

# A Study on Emotional Metaphors in *Yellow Emperor*

Xiaoying Li<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of International Studies, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

<sup>2</sup>Foreign Languages School, Sichuan Medical University, Luzhou, China

Email: [lixiaoying740516@163.com](mailto:lixiaoying740516@163.com), [498487312@qq.com](mailto:498487312@qq.com)

Received 15 September 2015; accepted 18 October 2015; published 21 October 2015

Copyright © 2015 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

The theoretical system of the medical classic *Yellow Emperor* reflects the cultural levels of the Warring States Period, and social history, and science and technology development long after the Qin and Han dynasty, and it also reflects the Chinese traditional mode of thinking. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, study on the book *Yellow Emperor's* emotional metaphor paradigm, cognitive mechanisms and meaning construction, it is found that emotional metaphor is a more general theory which explains the important thinking of physiology, pathology, therapy and health, etc., but it is also found that as long as it is related to disease and health, there will appear magical implication of emotional metaphors.

## Keywords

*Yellow Emperor*, Emotion Metaphors, Cognitive Mechanism, Meaning Construction

---

## 1. Introduction

The landmark book of Chinese medicine theory system, the *Yellow Emperor*, absorbed important achievements, before the Qin and Han dynasty, about astronomy, calendar, biology, geography, anthropology, psychology and philosophy and other disciplines, from many aspects such as gas, the relationship between man and heaven, God-shaped relationship. It deeply discusses and interprets the life phenomena and medical theory, and summarizes medical experience and academic theory before the Spring and Autumn (Guo, 2006: p. 4). Its theoretical system reflects the cultural level and science and technology development of the Warring States Period, and a long period of social history after the Qin and Han dynasty, and it further reflects the Chinese traditional mode of thinking. In various mindsets reflected in the *Yellow Emperor*, the emotional metaphor is more common way of thinking, which elaborates physiology, pathology, and treatment, as well as health theories and so on. From

the perspective of cognitive linguistics, this article mainly studies the emotional Metaphor paradigm, cognitive mechanisms and their meaning constructions.

## 2. Metaphor Research on *Yellow Emperor*

From Cognitive Perspective, studies on the *Yellow Emperor* began in the last few years: for example, Jia (2008) explores the conceptual metaphor on TCM etiology and pathogenesis under the cognitive science background; Yin & Pang (2011) discuss metaphor thinking and creativity in therapy of traditional Chinese medicine; Xie & Jia (2011) elaborate types and functions of metaphorical language in internal classic of Huang Di Nei Jing; Gu, Jia, & Xie (2012) interpret the Viscera state doctrine in traditional Chinese medicine based on metaphorical theory; Jia (2013) does a research of conceptual metaphor of five element theory from the perspective of embodied mind and so on. From about 2009 onwards, there have been some researchers or doctors who do cognitive research on the traditional Chinese medicine language from different perspectives, such as the classic *Yellow Emperor*. Liu & Lu (2013) demonstrates the conceptual metaphor in Huang Di Nei Jing; Zhao (2013) makes a cognitive research on polysemy in *Yellow Emperor's* canon of medicine. On the whole, the country has few scholars or researchers to study specifically the classic medical text, *Yellow Emperor*, from the perspective of English cognitive linguistics. After all, emotional metaphors in the *Yellow Emperor* almost have not yet been involved, thus a study of the emotional metaphors on the medicine classical is essential for linguistic researcher.

## 3. Research on Conceptual Metaphor and Emotional Metaphor

Cognitive linguists think that conceptual metaphors are important thinking ways and cognitive models for people to understand the world. People understand the world and conceptualize the world through conceptual metaphors all the time. In 1725, the Italian philosopher and rhetorician G. Vico discovered the cognitive function of metaphors. Later, his book *New Science* describes his cognitive points of view (Wen, 2004). In the 1930s; Richards published *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, marking the metaphors shifting from rhetoric into semantic field. In 1980, the famous philosopher Johnson and the famous linguist Lakoff co-authored *Metaphors We Live by*, which demonstrates that metaphor has been formally included in the study of cognitive linguistics. Since then, Chinese and foreign scholars examined the concept compositions of basic emotions in Chinese and English under the framework of Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory which is a cognitive tool for people to understand the world, and carried out some comparative study of English and Chinese Emotional Metaphors, such as Lakoff (1980, 1987), Kövecses (1986, 1990, 2000), Lakoff & Kövecses (1987), Lin (1998), Zhang (2000), Wen (2004), Peng (2007), Yue (2006, 2009, 2010), Sun (2013) and so on. In addition, some scholars analyzed the meaning construction process of the emotional metaphors from the perspective of Fauconnier's (1998) Integration Theory which is the whole dynamic process of meaning construction of the conceptualized conception, such as Mei (2007), Yuan (2009). Dynamic image schema theory proposed by cognitive linguists Talmy (2000) can also provide a new perspective for the study of emotional metaphors, because this theory highlights the online dynamic integration process of the meaning construction of the new conception when people conceptualize the world.

## 4. The Concept of Emotional Metaphors in *Yellow Emperor*

Emotional Metaphors conceptualize highly abstract emotions and visible feelings and emotional metaphor theory is a powerful cognitive tool to know the world for human. Peng (2001: p. 355) argues that emotions and feelings are the attitude of objective things and the corresponding behavioral responses that people experience, including simulative context and its interpretation, subjective experience, facial expressions, neural processes and their physiological arousal and so on. Emotion is the most important human's common life experience. Human cognition and emotion are mutual interaction effect. Emotion is often seen as feeling, which lacks of sense of conceptual contents, but, in addition to feel the feeling, we have imposed our understanding on what we perceived. When we act in accordance with emotion, our behaviors are not only based on the feeling, but also on understanding. Emotional concepts are the obvious examples of those very abstract concepts, and there is obvious physical experience basis (Lakoff, 1987: p. 377). Thus, a new research on emotional metaphors carried out by Sun (2013) defines emotional metaphors as emotions characterized by abstract, vague or difficult to express feelings, as invisible, non-material and the associated image, as complicated perception people intend to vividly

describe and understand their own emotions, and those are so-called emotional metaphors. But the author defines the concept of emotional metaphor in this article as follows: when people in order to vividly describe and understand their own emotions and emotional metaphors involved and implied in the conceptualization of the category, these are called emotional metaphors. For example, physicians at the time describe a disease; he will naturally reveal his emotions, such as joy or sorrow or fear and so on. For example, in the chapter *Golden True Speech in Suwen* there is an original sentence as (1) “Oriental green, into the pass in the liver”. At first glance, this sentence is describing liver functions, no emotion at all, but if we know the liver is wood, and the wood is green and can store water as well as produce carbon dioxide, we can know that wood’s functions and characters map the liver functions which store blood and others. From the example it also can be seen that the whole sentence implies a very important message of liver images, namely, if you do not nourish liver or liver is damaged, trees will die without watering, so will people. Thus, the consequences could be disastrous. Here only the word “green” implicates the attitudes of physicians who emphasize the importance of liver function; the interpreting of its functions also reveals some physicians’ emotions of worries or concerns if you do not protect the liver. In the *Yellow Emperor*, when the physicians narrate physiological, pathological as well as pathogenesis, they mix with their own understandings and attitude of life phenomena. They will show their “happy” emotion for a good physiological and pathological sign, and on the contrary they will naturally show their expression of a “worry” or “fear” for the bad physiological phenomena. At the same time, they will show their “thinking” for the unknown knowledge. In accordance with the definition of the author’s work, the language in *Yellow Emperor* almost involves emotional metaphors, because it is related to human health and disease, and health and diseases are associated with emotion. It can be said that emotional metaphor is one of the biggest features of the language in *Yellow Emperor*, and they are also the main cognitive tools to build the theory of TCM terminology, theoretical models, as well as theoretical system.

## 5. Cognitive Mechanism of Emotional Metaphors Generation

Metaphor plays an important role in the context of the conceptualization of things, the “vast majority of language to express emotion is metaphorical” (Kövecses, 2000: p. 5). Metaphor is an important cognitive style, which people use to know the world with one thing to understand other abstract thing. And emotional metaphors are to understand abstract emotional experiences and embodied cognition with specific things, and emotional metaphors’ generation has a certain cognitive mechanism. Cognitive mechanism of emotional metaphors is a system mapping people’s use of familiar things as the source domain and mapping of abstract emotions and feelings which are the target domains, in the process of which invariance principles are followed. That is the process to experience the psychological space and the process topology image formed. Wang (2006: p. 476) proposed five items in one metaphor cognitive mechanism, namely: cognitive subject, body, vehicles, ground, and context. Metaphorical meaning is the result of these factors in a dynamic integrated action to produce. Only a comprehensive analysis and consideration of these factors, can we better understand the metaphors, so is the emotional metaphors’ meaning.

## 6. Cognitive Context of Emotional Metaphors in *Yellow Emperor*

Verbal communication environment consists of a series of objective and subjective factors which are closely related with verbal communication, and these factors are relied on by language to express specific meaning. Understanding of any statements can be separated from the specific context (Wen & Xu, 2006: p. 130). Different nations have different cultural traditions, and even the understanding of the same concept in different cultures may have different interpretations. Although the metaphor is based on some similarity between source and target domains, Lakoff (1987: p. 295) holds that conceptual metaphor is not necessarily same in all nationalities, that is, different ethnic groups may know the same abstract concept with different metaphors. The approach will change over time for a nation to know the same abstract phenomenon through metaphors (Johnson, 1987: p. 129). Cultural background knowledge gives metaphors specific cultural semantic concepts, which is a rich source of creative thinking activities, and forms some semantic fields (Wen & Xu, 2006: p. 131). In ancient China, for instance, in the time of the Spring and Autumn Period, the book *Yellow Emperor* was written, in which there was the prevalence of Confucian classics simple dialectic materialist philosophy and simplicity of Confucian and Mencius family cultural environment. In addition to intuitive understanding of the disease or certain functional activities for their own personal experience, they dissect animals and human organs to observe, and people also

unconsciously use these simple materialistic ideas. They summarize, generalize and abstract the intuitive feel of medical knowledge, personal experience of life activities, as well as the accumulation of long-term on the medical practice knowledge to form the inheriting medical theories. In this process, for the abstract concepts of the complex phenomenon of life, physicians have used a lot of conceptual metaphors (there contain a lot of emotional metaphors). When they wrote the classic book *Yellow Emperor*, the doctors use the prevailing “Five elements, yin and yang, four, five internal organs, six classics, essence” as ideal cognitive models to map those abstract things which have similarities but not easily expressed. Thus “seven human emotions” concepts were created, namely: joy, anger, worry, thinking, sadness, fear, panic and so on. Some of these concepts are directly described in narrating physiological and pathological pathogenesis, but some implicit in various narrations. In this paper, taking into account the above two situations (emotional concepts directly mentioned or implied in the narrative), regarding cognitive linguistics as research methods, the author intends to describe a few emotional metaphors in *Yellow Emperor* and analyzes their linguistic characteristics to achieve the initially exploration of emotional metaphors that is how to build the TCM theoretical terms, theoretical model, the theoretical system of TCM, and to preliminarily verify that the highly abstract emotion metaphor TCM language is a way of thinking when people know the world, but the author still hold doubt if this way of thinking meets Chinese people or Chinese texts, especially cognitive habit of classical texts.

## 7. Emotional Metaphors' Types and Meaning Construction in *Yellow Emperor*

In different cultural knowledge backgrounds and situations, people have different understandings for the same concept, that is, the concept structure in the integration process of meaning construction is not the same. However, the different ethnic groups, people of different languages cannot be ignored, since they have many of the same physical characteristics and human's common physiological characteristics and emotional experiences (Sun, 2010: p. 48). In other words, there is a certain commonality in the integration process of constructing meaning for emotional metaphors. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) divide the conceptual metaphors into three categories, namely: structural metaphors, orientation metaphors, entity conceptual metaphor. Among them, the emotion metaphor belongs to them. Therefore, this article also assumes the emotional metaphors in the book *Yellow Emperor* into three types, namely: structural emotional metaphors, orientation emotional metaphors, entity emotional metaphors.

### 7.1. Structure of Emotional Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: p. 10) believe that the structural conceptual metaphors are generally “conduit metaphors”, language construction of structural conceptual metaphor has three forms, namely: “IDEAS (or MESSAGES) ARE OBJECTS”, “LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS”, and “COMMUNICATION IS SENDING”. These language construction forms also can be applied to conceptual metaphors and emotional metaphors in ancient Chinese medicine such as the language in the book *Yellow Emperor*. For example, in the chapter *Angry Sky Theory in Suwen* there is an original sentence as (2) “Due to the cold, want as transportation hub, living as scared, air is floating” (Its concrete modern medical meaning is following: If the body has been attacked by pathogenic cold, *yang* in the body cannot go out and guard outside just like a door rotating within the door hinge pit. So while living people would therefore feel restless and often frivolous, even impetuous). Here, the doctors put ideas (objects) in words (containers), and then the readers take the ideas/objects out of the words (containers).

### 7.2. Orientation of Emotional Metaphors

Spatial orientation includes up and down, left and right, front and back, inside and outside, depth and center and periphery. In real life, humans are used to projecting space categories onto the non-spatial categories and relationships in the course of understanding the world in order to grasp a variety of non-spatial categories and relationships, and this cognitive style is named spatial metaphorization (Sun, 2010: p. 46). In the book *Yellow Emperor*, many emotion metaphors also represent the psychological characteristics of human beings with the spatial orientation. In general, the vertical relationship is the most widely used, and the ancient Chinese also follow Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor structures, such as “HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN”, “CONCIOUS IS UP; UNCONCIOUS IS DOWN”, “HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP; SICKNESS AND DEATH IS ARE DOWN”,

“HAVING CONTROL or FORCE IS UP; BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL or FORCE IS DOWN” ... The most typical instance, for example, in the chapter *For the Pain Theory in Suwen* is an original sentence as (3) “the Qi up when angry, the Qi slow when happy, the Qi dismissed when sad, and the Qi down when fear” (Its concrete modern medical meaning is following: Madness makes Qi go up and accelerate blood circulation. Joy makes Qi soothing. Sorrow makes Qi diminish. Fear makes Qi sink and let out).

### 7.3. Entity of Emotional Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: p. 25) defined entity metaphors: “Our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances”. From this definition of entity metaphors, the entity metaphor is a way of thinking which sees events, activities, emotions as other entities and substances. We can say nearly entity metaphors are emotional metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: pp. 27-28): “THE MIND IS AN ENTITY”, “THE MIND IS A BRITTLE OBJECT”, and “THE MIND IS A MACHINE” and so on, these are more typical structures. The mindsets can equally interpret the meaning construction of emotional metaphors in the classical Chinese medicine *Yellow Emperor*, and there are many real examples cited from it. In the chapter *Riddled with the Beginning of Sickness in Suwen*, the contents are almost entity emotional metaphors. Among them, there are some to be understood easily. For example, an original sentence as (4) “Sadness injures heart, heavy coldness injures lung; anger injures liver; drunk in the room or when sweating meeting the wind injures spleen; excessive force or excessive sexual intercourse injures the kidney” (Its concrete modern medical meaning is following: Over sorrow and sadness makes the heart injure. Cold food and drink as well as cold evil make the lung injure. Over resentment and anger makes the liver injure. Drunkenly undergoing intercourse and sweating but meeting wind makes the spleen injure. Over exertion or sexual intercourse, while sweating like just out of the bath, is easy to damage the kidneys). These words such as “worry”, “thinking”, “loss”, “anger”, “hurt” and so on are the emotional core vocabulary which can vividly express the physicians’ views and opinions on the physiology, pathology as well as pathogenesis.

## 8. Conclusion

One person is the same blend of body and mind; as long as it relates to disease and health, there will be some outpouring of emotional expression on “worry” or “sorrow” or “joy” in people’s language. In the medical classic *Yellow Emperor*, no matter it relates to the elaboration of internal organs, blood and body fluids, meridians or the narrating the physiology, pathology as well as pathogenesis, many languages are carrying emotional colors; because the outpouring of emotional expression on “worry” or “sorrow” or “joy” is a natural reflection of people’s own experience to the real world, and makes us study, they contain profound philosophical and emotional attitudes through their positive narrative language, and particularly make out the magical meaning of the emotional metaphors.

## Notes

- 1) The book *Yellow Emperor* is a classic of TCM, and it consists of two parts. One is named *Su Wen*, the other is named *Lin Su*. The two parts separately consist of 81 chapters which have different names. So in this paper, there are some examples abstracted from different chapters, but nearly from the chapters from *Su Wen* part.
- 2) Traditional Chinese Medicine is short for TCM.
- 3) In China, the book *Yellow Emperor* also is called *Huang Di Nei Jing*.

## Funding

Special Program for Foreign Languages in Sichuan Province Association of Social Sciences: A Cognitive Study on Emotional metaphors in “Yellow Emperor” No SC15WY018.

## References

- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (1998). Conceptual Integration Networks. *Cognitive Science*, 22, 133-187.  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog2202\\_1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog2202_1)

- Gu, H. R., Jia, C. H., & Xie, J. (2012). Study on the Viscera-State Doctrine in Traditional Chinese Medicine Based on Metaphorical Theory. *World Science and Technology—Modernization of Traditional Chinese Medicine Symposium: Traditional Chinese Language and Cognition*, 5, 2092-2095.
- Guo, X. Z. (2006). *Basic Theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine*. Shanghai: Shanghai Science and Technology Press.
- Jia, C. H. (2008). The Conceptual Metaphor Research on TCM Etiology and Pathogenesis under the Cognitive Science Background. *Chinese Journal of Medical Guide*, 8, 1141-1143.
- Jia, C. H. (2013). Research of Conceptual Metaphor of Five Element Theory from the Perspective of Embodied Mind. *World of Medicine*, 8, 91-95.
- Kövecses, Z. (1986). *Metaphors of Anger, Pride and Love: A Lexical Approach to the Structure of Concepts*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/pb.vii.8>
- Kövecses, Z. (1990). *Emotion Concepts*. New York: Springer. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-3312-1>
- Kövecses, Z. (2000). *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226471013.001.0001>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Kövecses, Z. (1987). The Cognitive Model of Anger Inherent in American English. In D. Holland, & N. Quinn (Eds.), *Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (pp. 195-221). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511607660.009>
- Lin, S. W. (1998). On the Conceptual Metaphors of “Anger” from English and Chinese Perspectives. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2, 9-13.
- Liu, Z., & Lu, W. Z. (2013). Conceptual Metaphor in Huang Di Nei Jing. *Qilu Normal University*, 2, 123-126.
- Peng, D. L. (2001). *General Psychology*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.
- Sun, Y. (2010). Embodied Philosophy and Culture-Specific Motivation Micro Probe in the Perspective of English and Chinese Emotional Metaphors. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 1, 46-48.
- Sun, Y. (2013). Embodied Origins of Primary Emotive Metaphors. *Shanxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 1, 105-111.
- Talmy, L. (2000). *Toward a Cognitive Semantics Volume I: Concepts Structuring Systems*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Wang, Y. (2006). *Cognitive Linguistics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Wen, X., & Luo, L. (2004). Metaphor, Context, Culture—Also on Emotional Metaphor: Thinner than Yellow. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 1, 11-14.
- Wen, X., & Xu, A. Q. (2006). *Cognitive Linguistics Vision*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.
- Xie, J., & Jia, C. H. (2011). Types and Functions of Metaphorical Language in Internal Classic of Huang Di Nei Jing. *Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 1, 1-4.
- Yin, P. S., & Pang, J. (2011). Metaphor Thinking and Creativity in Therapy of Traditional Chinese Medicine. *Medicine and Philosophy (Humanities and Social Medicine Edition)*, 32, 14-16.
- Yuan, H. M. (2009). Interpreting New Metaphors of Love from the Perspective of Conceptual Integration Theory. *Qiqihar University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 1, 115-118.
- Yue, H. P. (2006). *Cognitive Study of Chinese Emotional Metaphor*. Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House.
- Yue, H. P. (2009). Unscrambling of Emotional Metaphors about Sadness between English and Chinese. *Central South University of Forestry & Technology (Social Sciences)*, 3, 123-125.
- Zhang, H. (2000). Conceptualization and Expressions of Emotions in Chinese and English. *International Studies*, 5, 27-32.
- Zhao, L. M. (2013). *A Cognitive Research on Polysemy in Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine*. Ph.D. Thesis, Shanghai: Shanghai International Studies University.