

A Holographic Study of Metaphors Concerning Love in Chinese

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This paper aims to make a thorough analysis of love metaphors in Chinese. Based on the conceptual study of emotional metaphors by Lakoff, Kövecses and others, this paper structures a conceptual metaphor of “love” in Chinese and reveals an understanding of its characteristics and cultural models. For the convenience of discussion, categorization of love in Chinese and a prototype model are first introduced. Second, this paper presents the cultural-specific characteristics by giving a diachronic study of love metaphors in Chinese from the perspectives of historical development and ideology, especially in the era of globalization when abundant metaphors concerning love are coined or introduced from the other languages. And the newly-born expressions in a sense reflect the degree of people’s emotional openness and changes in aspects of traditional cultural modals and values, the awareness of which helps to enhance understanding in cross-cultural communication and promote interpersonal relations, as well as social harmony.

Love is an eternal topic, whether in daily life or in literary works, or in films, which are universal and complex. Due to certain cultural contexts or specific geography, love has its own uniqueness; even an individual has his or her own way in expressing love. Some people hold love as elusive and abstract, and there seems to be no cause of love, therefore the description of conceptual love is beyond practicality. However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) found: “metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words . . . on the contrary, human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical. That is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined” (p. 6). Hence, the conceptual metaphor theory has provided us an important method to explore the conceptual meaning of such emotional words as love. Also, Zoltán Kövecses (2000) points out, inspired by Talmy’s notion of *force dynamic* (p. xv), that what underlies most of the emotion metaphors is a “master metaphor”, namely, emotion as force. He concludes that our notion of emotion is “inherently metaphorical” (p. 86). Another contribution is that he has provided a new synthesis in the study of emotion from a cognitive linguistic perspective, “in which language (conceptualization), body, and culture naturally come together in a unified account of human emotion” (2000, p. xiv). Besides, other cognitive theories such as frame semantics by Fillmore and mental space theory by Fauconnier make the in-depth exploration possible. So far, scholars home and abroad have studied many aspects of human feelings from metaphor theory, including cultural comparisons of emotions in different languages. However, a relatively whole structure on Chinese love (*ai*) has not been done. Therefore, it is a worthwhile and challenging task to do, thus we can take this opportunity to scrutinize many aspects of Chinese love, such as investigate its characteristics and explore what aspects of love in Chinese are often motivated in different cultural contexts. It is worth mentioning that the study of love in this paper is not only confined to the romantic or passionate feeling as most previous studies do. In addition, semantic meaning changes with the time. Kövecses (2006) points out: “the conceptual metaphors that emerge may be based on one component or aspect at a certain point of time and on another at another point of time. Which one is chosen

depends on a variety of factors in the surrounding cultural context” (p. 5). In the new era, Chinese attitudes toward love seem to be changing, and this paper serves to discuss the diachronic change of love in Chinese and give an analysis from the perspectives of historical development and ideology.

Conceptual Structure of Love in Chinese

Categorization of Love in Chinese

In order to have a holographic analysis of love in Chinese, love is divided into three layers in this paper: (a) the cause of love, (b) the trend of love, and (c) the relationship between the agent and recipient of love. Three sub-categories of love can be (a) *adoration*, (b) *affection*, and (c) *benevolence*, which are analyzed as following:

1. Adoration

Cause: the attractive qualities (including appearance, personality, and behavior) of the recipient, which can be specific (a certain person or a game) or abstract (e.g. truth, beauty, or justice)

Trend: to feel happy, the desire to get or enjoy; to approach it, to pursue it, or to establish a friendly relationship with it

Relationship between the recipient and the agent: single directional

2. Affection

Cause: passionate attachment to a person of the opposite sex

Trend: a natural affection which will be intensified or destroyed

Relationship between the recipient and the agent: interactive

3. Benevolence

Cause: the divine or noble quality of the recipient

Trend: aim to maintain, protect and improve its existence or its characteristic; to give, to contribute, even sacrifice for the benefit of the recipient

Relationship between the recipient and the agent: single directional

For adoration and benevolence, the agent or the doer is rather active, whereas the recipient, i.e. the object of love, usually cannot or is not expected to be engaged. That partly explains why the description of love in these two categories is easy to be understood, limited in number, and fewer metaphors are adopted to give further explanation. On the contrary, affection is unique. When the doer expresses his feeling, he expects to get feedback from the recipient, even if the other would not give a response. When the recipient of adoration is a person, adoration and affection seem to be greatly alike, the only difference is that in affection, interaction is preferred. In addition, human emotion involves many factors, and a clear statement requires vivid mapping of concrete things, thus abundant metaphors appear. Next we will focus on the conceptual structure of love based on this category.

Conceptual Metaphor Structure of Love in Chinese

As love belongs to abstract emotion, it will be mapped onto the concrete things or the physiological reflection when described. Based on the postulation that emotion will be expressed through the body or parts of the body and one's feelings, i.e. *physical agitation stands for the emotion* (Ungerer & Schmid, 2001, p. 140), we draw the following metonymy: *Physical agitation stands for the love* (the physical agitation includes increase of body temperature, palpitation of the heart, change of pulse rate, hug, kissing, etc.).

Originating from the above metonymy, we can produce the following metaphor, which is postulated as the most basic: *Love is heart*, from which many branches can be inferred:

Branch 1: Physical Change of Body

When a person feels happy, the heart feels relaxed; when painful, the heart seems to have burden, therefore two kinds of metaphors can be inferred, i.e. the positive ones and the negative ones.

For the positive metaphor:

Love is the body part → *The body parts are the containers for the emotion.*

Based on the above, we can have:

Love is a fluid in a container, or

Love is a river.

Therefore, the following can be inferred:

Love is a dimension/measurement (depth, width, height).

As pressure gets too intense, we can get:

The fluid flows out.

Since love is heart, love can be felt by neuron organs: *Love is the senses/feeling* (auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory) → *Love is taste; Love is a nutrient; Love is appetizing food.*

As we know, heart is part of body, which does exist:

Love is entity → *Love is a unity* → *Love is a structured object.*

Concrete examples are given to illustrate the above structural mapping:

Love is the body part.

全身心地爱着一个人 (Love a person with one's *body and heart*.)

从心眼儿里爱 (Love a person from *the bottom of one's heart*.)

As we know, blood belongs to part of the body, therefore:

Love is a fluid in a container.

爱河 (love river)

爱如泉涌 (Love is like a *fountain* that flows out.)
) 爱在心中激荡 / 爱心荡漾 (Love *popped* in the heart.)
 爱情漩涡 (Love is like a *whirlpool*.)
 爱情滋润他的心 (Love moistened his heart like *spring rain*.)

If love is a river, love has length and depth like a river:

Love is dimension/measurement.
 爱得很深 (love *deeply*)
 薄情寡义 (Love is *thin* and personal loyalty is little.)

Since love is fluid in the body, the temperature of the blood can go higher when the body is full of enthusiasm, so we can have:

Love is hot.
Love is fire.
 挚热的爱 / 火热的爱 (*fiery love*)

When the body temperature goes high, the body part can be imagined as fuel:

Love is a material that can be combustible.
 爱情之火在他们身上点燃。 (Love is *kindled* on them.)

It is held that love creates the world; that is to say, love is the origin of everything, so it can be inferred:

Love is a nutrient.
 我需要爱。 (I *need* love.)
 他渴望爱。 (He *thirsts for* love.)
 没有爱我无法生存。 (I cannot *live* without love.)
 她靠爱维持着。 (She's *sustained* by love.)
 从他身上汲取了爱的力量 (*Scoop* love from him.)

As an emotion, love can be felt by senses, such as touch, hearing, taste, and olfaction:

Love is senses.
 爱情甜如蜜。 (Love is as *sweet* as honey.)
 爱情已麻木。 (Love has been *numb*.)
 爱情很淡 (Love is *not strong*.)

If love can be tasted, then love is:

Love is appetizing food.
 爱情如可口的饭菜 (Love is like *delicious food*.)

If two people fall in love, they will marry and establish a united family; therefore:

Love is unity.
 我们是一个整体。 (We are *one*.)

他们是不可分的。(They are *inseparable*.)
她是我的另一半。(She is my *better half*.)

Since love connects two people and establishes a relationship, it can be regarded as being structured:

Love is a structured object.
爱情破裂了。(They *broke up*.)
他们正在修好。(They are busy *patching up* their relationship.)

So much for the positive conceptual structure inferred from the most basic metaphor. Now let us turn to the negative ones.

From *love is body*, we shall say: *Love is material*, and therefore: *Love is benefit*; *Love is money*; *Love is value*; *Love is power*; *Love is war*; *Love is hunting*; *Love is fishing*; *Love is a disease*.

In order to show love is not unusual material, we usually put value on it:

Love is a valuable commodity.
爱情不能买卖。(Love is neither *bought* nor *sold*.)
我把所有的爱都给了她。(I *gave* her all my love.)
我失去了她的爱。(I've *lost* all my love for her.)
爱情是无价的。(Love is *priceless*.)

When a person tries to win the other's heart, he or she has to adopt some strategy and make a bet, hence we have:

Love is war.
她俘虏了我的心。(She *captured* my heart.)
他征服了她。(He *overpowered* her.)
他赢得了她的芳心。(He *won* her heart.)

When a person falls in love with the other, he or she will find some way to attract and follow after the other often; it is just like a hunting game, where there are traps and hunters:

Love is hunting.
他整日追女孩子。(He is *chasing* girls all day.)
他陷入了她的情网。(He was caught in her love traps.)
他是她的猎物。(He *fell prey* to her.)
爱情陷阱 (Love is a trap.)

Or the way to win the other is like going fishing:

Love is fishing.
钓了个金龟婿 (She *hooked* a rich husband.)
她上钩了。(He *reeled* her in.)

When love is unilateral, it will bring hurt to the body, therefore:

Love is a disease.

害了相思病 (to get ill from missing someone)

Branch 2: Outside Factors

The cause of being happy is partly from outside, therefore we can infer: *The love comes suddenly from outside* → *Love is nature* → *The love is a living organism* (i.e. *Love is plant; Love is flower; Love is animal*).

Love comes suddenly from outside. The way to convey love through outside things is often adopted in Chinese poems. Take Wangwei's (a famous ancient poet in the Tang dynasty) poem for example:

秋夜曲

桂魄初生秋露微，轻罗已薄未更衣。
 息箏夜久殷勤弄，心怯空房不忍归。

The main idea is: with the autumn's coming, the author feels lonely and longs for love. He tries to express this feeling through the change of the season. Another example:

相思

红豆生南国，春来发几枝；
 愿君多采撷，此物最相思。

The author misses his love very much and tries to convey his deep emotion by means of *Hongdou* (red bean).

Love is also compared to the other outside things, such as:

Love is nature.

爱情就像沙尘暴。(Love is like a sandstorm.)

It is generally believed love is animate, therefore:

Love is a living organism.

培育爱的花朵。(Cultivate the love flower.)

爱情是脆弱的。(Love is fragile.)

Branch 3: Magic Force

Love is a passion, the cause of which is beyond explanation, therefore we apotheosize it by virtue of magic: *Love is magic; Love is god; The object of love is a goddess:*

Love is magic.

我好像中了邪。(I was spellbound.)

她使我着迷。(She had me hypnotized.)

爱是盲目的。(Love is blind.)

我眼里只有她。(I only have eyes for her.)

我疯狂地爱着她。(I am crazy about her.)

Branch 4: Space of Love

Though love is intangible, it does exist in a space, even if the space is boundless, hence:
Love is space → *Love is a motional object in space*:

Love is space.

恋爱中 (be *in* love)

爱上 (to fall *in* love with)

爱在心里 (Love *from* the heart.)

爱下去 (Keep *loving*.)

If we acknowledge love is in a space, then there may be some ways to gain love, the way of which may be smooth or just the opposite:

Love is a journey.

爱情之路漫长而艰辛。(It's been a *long, bumpy* road.)

我们处在十字路口上。(We're at a *crossroads*.)

你们的关系走到那儿了? (Where is your relationship going?)

If love is a journey, the journey can be a race track, so we have such expressions as:

爱情的跑道 (the *race track* of love)

As illustrated above, love's course is usually bumpy and full of barriers, therefore we have to make an effort to take care of it:

爱情是需要经营的 (Love needs to be *cultivated*.)

Branch 5: Entity of Love

Since love can be regarded as the entity or material, i.e. *Love is material*, then it can be: *Love is weight*; or, *Love is force*. From *Love is the body*, we can regard love as being solid; therefore:

Love is material.

做爱 (*make* love)

爱的奉献 (to *offer* love)

Materials can be weighed, and so does love though it cannot be exactly calculated:

Love is weight.

爱情的分量沉甸甸的。(Love *bears much weight*.)

Since love possesses weight, it becomes forceful as the incarnation of natural force:

Love is a natural force.

她被爱情冲昏了头。(She was *carried away* by love.)

她被爱情淹没了。(She was deeply *immersed* in love.)

The force, of course, can be physical; therefore we can describe it as below:

Love is a physical force.

我被她吸引了。(I was *magnetically drawn* to her.)

碰撞出了火花。(There were *sparks*.)

他们失去了动力。(They lost their *momentum*.)

Speaking of the force, it will be either active or passive; so is love:

爱情是主动 / 被动的。(Love is *active*/Love is *passive*.)

An Analysis of the Metaphorical Structure Concerning Love in Chinese: Characteristics of Love Conceptual Structure and Mapping Theory

From above, we can see that love-relating expressions in Chinese can constitute a large systematic net, just like an open spider-web, which possesses the following characteristics:

1. Hierarchical: having many levels in each branch
2. Open: radiating from the core (the most basic metaphor) and being productive
3. Interwoven: being overlapped among branches
4. Numerous: not being limited in number

These can attribute to the source domain, which covers all the aspects in the world, ranging from our bodies (perceptual and motor apparatus, mental capacities, emotional makeup, etc.), to our interactions with our physical environment (moving, manipulating objects, eating, etc), and to our interaction with other people within our culture (in terms of social, political, economic, and religious institutions) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 117). The reason love has so many source domains (SD) is that it possesses so many qualities, such as sweetness, bitterness, saltiness, elusiveness, blindness, power, etc. For each quality, there are so many SD to be labeled. What SD of love does, in a sense, implies the course and impact of the concept. For example, the verbs kindle (点燃 (*dianran*)) and evoke (唤起 (*huanqi*)) highlight how love is produced. Cultivation (培育 *Peiyu*) implies patience and care are accumulated for love.

As to how the SD is generated in reality, we will refer to the mapping model theory. For instance, *fluid/fluid in a container* as the source domain is popular, especially water. As we know, water is tasteless, but it is indispensable in our daily life and no one will be tired of it. Love, as a passion, is our necessity as well; people cherish the hope that it can be kept forever just like water. Therefore we have such metaphors as 爱情淡如水 (Love is like *plain water*). When fluid is held in a container, it will flow out at a certain pressure. So does love. Passion, when reaching a limit, must find a way out. Thus the correspondences with the two domains are structured and we can get metaphorical entailment or carryover from the source domain to the target domain: when the intensity of love increases, the fluid rises, hereby we have metaphors like 爱如泉涌 (love *wells up*). Hence we can see that the structural aspect of a conceptual metaphor consists of a set of correspondences between a source domain and a target domain.

Cultural Models Reflected by the Conceptual Structure

In fact, it is easy to find the counterparts in English and other languages in the network structure, which shows the great similarity based on the same experience and emotional cognition, i.e., the conceptualization of emotion revealed through language is universal to some extent. Also, it proves that Chinese people have and are able to produce rich emotional experiences. On the other hand, according to Kövecses (2000), metaphors can constitute the cultural model. From the above structures and examples of metaphors about love, we can explore the thinking patterns and values the Chinese people follow:

1. Integration: love is often regarded as a whole entity instead of separate parts.
2. Indirectness or implicitness: there are fewer metaphors expressed by the body parts, which are regarded as too direct; however, vivid images are preferred, and the feelings of love are often expressed through the outside factor, especially by the natural scenes.
3. Harmony: it is highly advocated by seeking common sense and avoiding the discrepancy.

This can explain *bo'ai* (benevolence) and *xi'ai* (adoration). Both are more common in daily expression than *qing'ai* (affection). Besides, that partly explains why there are more positive expressions than negative ones about love in Chinese.

Semantic representation of metaphors takes the form of hierarchical networks. However, due to different cultures and backgrounds, different levels are motivated (Xu, 2004). Similarly, in different periods, due to different environments and ideologies, the metaphors of love in Chinese differ, displaying the time spirit.

A Diachronic Analysis of Metaphors Concerning Love in Chinese

Metaphors of Love in Chinese in Different Periods

For the convenience of discussion, the period is roughly divided as follows: ancient time, from 1840 to 1949, from 1949 to 1980, and from 1980 to present. The word prototype was adopted in the following discussion, meaning the typical image of love evoked in people's mind.

Ancient time. In ancient time, love is ethic and hierarchical. Influenced by the Confucianism and orthodox education, ancient Chinese advocated the three cardinal guides (ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife) and the five constant virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity). In this sense, benevolence can be regarded as the prototype of love for the ancients. In addition, just as many scholars point out that the traditional attitude of Chinese people toward universe or nature is "oneness between Man and Nature" (Jia, 1995, p. 56). Just as a famous essayist Hanyu said: "love is identical to benevolence; heaven itself is benevolence, and heaven and man is a unity ("博爱之谓仁"; 天本身就是仁: "人之美者在于天。天, 人也!"). As to the essence of benevolence, just as Mengzi says, it stresses the blood ties (亲亲, 仁也!). That is, it attaches great importance to the care and respect for the people who have blood ties (Jin,

2006). For the young and the weak, love in Chinese usually bears the sense of caring, respect, and awe for the elder.

Ancient poets tend to write a lot of poems or essays in praise of nature, which fall into the category of adoration, meanwhile also falling into benevolence due to the oneness of nature and man. However, the most natural and spontaneous loving feeling between sexes was rarely expressed in a direct way, some of which were even regarded as taboos. The wife never called the husband “honey” or “sweet heart,” for it is embarrassing to call their love directly; instead they adopted “我们那位/那个”, “孩子他爹”, and “孩子他娘.” Such romantic novels as *Romance of Western Bower* was listed as banned books. The way to express such romantic feeling is rather implicit and usually conveyed with things out of the world view of unity between man and nature, i.e. by means of the metonym or metaphor. In this sense, it illustrates there are more metaphors about *love is thing*.

1840 to 1949. From 1840 to 1949, China suffered a difficult time, from the loss of territory to civil war. A lot of people fought and struggled for freedom and dignity as well as a brighter future. Love for country is the theme, though greatly influenced by Confucianism. Especially after 1919, the spirit of love is greatly shaped by Christianity and democratic ideology, and then love was given the color of equality by the intellectuals, and love has since surpassed the narrow-sensed benevolence of ancient times and rise into humanism. In Binxin’s master works, this has been fully represented (Hu, 2006). Correspondingly, metaphors about love are given such meaning.

1949 to 1980. From 1949 to 1980, it is the period of socialist construction. Love for new country is the theme. In primary school, if a student was asked who he loved most, the definite answer was quickly given, i.e. motherland, instead of father or mother, for it seemed shameful to speak out true feelings. This can be explained by the cultural pattern given by Hofstede. In China, collectivism is highlighted, which means emphasis on (a) the views, needs, and goals of the in-group rather than oneself, (b) social norms and duty defined by the in-group rather than behavior to get pleasure, (c) beliefs shared with the in-group rather than beliefs that distinguish self from in-group, and (d) great readiness to cooperate with in-group members (Samovar, L. A. & Porter, R. E, 1998, p. 68). This pattern illustrates why Chinese people tend to associate love with a big environment. Of course, traditional Confucianism is also one of the elements. Lin Yutang (1990) mentioned the conservativeness as one of the national characteristics of the Chinese people in his *My Country and My People*, which is a good piece of evidence (1990, p. 67). During this period, the expression of personal love is not advocated in public and thus the metaphors of love are less productive.

1980 to present. From 1980 to present, with open policies and more contact with the outside world, things have changed a lot. People tend to express their personal feelings directly in public, especially the young generation. Living in a harmonious society as the only-child, spoiled and taken good care of by their parents, it is more natural for them to feel and convey their love to others. On the other hand, they are prone to be self-centered and probably express their love and hatred without the restrictions of tradition. Of course, the traditional worldview, more or less, has an impact on them. In addition, it depends on the character of individuals. When you log onto the internet or listen to popular songs, love as the main theme is praised or criticized. One popular lyrics goes: “I love you just as mice is fond of rice” (我爱你就象老鼠爱大米), comparing love to rice. This lyric gives us a vivid description and meanwhile reveals the liveliness and humor of the contemporary young

people, and that is the reason for its being popular. Also, abundant metaphors about love are coined and introduced from foreign cultural backgrounds; for example, *love is a gust of wind* (爱情是一阵风), love means flying a kite (爱情是飞舞的风筝), love is a heavy cold (爱情是重感冒), love is to wait for a bus (爱情是等待公共汽车), love is the battery of a cellular phone (爱情是手机电池). The source domains are all from daily life, and people have been used to expressing with the things on hand.

Characteristics of the Present-day Metaphors Concerning Love in Chinese

Today, new metaphors of love occur in abundance and new source domains are being invented or introduced to express personal feelings. For the present-day metaphors of love, the source domains usually display such attributes as following:

1. The new source domains are closely relevant to the rapid development of modern science and technology, especially information technology.
2. The new source domains are influenced by the globalization, i.e. the influence of other cultures and languages.
3. The new source domains tend to be specific, represented by an action or a move.
4. The new source domains tend to be more direct, represented by the organs of the body.
5. The new source domains tend to be personalized.
6. The new source domains tend to be fashionable, meeting the demands of the new era.

Language is the mirror of people's mind. With the accompaniment of such expressions, we can see some Chinese people, especially the young generation, nowadays are more open than before in mind and they easily accept the new things and can find a lot of common qualities in reality. They love life and enjoy life. On the other hand, living in a quick-fix society, they have to endure pressures and are eager to be understood and expect heart-to-heart communication. In such circumstances, love as the basic emotion is most described. Of course, we cannot deny the fact that Confucianism and collectivism still potentially influence people's life and remarks. We Chinese advocate more harmony, which shows there are less metaphors (*love is force*) comparing with the metaphors in English. On the whole, we should acknowledge that people's attitude toward love is more open than before, whether from the category of benevolence or affection.

Conclusion

Love is the universal emotion and shared by all human beings, which can be further evidenced from the above conceptual metaphor structure of love in Chinese. The understanding of the conceptual structure helps to interpret the other emotions and Chinese values. In the era of globalization, enhancing cultural awareness is a necessity and a guarantee for communication. We should not only know ourselves but let others know us. As a result of globalization, the degree of openness in Chinese people has improved, which shows people are expanding their mind and broadening their new outlooks. We tend to exchange with

others, with those of both the same and different cultural backgrounds, thus making smooth cross-culture communication possible and hence facilitating the construction of the harmonious society as well as the interpersonal relationship. Of course, traditional ideology is deeply- rooted and we should learn to avoid the negative effects.

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