

3.3 Love Is (a Fluid in) a Container

- (13) He was filled with love.
- (14) She was overflowing with love.
- (15) Warm and cozy feelings welled up inside her.
- (16) Chris poured out his affections on Lisa.
- (17) *Ta dui ta yi wang qing shen.*
"He is devoted to her passionately."
- (18) *Ta chun xin dang yang, xiang you yi zhong li liang zai ti nei chong ji, bu neng kong zhi.*
"Her desire is a power that shocks in the body uncontrollable."

3.4 Love Is Fire

- (19) I am burning with love.
- (20) That kindled love in her heart.
- (21) My skin's still burning from your touch.
- (22) She is his latest flame.
- (23) *Ai qing de huo yan, zai wo men de xin zhong ran shao, cong ci wo lia jiang rong zai yi qi.*
"The love fire burning in our hearts, therefore we will be fused together."
- (24) *Ai qing de chi re sheng guo qian wan tuan de huo.*
"Love warms more than a thousand fires."

3.5 Love Is a Journey

- (25) They're at a crossroads.
- (26) It's been a long, bumpy road.
- (27) Their marriage is on the rocks.
- (28) The course of true love never did run smooth.

- (29) *Zhe yi duan jian xin de ai qing lv tu zhong yu hua shang liao yuan man de ju hao.*

“Finally their love journey which was full of hardships was determined with a happy ending.”

- (30) *Hun yin shi yi ge zhui qiu bu zi you de lv cheng.*
“Marriage is a journey in pursuing non-freedom.”

3.6 Love Is War

- (31) Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled. (Yeats, When You Are Old)
(32) He was overcome by love.
(33) Love takes complete control over her.
(34) Tell me how to win your heart for I haven't got a clue.
(35) *Qing chang zhan chang, ge xian suo chang.*

“People exert their own strengths at both love field and battle field.”

- (36) *Ai qing zhong, yi ge ren shou cheng, yi ge ren gong cheng.*

“In love, one defends the castle while the other attacks the castle.”

3.7 Love Is Disease

- (37) Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you. (Shakespeare, Sonnet 118)
(38) My love is as a fever, longing still. (Shakespeare, Sonnet 147)
(39) He's gone mad over her.
(40) There is no remedy for love but to love more.
(41) *Ta huan liao dan xiang si de xin bing.*
“He suffers from love sickness.”
(42) *Gan qing de shang hen nan yu he.*
“The hurt caused by love is not easy to be healed.”

3.8 Love Is Plant

- (43) My love is a red, red rose. (Robert Burns, My Love is a Red Red Rose)
(44) Love is like a flower, it must flower and fade. (D. H. Lawrence, The Mess of Love)
(45) Love grew up between them.
(46) I say love it is a flower, and you it's only seed. (The Rose by Westlife)
(47) *Rang wo men de ai sheng gen, fa ya, kai hua, jie guo ba !*

“Let our love strike root, budding blossom and finally fruiting!”

- (48) *Ta men de ai zheng zai ku wei.*
“Their love is withering.”

3.9 Love Is Insanity

- (49) I'm insane about her.
(50) He's gone mad over her.
(51) She drives me out of my mind.
(52) She constantly raves about him.
(53) *Ta rang ta shen hun dian dao.*
“She made him entranced.”

- (54) *Qin ai de, ni shi wo feng kuang.*
“You drive me crazy, my dear.”

4. THE UNIQUE LOVE METAPHORS IN CHINESE

According to our research, there are four unique love metaphors in Chinese, the following are the four unique conceptual love metaphors and their example metaphorical expressions in Chinese.

4.1 Love Is Moon

- (55) *Si jun ru man yue, ye ye jian qing hui.*

“How I miss you my husband, every night, as the moon from full to wane, I am getting withered because of lovesick.”

- (56) *Ni wen wo ai ni you duo shen, yue liang dai biao wo de xin.*

“You ask me how much I love you, the moon represents my heart.”

- (57) *Ai qing duo mei ya ! Ai qing xiang jiaojie de yue guang, ai qing xiang shan jian de quan shui.*

“How beautiful love is! Love is like the bright moonlight, love is like a mountain stream of spring water.”

4.2 Love Is Predestined Affinity

- (58) *Ta men de gan qing hen nan de, zhen shi tian ci liang yuan a.*

“Their feeling is hard to maintain, it is really a gift given by the Almighty God.”

- (59) *You yuan qian li lai xiang hui, wu yuan dui mian shou nan qian.*

“As destined by providence you have acquainted the person, otherwise you might have failed although you traveled a thousand li.”

- (60) *Ni lai dao zhe ge shi jian huo xu wei liao yu jian ta, yu ta qian shou, cheng jiu zhe yi shi qing yuan.*

“You came into this world just to meet him, and launch a romantic love with him, to enjoy the predestined relationship.”

4.3 Love Is Silk

- (61) *Tang ruo qing si yi zhan bian duan, na ye suan bu de shi qing si liao.*

“If love is a cut off, it is not a must.”

- (62) *Zhan liao qian ci de qing si que duan bu liao, bai zhuan qian zhe ta jiang wo wei rao. (li zong sheng, “gui mi xin qiao”)*

“I cut the lingering affection a thousand times but can't give up, around me are the hundreds of the sufferings the losses of the affection turn out.”

4.4 Love Is Vinegar

- (63) *Ta hen ai chi cu.*
“He is green.”

- (64) *Ting liao zhe hua, ta you yi xie cu yi.*
“After hearing this, she is a little jealous.”

5. CULTURAL FACTORS IN UNIQUE CHINESE LOVE METAPHORS

The English word “culture” originates from the Latin word “cultura” and its original meaning is related with “cultivation” or “planting”. But in the history, no agreement on the definition of a culture has been reached due to the fact that there is no aspect of human life that is not touched by culture. It is estimated that there have been as many as more than 200 definitions about culture up to now.

Culture is here not understood in the narrow sense of man’s advanced intellectual development, but in the broad anthropological sense to refer to all socially conditioned aspects of human life. The famous British anthropologist E. B. Taylor made the most classic explanation about this concept of culture in *Primitive Cultures* (cited in Avruch, 1998, p.6) as follows: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. Taylor’s definition has continually been the basis of most modern anthropological conceptions of culture. And according to Taylor, culture has the following features:

- (a) Culture is socially acquired instead of biologically transmitted;
- (b) Culture is shared among the members of a community instead of being unique to individual;
- (c) Culture is symbolic. Symbolizing means assigning to entities and events with meanings which are external to them and not able to be grasped by themselves alone. Language is the most typical symbolic system within culture;
- (d) Culture is integrated. Each aspect of cultural ties in with the other aspects.

According to Taylor’s definition of culture and Kövecses’s cultural variation theory, in the next part we will discuss the specific cultural factors which (create) bring about the unique Chinese romantic love metaphors used.

5.1 Love Is Moon

The Chinese culture has traditionally been influenced by the philosophy of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, especially the Yin Yang theory of Taoism. The original yin and yang referred to the shady and sunny sides of a mountain. From very early times, yin and yang represented not only darkness and brightness, but also female and male, and gentleness and stableness. The yin is an energy-mode for a lower and slower key; it is the female or negative principle in nature, fertile and breeding, dark, cold, wet, and mysterious. It is visible in the shadows, in quiescent things, in the north side of a

hill and the south bank of a river. The yang is described as masculine in character—active, warm, dry, bright, procreative and positive. It is visible in the sun, the fire, in anything with heat in it, in the male property of all kinds.

This theory holds the view that all things in the world are governed by the law of the unity of opposites yin and yang. Yin exists in yang and yang exists in yin. Under certain circumstances can they turn into their counterparts. Some counterparts of yin and yang are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Some Counterparts of Yin and Yang

Yin	Moon	Land	Night	Cold	Water	Winter
Yang	Sun	Heaven	Day	Heat	Fire	Summer

Note. Yu, 1998, p.72.

Influenced by the philosophy of Yin Yang theory, the Chinese tend to regard love as a kind of tender, feminine emotion. As is known that the ancient Chinese are conservative, and lovers cannot be allowed to date in public. If they do so, they are considered immoral, indecent, and indelicate. Only at night when the moon appears, lovers begin their dating. Furthermore, the shapes of the moon are unstable. With it round, it may indicate that the lovers are together happily, or a person misses his or her beloved to the largest degree. Besides, moon is always used by ancient Chinese to show their love and missing to their beloved. As the husband goes outside, the wife stays at home, longing for her husband returning. The time when the moon is full, the time the husband and his wife reunify. In other words, moon is used as a tender, soft and moderate feeling to show the missing to the beloved. So the moon and love interrelate with each other in China and it is not surprising to metaphorically conceptualize love in terms of moon.

5.2 Love Is Predestined Affinity

As mentioned before, the Chinese culture has also been deeply influenced by Buddhism, which originated from India and was introduced into China in Tang Dynasty.

In China, a majority of people believe in Buddhism, which has considerably influenced almost every aspect of people’s life since introduced into China. One emphasis of Buddhism is “Metempsychosis”, the transmigration of human being’s soul. The other is cause and effect, which believe that nothing occurs independently of others and the change of everything is due to certain conditions. That is, anything in the universe has its cause and predestination. Therefore, the relationships of human beings are predetermined; love and marriage are predestined in people’s previous existence. The marriage between lovers is predestined and it is the continual affinity of their previous life. In this way, it is accidental in predestination for the lovers to come to know each other, then fall in love and finally get married.

Therefore, it is common for Chinese to conceptualize love in terms of affinity. The conceptual metaphor of “LOVE IS PREDESTINED AFFINITY” is widely accepted in China.

5.3 Love Is Silk

China is located in the east part of Eurasian continent, facing the Pacific Ocean. The altitude lowers gradually from the plateaus to the plains. Vast land, rich resources and plentiful water form the typical agricultural culture. Agriculture has long been dominant in ancient China.

China took the lead in silkworm raising and silk production. It was as early as in the New Stone Age about 4,000 to 5,000 years ago that the Chinese ancestors began to raise silkworm and produce silk. From the spring and autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) to the Qin Dynasty, silk production was increasing all over China. During the Western Han Dynasty, fine silk products were transported to the countries in Southwest Asia and Europe through the well-known “Silk Road”.

The ancient Chinese lifestyle is the farming of men and the weaving of women. The Chinese are interested in using *si* “silk” to metaphorically conceptualize everlasting love relationship between lovers because of the characteristics of silk.

Silk is pliable, tough and hard to snap.

5.4 Love Is Vinegar

As we all know vinegar is a kind of spice in China, making food more delicious and tasteful. And *cu* “vinegar” is a necessary and indispensable spice in China’s eating habits. In the LOVE IS VINEGAR metaphor, vinegar is used to emphasize on the jealous property of love. Thus there exists LOVE IS VINEGAR metaphor.

CONCLUSION

Through our investigation, this paper argues that conceptualization of specific romantic love metaphor in the Chinese language is mainly influenced by the Yin Yang theory, Buddhism, Daoism, living habits and so on. Specifically speaking LOVE IS MOON

metaphor is mainly influenced by the Yin Yang theory and LOVE IS PREDESTINED AFFINITY metaphor is mainly influenced by the Buddhism, while the two other metaphors LOVE IS A SILK and LOVE IS VINEGAR are influenced by the living habits.

We hope this study can offer some evidence for the contemporary metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics from the viewpoint of Chinese and help place the theory into a wider cross-cultural perspective. In the meanwhile, it can make people have a better and clearer understanding of the notion of romantic love, and it also is helpful to the understanding of some cultural problems in the foreign language teaching.

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