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

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 metaphors 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.
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.

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)  
(6)  
“Dì yì yán kàn jiàn tā, wǒ jiù pēng rán xīn dòng liao.”
“I lost my heart when saw him at the first sight.”
(7)  
(8)  
“Tā men yī jiàn qīng xīn, liàng xīn xiǎng yuè.”
“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)  
(12)  
“Tā men nán shé nán fèn.”
“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)  
(18)  
“Tā duì tā yì wáng qíng shen.”
“He is devoted to her passionately.”
(19)  
(20)  
“Ai qíng de huo yàn, zài wǒ men de xīn zhōng rán shǎo, cóng cǐ wǒ lián jiāng róng zài yī qí.”
“The love fire burning in our hearts, therefore we will be fused together.”
(21)  
(22)  
“Líng huó wärn wós Hài yán.”
“Love warms more than a thousand fires.”

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)  
(24)  
“Ai qíng de huo yàn, zài wǒ men de xín zhòng rán shào, cong cǐ wǒ lián jiāng róng zài yī qí.”
“The love fire burning in our hearts, therefore we will be fused together.”
(25)  
“Líng huó wärn wós Hài yán.”
“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.
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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) “People exert their own strengths at both love field and battle field.”
(36) “In love, one defenses 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) “The hurt caused by love is not easy to be healed.”

3.8 Love Is Plant
(42) “Let our love strike root, budding blossom and finally fruiting!”
(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) “If love is a cut off, it is not a must.”
(48) “If love is cutting, it is not a must.”

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) “She made him entranced.”

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.”

4.2 Love Is Predestined Affinity
(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.”

4.3 Love Is Silk
(61) “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) “He is green.”
(64)  *Ting liào 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Moon</th>
<th>Land</th>
<th>Night</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Winter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yang</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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.

REFERENCES