

Self-Referential Metaphors in Contemporary Chinese Poetry – Reconnaissance

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Introduction

The functionalities of metaphor as dominants of the style of poetic texts are widely known. Important, of course, are graphic aspects that refer to the spatiality of the poetic text as a parameter influencing meaning (especially) in repeated reading.

One of the aspects of metaphor – in this case in relation to contemporary Chinese poems – is self-referentialism, i.e., a kind of meta-reflection on writing poetry and perceiving the world (preceding metaphor). That is why we decided on this topic - because on the one hand it concerns metaphors as carriers of ways of representing an individual view of the world, and on the other hand, it concerns the strategy of describing and the process of creating poetry. In both cases, we are interested in the peculiarity of the poem, i.e. the structure of the text that interacts semantically (working more or less strongly in the individual analyzed cases).

The article has two main goals. The first is to present the specificity of selected poems by contemporary Chinese poets from a comparative perspective. Thanks to the reference to three language versions (Chinese, Polish and – auxiliary – English), an analytical reading at the meta level is possible – one that encourages reflection on the metaphors organizing this poetry. We are therefore dealing with an attempt to read the poems, but from a superior perspective, i.e. one focused on metaphor. The second goal emerges from this approximation – the analysis of poetic texts (including the structure of these poems) in terms of the ways of exploiting various manifestations of metaphorization.

It should be immediately emphasized that the sketch is a reconnaissance – on the one hand, it disseminates the texts of poets who stand out from the background of contemporary Chinese literature, and on the other hand, it proves the validity of studying this poetry in relation to popular metaphorical phenomena commented on in renowned works of language researchers. The peculiarity of this proposal is, above all, that it is an example of transposing thoughts on metaphors to artistic texts not read through the prism of such methodological tools. This is not only an indication of the linguistic phenomena present in the texts mentioned, but also an approach to them in relation to the structure of the poem, and therefore in connection with poetological reflection.

As mentioned before, the specialty of this article is that, due to the author's special background, the original texts being analyzed are in Chinese, which have been translated into Polish, and English forms a bridge between readers and the author. This article mainly uses Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a tool to analyze the poetry. Since it covers three languages, this further illustrates the core point of conceptual theory: metaphor is a way of thinking rather than just linguistic expression. Next, a brief review of Conceptual Metaphor Theory will be given.

There are many works on metaphor such as *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980),¹ *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* by George Lakoff and Mark Turner (1989),² *Metaphor and Thought* by Andrew Ortony (1993),³ *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* edited by Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (2008),⁴ and etc., among which *Metaphors we live by* is the most relevant to this article. The book extends the study of metaphor from the linguistic category to the cognitive category and proposes conceptual metaphor which refers to the understanding of one idea in terms of another.⁵ In other words, it involves a mapping process from one domain (source domain) onto another domain (target domain). Although there are also some criticisms of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, such as Gentner and Bowdle, who suggest novel metaphor and conventional metaphor requires different mental process in their *Career of Metaphor Theory*,⁶ and Glucksberg, who argues that the on-line metaphor comprehension process works by categorization instead of comparison,⁷ it is undoubtedly still an important theory in metaphor research.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphor can be divided into three types: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor.

Structural metaphor uses one concept to construct another concept. The cognitive domains of the two concepts are different, but their structures remain unchanged. In other words, there is a regular correspondence between their respective components. Orientation metaphors are self-organized with reference to the spatial orientations within the same conceptual system, such as up and down, inside and outside, front and back, deep and shallow, center and edge. The third is ontological metaphor. Human

¹ Lakoff, George, Mark Johnson. *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press, 2008.

² Lakoff, George, Mark Turner. *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*, University of Chicago press, 2009.

³ Ortony, Andrew, ed. *Metaphor and thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

⁴ Gibbs Jr, Raymond W., ed. *The Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁵ Lakoff, George, *The contemporary theory of metaphor*, 1993.

⁶ Bowdle, Brian F., Dedre Gentner, *The career of metaphor*, "Psychological review" 112, no. 1 (2005): 193.

⁷ Glucksberg, Sam. "How metaphors create categories—quickly." *The Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought* (2008): 67-83.

beings' original way of survival was material, so our experience with objects provides a material basis for our understanding of abstract conceptual expressions as entities. Therefore, ontological metaphor means that we can regard abstract and vague thoughts, emotions, psychological activities, events, states and other intangible concepts as concrete, tangible entities, or even the human body itself.

As Gibbs proposes, human being's cognition is basically characterized by figurative processes such as metaphor, metonymy and etc., which helps people to understand their own experience and interaction with the external world.⁸ Metaphor is in our thought that we use it automatically with little effort. Great poets use this mode of thought too; that is why they can speak to us. Therefore, in order to comprehend the artistry and creativity of poetry requires us to understand our most ordinary ways of thinking.⁹ In other words, in order to comprehend poetic metaphor, we have to understand conventional metaphor. The poetic metaphors call on our daily ways of thinking, dealing with core respective of our conceptual system and forcing us to understand them in new ways. Far from being only embellishment, metaphor is vital for us to understand ourselves, our culture and the world, and via metaphor, poetry can exercise our minds, making us more open-minded when we try to understand the ordinary metaphors we live by. Although great poets use the same tools we use when creating poetry, their talent and skills are quite distinct from us. Their masterful use of metaphor including extension, composition and other fundamental tools helps us appreciate more reality.

The following is the original text of each poem, its corresponding Polish translation¹⁰ and English translation, as well as an analysis of each poem.

写诗是.....

写诗是干一件你从来没有干过的活
工具是现成的，你以前都见过
写诗是小儿初见棺木，他不知道
这么笨拙的木头有什么用
女孩子们在大榕树下荡秋千
女人们把毛线缠绕在两膝之间
写诗是你一个人爬上跷跷板
那一端坐着一个看不见的大家伙
写诗是囚犯放风的时间到了
天地一窟窿，烈日当头照
写诗是五岁那年我随我哥哥去抓乌龟
他用一根铁钩从泥洞里掏出了一团蛇
我至今还记得我的尖叫声
写诗是记忆里的尖叫和回忆时的心跳

张执浩

⁸ Gibbs, Raymond W. *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press, 1994. p1

⁹ Lakoff, George, and Mark Turner. *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. University of Chicago press, 2009.

¹⁰ All from the Poetry Collection "Chen, Xianfa, Xie Da, Ya Du, Nan Hai, Yuansheng Li, Yangzhong Tang, An Yan, and Zhihao Zhang. *Światła w bursztynie: antologia współczesnej poezji chińskiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, 2021."

Pisanie wierszy to...

pisanie wierszy to praca nieużywanyymi nigdy narzędziami
 narzędziami, które są gotowe i już je widziałeś
 pisanie wierszy jest jak dziecko, które po raz pierwszy widzi trumnę i nie wie
 do czego służy to pokraczne drewno
 dziewczynka huśtająca się na huśtawce pod wielkim figowcem
 kobieta nawijająca na kolana włóczkę
 pisanie wierszy jest jak kołysanie się na huśtawce
 na której na drugim końcu siedzi ktoś niewidzialny
 pisanie wierszy to wyjście więźnia na spacerniak
 niebo i ziemia jak jaskinie oświetlane palącym słońcem
 pisanie wierszy jest jak ja pięcioletni idący ze starszym bratem łapać żółwie
 który żelaznym hakiem wygarnął z błotnistej jamy kłębowski węż
 do dziś pamiętam mój przenikliwy krzyk
 pisanie wierszy to ostry krzyk w pamięci i łomotanie serca przy wspominaniu

Zhang Zhihao**Writing poetry is¹¹**

Writing poetry is doing something you have never done before
 The tools are readily available, you have seen them all before
 Writing poetry is a child's first look at a coffin, he does not know
 What is the use of such clumsy wood
 The girls swing under the banyan tree
 The women wrap woolen threads between their knees
 Writing poetry is when you climb the seesaw alone
 With an invisible big guy sitting on the other end
 Writing poetry is the time for prisoners to relax
 There is a hole in the sky and the sun is shining brightly
 Writing poetry is that I followed my brother to catch turtles when I was five years old
 He pulled a snake out of a mud hole with a hook.
 I still remember my screams.
 Writing poetry is the scream in memory and the heartbeat of recollection

Zhang**Zhihao¹²**

The title of this poem "Writing poetry is....." is a typical metaphorical strategy. This structure appears six times in the whole poem.

¹¹The English version is translated by the author of this article.

¹²A contemporary Chinese poet and writer. He serves as Vice Chairman of the Hubei Writers Association and editor-in-chief of Chinese Poetry (Han Shi). Known for his plain yet profound poetic style, he extracts lyrical depth from everyday life. His acclaimed poetry collection *Wildflowers on the Plateau* won the 7th Lu Xun Literary Prize (2018). Other notable works include the poetry collection *Ancient Kiln* and the novel *Trying to Reconcile with Life*. As an active literary editor, he has significantly influenced modern Chinese poetry through his editorial work at Han Shi.

First, the subject of the poem says “Writing poetry is doing something that you have never done before, the tools are readily available, you have seen them all before”. Here shows an ontological metaphor: writing poetry is an activity that can be viewed as a container object in which poets are participants; pens, papers and other stationery are tools. Then we may think the following line would be “you do not know how to use”; however, here the sentence stops, evoking us to think about whether we are able to use these tools or not. Some people may be very talented in writing poetry, and writing poetry is easy for them, while some people may not.

Second, the subject compares writing poetry to a child seeing a coffin for the first time. This sentence ends with “he does not know”, which still makes the reader wonder what he does not know? Then the answer is revealed – he does not know “what is the use of such a clumsy piece of wood”. In this metaphor, poets are children and poetry is coffin. Writing poetry probably would be useless since it cannot bring much material wealth, but it can bring spiritual comfort, which cannot be understood by a child. Additionally, the wood is personified through the use of the word “clumsy”, an adjective commonly used to describe human beings. A coffin is also a mystery, at the same time, it is concerned with irreversibility – a person will stop moving, living, and moreover, he is hidden from the world forever, which is something generally reserved for the world of adults (and wrongly so). Above all, a coffin is an absurd object for a child, because it is extremely hard for a child to understand death. Writing poetry, therefore, can be a mystery, a necessity, the passing of time, a moment, a sign of an inevitable contrast to life. From another perspective, it is yet striving towards a goal, which you may not want to achieve at all.

Next, writing poetry is likened to climbing up on a seesaw – here we may think of the picture of a seesaw being pushed down. But the following line is “with an invisible big guy sitting on the other end”, implying that writing poetry is an unknown endeavor and we do not know the results. The seesaw metaphor in the poem can be related to orientational metaphors which are based on the spatial orientation experienced in our physical environment, such as up-down, in-out. The widely known metaphor HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN is hidden here. The seesaw sometimes goes up and sometimes goes down – sometimes we are happy and sometimes we are sad. Our emotion can be reflected in poetry but it is not certain until the poem is finished. In other words, seesaw symbolizes instability since it rarely stops in one place, and writing poetry is a search for stability through instability.

Then, it writes “Writing poetry is the time for prisoners to relax. There is a hole in the sky and the sun is shining brightly.” A structural metaphor is included here: Poets are prisoners. The concept of poet is metaphorically structured in terms of the concept of prisoner. Prisoners are imprisoned and have no freedom while poet’s heart is also imprisoned, and writing poetry is a way for poets to relax, escaping from imprisonment, and an outlet to release their emotions, just like prisoners leave the prison to relax and see the sun outside, though this kind of freedom is ephemeral. In Chinese culture, the saying “there is a hole in the sky” is usually used to describe abnormal weather or unusual scenes in the sky such as dark clouds, lightning, and thunder, which is related to an ancient Chinese mythology “Nvwa mends the sky”.¹³ The prisoner remains locked up, but while walking he sees the sun, the sky, he sees a piece of freedom, which

¹³Yang, Lihui, Deming An, Handbook of Chinese mythology, Oxford University Press, USA, 2008, p170

is obviously an absurdity, because freedom cannot be divided and cannot be limited. Therefore, here indicates that writing poetry does not give the poet complete freedom. Nevertheless, writing poetry is like the blazing sun that illuminates and warms up the poet's heart a bit.

Finally, the next metaphor is "writing poetry is that I followed my brother to catch turtles when I was five years old". In addition, the last sentence says "Writing poetry is the scream in memory and the heartbeat of recollection". To be more briefly, these two metaphors both refer to "writing poetry is recollecting memory". China has always been a country dominated by agriculture and most adults today spent their childhood in rural areas. The main place where they played in childhood was in the fields and the activity of catching turtles was a reflection of their childhood. So here the domain of writing poetry is mapped into the domain of recollecting memory. Poetry demonstrates the author's memories. For him, writing poetry is a process of sorting out memory. Moreover, different people have different memories and will write different poems, therefore, memory can be collective, but emotions are mostly hidden in individual, unique memory. Writing poems is an attempt to transpose memory into a poem, which, of course, involves intense emotions that congeal in language.

Overall, this poem contains many metaphors, including structural metaphors, orientational metaphors, and ontological metaphors to describe the activity of writing poetry via concrete images, however, these repeated attempts to define the act of writing poetry is also a strong signal of a semantic crisis. It is not easy to indicate the best image that encompasses the meaning of the writing process—creating a poem. The characteristic structure of the text (poetic definition), which on the one hand makes it possible to list the features of writing poetry, but on the other hand blurs the boundaries between the individual parts of this description, and the metaphors used to specify the phenomenon become a set of images moving away from each other. Thanks to this, we know that writing is, above all, intimate, but also in no way pragmatic or aimed at a tangible goal. Writing is one activity and an enduring activity at the same time, so it is an enumeration, a stream of words, a set of metaphors, and finally—an attempt to describe what happens to a person in life unannounced. In this way, even readers who have never written poetry are able to experience a little bit of the feeling of writing poetry.

奇怪

多么奇怪的事，我一边做人，一边还在伺候着
自己的文字。多么不可思议
做一个人还要写字。这是糗事
却窃喜暗中藏着一张脸。这也无常，鞋在脚上
脚还在想着另一双鞋。
当我写字，我就是那个多出脚板的人
想起自己就是这人，再读了读
那些被我写下的字，我就偷偷耻笑，铁如何长出了锈
铁反对锈，锈又必然长在铁上
禽与兽是分开的：一个用来飞。另一个必须四脚落地

汤养宗

Dziwne

co za dziwna sprawa, równocześnie jestem człowiekiem i służą
własnych słów. Jakie to nieprawdopodobne
być człowiekiem i chcieć pisać. To wstyd
ale w głębi duszy lubię chować twarz w mroku. Nieczęsto się zdarza, żeby obuta
stopa marzyła o innej parze butów.
Kiedy piszę, jestem właśnie człowiekiem o wielu podeszwach
myśleć o sobie jestem tym człowiekiem, ponownie odczytuję
zapisane przeze mnie słowa, śmieję się ukradkiem, kiedy żelazo rdzewieje
walczy z rdzą, a rdza musi porastać żelazo
ptaki i zwierzęta to odmienne byty: pierwsze zwykły latać. Drugie muszą czterema nogami stać na
ziemi.

Tang Yangzong**Strangeness¹⁴**

What a strange thing, I am being a human being, while still serving
my own words. How incredible
To be a human being, you also need to write. This is an embarrassment
But I secretly rejoice that I have a hidden face. This is also impermanent, the shoes are on my feet
My feet are still thinking about another pair of shoes
When I write, I am the one with the extra feet
Remembering that I am this person, I read it again
I secretly laughed at the words I wrote, how iron has been rusty
Iron opposes rust, and rust will inevitably grows on iron
Birds and beasts are separate: one is to fly. The other must land on four limbs

Tang Yangzong¹⁵

As a reader, the first time I read the title of this poem *Strangeness*, I cannot help but start to think: What is strange? The first line of the poem is “What a strange thing, I am being a human being, while still serving” – the lack of the object of the verb “serve” provokes readers to ask: Serving what? The second line reveals the answer – Serving his own words¹⁶. Two lines down, where the verse stops is strange because it is very normal that shoes would be on one’s feet. But the next line says “My feet are still thinking about another pair of shoes” which is very unexpected for

¹⁴The English version is translated by the author of this article.

¹⁵A contemporary Chinese poet as well. In 1994, he won the second prize of the first “Hundred Flowers Literary Award” of Fujian Province. At the same time, his several works won the “Fujian Province Outstanding Literary Work Award”. In August 2018, his work *Going to the World* (qu renjian) won the Poetry Award of the 7th Lu Xun Literature Award. In 2020, he also won the Achievement Award in the Poetry Category of the 11th Ding Ling Literary Award in China.

¹⁶There is difference due to translation. In the polish version, the first line of the poem is literally “What a strange thing, I am simultaneously being a human being and a servant”, which actually can be a complete sentence and may not trigger readers to think about the following lines.

readers. Then the author writes “When I write, I am the one with the extra feet”¹⁷. Here includes a metaphor THE POET IS A PERSON WITH EXTRA FEET in the poem. Just like other conceptual metaphors, based on the description of the writer, we can figure out a number of correspondences between the target domain (the poet) and the source domain (a person with extra feet) here:

- The feet are brains.
- The shoes worn on the feet are thoughts.
- The written words are extra feet.

Such correspondences are called “mapping” between two conceptual domains. Therefore, here, for instance, we can speak of the written words (thoughts been expressed) being mapped onto extra feet. The poet deliberately uses this metaphor to indicate that he thinks so much and writing is a way for him to express superfluous thoughts.

In addition, there is also a metonymy in this sentence “But I secretly rejoice that I have a hidden face” which uses “a hidden face” to replace the hidden thoughts. The face can be regarded as a container where expressions and emotions are contained, on the other hand, the face can be seen as the surface on which expressions are shown as well, supported by examples like “He reads Cathy’s face”.¹⁸ Therefore, the metonymy THE FACE STANDS FOR EMOTIONS is manifested here. Although in fact the person writing the poem would prefer to be even more hidden (his emotion), he still writes the poem to express his feeling to some extent. This also means that writing is a way of camouflage – the expression of the subject is at the same time the hermeticity of the writer.

Then, the author reads the words he wrote and secretly laughed at how iron has been rusty. This verse stops here, making us confused again, what is so funny about iron rusting – Iron opposes rust, and rust will inevitably grow on iron. It is easy to understand it literally, while iron and rust are personified through the use of verbs “oppose” and “grow”. There is a paradox: Iron does not want to rust, but rust has to grow on iron. This paradox exists widely in daily life, there are time when we do something that is not our intention, but we have to complete it.

The last line of the poem “Birds and beasts are separate: one is to fly. The other must land on four limbs.” This ending seems strange to readers, while echoing the title, but if we look at it from another perspective, it is also related to the above verses: the difference between birds and beasts is also an unchangeable contradiction.

Iron and rust, birds and beasts, these two groups of categories are mapped onto the poet’s writing of poems. Iron against rust corresponds to the poet’s reluctance to have more feet (not want to think too much), which cannot be controlled and will inevitably happen. Moreover, the poet’s thinking and writing must be separated: thinking is like a bird and writing is

¹⁷In Polish and English there is a similar idiom: “to step into someone else’s shoes” and “walking in one’s shoes”, which means to be in another person’s situation, to feel like another person. So maybe this means that the person writing the poem has the ability or need to take on other roles, to see the world as a different person - this is also strange, and certainly not obvious. However, there is no such an expression in Chinese.

¹⁸Fangfang, Wang. “The metaphorical and metonymical expressions including face and eye in everyday language.” (2010).

like a beast. Thoughts can be wild and unconstrained, but writing needs to be realistic, reflecting the orientational metaphor MUNDANE REALITY IS DOWN (as in “down to earth”).

In the case of this poem, strangeness is also expressed in the peculiar structure of the poem: we rightly pay attention to the lines whose completion turns out to be non-obvious, we want to complete the thought, and the next line modifies and deforms this thought. In other words, syntagmaticity becomes clear as a way of providing temporary semantic independence of the lines. Infinite (in the syntactic sense) fragments—such as in the first line of the work—require completion from the reader, which in turn exposes the grammatical potential of relational lines. Thanks to this, the topic-writing poetry—gains a textual illustration pointing to the process of non-obvious expression by the subject, which is a multiple creation. From the perspective of content, this poem uses a variety of things (face, shoes, feet, iron, rust, birds and beasts) that may seem unrelated on the surface, but actually writing poem is connected to these images through metaphors. These seemingly strange connections also echo the title of the poem.

不可多得的容器

我书房中的容器
都是空的
几个小钵，以前种过水仙花
有过璀璨片刻
但它们统统被清空了
我在书房不舍昼夜的写作
跟这种空
有什么样关系？
精研眼前事物和那
不可见的恒河水
总是貌似刁钻、晦涩——
难以作答
我的写作和这窗缝中逼过来的
碧云天，有什么样关系？
多数时刻
我一无所系地抵案而眠

陈先发

Rzadko spotykane pojemniki

w moim gabinecie wszystkie pojemniki
są puste
w kilku małych miskach hodowałem kiedyś hiacynty
miały krótki moment splendoru
ale znów wszystkie są puste
w moim gabinecie piszę dniami i nocami
razem z tą pustką
jaki związek istnieje

pomiędzy studiowaniem rzeczy leżących przed oczami i
 niewidzialnymi wodami Gangesu
 zawsze jakby oszukańczymi i mrocznymi
 trudno odpowiedzieć
 jaki związek istnieje pomiędzy moim pisaniem a wciskającym się
 przez szpary w oknie błękitnym niebem
 większość czasu
 nie mam nic do roboty i śpię

Chen Xianfa

A Rare Container¹⁹

The containers in my study
 are all empty.
 Several small pots, where daffodils have been planted before
 They had their glittery moments
 But they've all been emptied.
 I write around the clock in my study
 What does it have to do
 with this emptiness?
 Focus on what's at hand and
 The invisible waters of the Ganges
 Always seeming to be tricky, obscure--
 Difficult to answer
 What does my writing have to do with
 that glimpse of blue sky pressing on towards me through the window slit
 Most of the time
 I have nothing to do with all these things and just lean on the desk to sleep

Chen Xianfa²⁰

The title of the poem is Rare Container and the first line of the poem opens with a reference to the container – containers in the study, with the following line revealing the property: they are empty. Next, the containers are more specific – they are several small pots, where daffodils have been planted before. These daffodils “had their glittery moments, but were then all purged”. Just like human beings, there are moments of brilliance in life, but eventually we will die. The study itself is also a huge container, which separates the author from outdoor nature. The author writes in the study and ask “How is my relentless writing day

¹⁹The English version is translated by the author of this article.

²⁰A famous contemporary Chinese poet. He is the Chairman of Anhui Federation of Literary and Art Circles, and also the Deputy Director of the Poetry Committee of the Chinese Writers Association. His major works include poetry collections *The Heart of Writing a Monument* (Xie bei zhi xin), *Nine Chapters* (Jiu zhang), *Selected Poems of Chen Xianfa* (Chen Xianfa shixuan), the novel *La Hun Tune* (La hun qiang), the collection of essays *Notes of Heichiba* (Heichiba biji). His works have been translated into English, French, Russian, Spanish, Greek and other languages, and have been selected as literature textbooks in many universities in China and abroad. He has won numerous awards and honors from media and literary research institutions, such as the “October Poetry Award”, “China’s Top Ten Emerging Poets from 1986 to 2006”, “2008 Chinese Poet of the Year” and etc.

and night related to this emptiness? How is my writing related to that glimpse of blue sky pressing on towards me through the window slit?" Neither the things that are close at hand nor the water of the Ganges River that is far away can answer the author's question. In the end, the author says that he has nothing to do with all these things and just lean on the desk to sleep most of the time.

In the poem, the study room is obviously a container, the small pots are containers, and we are also containers. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), we humans are physical beings – our skin separates us from the outside world, so each human being is a container. There is a clear surface as a boundary that allows us to clearly distinguish between internal and external feelings. Therefore, it is exactly because the metaphor of HUMAN BEINGS ARE CONTAINERS is implanted in our thinking, separating us from the outside world, that the author naturally keeps asking what his relationship is with the outside world.

Moreover, ontological metaphors can be used to understand actions and activities. Writing poem is an activity, which is viewed as a discrete entity and exists in space and time, so it has a well-defined boundary. Therefore, it can be regarded as a container: the participant (the author) is the object, the start and the finish of writing are metaphorical objects. Hence the author can ask the relationship between his writing and the emptiness as well as the blue sky, because he regards his writing as a concrete entity. Containers are also equivalents of categories, i.e. concepts expressed in language by lexical units and later by sentences and texts. Categorizing the world in language is possible thanks to socially agreed meanings that have their own cultural determinants. Poetry is a dynamic attempt at redefinition, such as creating or exploiting unusual containers, which makes it necessary to read the world in a new way and thus to get to know the world. Although here the containers in the office are empty – so maybe writing is not an attempt to describe the world in a new way, but on the contrary - to describe the state of the person who is writing – his unpreparedness, his inability to overcome his own powerlessness.

In the verse "How is my writing related to that glimpse of blue sky pressing on towards me through the window slit?", the use of the verb "press" is metaphorical, to be more specific, it is personification. Personification allows us to comprehend phenomena in human terms that we can understand based on our own experience, and it may be the most obvious ontological metaphors in which we consider something nonhuman as human. Here the blue sky is personified and the metaphor is BLUE SKY IS A PERSON. More precisely, the author thinks of the blue sky as a force trying to squeeze in through the window slit, which can be implied by the use of the verb "press". The blue sky tries to enter the container of the study room through the window, enter the container of the author's writing, and enter the container of the author.

In summary, the activity of writing poetry is seen as a container in this poem, and the poet focus on the relationship between writing and other objects. Besides, multiple containers appear in this poem, some are concrete (the small pots and the study room) and some are metaphorical (the poet himself and his writing). Thus, it can be seen that the Container Metaphor already inherently exists in our cognition.

走得太快的人

走得太快的人
有时会走到自己前面去
他的脸庞会模糊
速度给它掺进了
幻觉和未来的颜色

同样，走得太慢的人
有时会掉到自己身后
他不过是自己的阴影
有裂缝的过去
甚至，是自己一直
试图偷偷扔掉的垃圾

坐在树下的人
也不一定刚好是他自己
有时他坐在自己的左边
有时坐在自己的右边
幸好总的来说
他都坐在自己的附近

李元胜

Człowiek chodzący za szybko

człowiek chodzący za szybko
niekiedy się wyprzedza
jego twarz staje się niewyraźna
prędkość splata w niej
miraże i barwy przyszłości

podobnie człowiek chodzący za wolno
niekiedy zostaje z tyłu
staje się nie tylko swoim cieniem
pękniętą przeszłością
ale nawet śmieciem, którego
zawsze chciał się ukradkiem pozbyć

podobnie siedzący pod drzewem człowiek
również nie zawsze jest sobą
czasami siedzi po swojej lewej
czasami siedzi po swojej prawej
na szczęście zawsze
siedzi blisko siebie

Li Yuansheng

The Man Who Walks Too Fast²¹

The man who walks too fast
 Sometimes he goes in front of himself
 His face will be blurry
 Speed mixed it with
 the Color of illusion and the Future

Likewise, the man who walks too slowly
 Sometimes falls behind himself
 He is just his own shadow
 A cracked past
 Even, he has been
 The trash being tried to throw away secretly

The man sitting beneath a tree
 Isn't always exactly himself either
 Sometimes he sits to the left of himself
 Sometimes he sits to the right of himself
 Fortunately, in general
 He is always sitting near himself

Li Yuansheng²²

First, the poem has a fairly regular structure, that is, three stanzas with an almost identical structure. The title is *The Man Who Walks Too Fast*, echoed by the first section –

The man who walks too fast
 Sometimes he goes in front of himself

And then as readers, we may wonder what will happen when the man goes in front himself, so here the poet continues writing:

His face will be blurry
 Speed mixed it with
 the Color of illusion and the Future

There is a similar structure in the second section, on the contrary, the main character is the man who goes too slowly, who sometimes falls behind himself. Moreover, the last section is a person sitting beneath a tree, who sometimes sits to the left of himself, and sometimes sits to the right of himself.

²¹The English version is translated by the author of this article.

²²A contemporary Chinese poet. He is currently a member of the Poetry Creation Committee of the Chinese Writers Association and vice chairman of Chongqing Writers Association. His poem Scenery (Jing xiang) won the "People's Literature Award" in 2003. In August 2014, his collection of poems Infinite Things (Wu xian shi) won the 6th Lu Xun Literature Award for Poetry. In November 2015, his poem Fate Has Flowers (Ming you fan hua) won the October Literature Award. In addition to poetry, he also writes prose and novels, winning numerous related awards as well.

Here calls upon our implicit knowledge of the structure of the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. In the journey of life, some people walk ahead and some people walk behind. In order to know this metaphor better, knowing a series of correspondence between the two conceptual domains is necessary, such as (in this poem)

- The character (who walks) leading a life is a traveler.
- Progress is the distance traveled.

The traveler in the poem sometimes goes too fast to be in front of himself, which can be understood as that he works very hard and make greater progress than ever expected. And the traveler who goes too slowly could fail to achieve expected progress so he is left behind in the journey of life. A blurred face also means eluding identity – being not oneself.

Additionally, as Lakoff proposes that there is a certain degree of coherence and systematicity in metaphors, the metaphor AHEAD IS GOOD; BEHIND IS BAD is also manifested here. Our eyes usually look forward, and when we want to comfort someone who is sad about something, we always tell them to move forward and forget about that terrible thing behind. Leaving yourself behind also may provoke and encourage you to choose and eliminate “unnecessary”, unpleasant memories that do not fit your self-image. On the contrary, we will say “We are looking forward to something” when we want something good. The man who goes too fast are written to be mixed with “the color of illusion and the future” – future is something ahead of us on the journey of life, which is always relevant to good hope.

In contrast, when we read:

He is just his own shadow
A cracked past
Even, he has been
The trash being tried to throw away secretly

Above verses follows the man who walks slowly. As can be seen, all are negative (usually) adjectives and nouns. The metaphor BLACK IS BAD; WHITE IS GOOD is so taken for granted that we instantly regard the “shadow” is not a good description here. “Cracked” is often related to something broken or imperfect, and trash, something nobody wants and to be thrown away, which is also regarded as being bad.

In the last section, another kind of man appears – the man sitting beneath a tree.

Sometimes he sits to the left of himself
Sometimes he sits to the right of himself
Fortunately, in general
He is always sitting near himself

These are interesting verses – he is himself, even though he is sitting next to himself. Maybe it is still a reflection on the phenomenon of the coherence of one’s own personality as imagined by the man who is trying to describe this situation. “He is always sitting near himself” can be

comprehended as he is in control of himself. According to the metaphor CONTROL IS UP, which can be indicated in expressions like “He is under my power”, and the metaphor UP IS GOOD, we can easily infer CONTROL IS GOOD here. That is why the word “fortunately” is used before.

In a nutshell, a blurred face, leaving oneself behind, getting ahead of events, is consequently a movement that tries to invalidate time. It is someone who becomes his future or past, who does not fit in himself to some extent and does not focus on the present, in other words, he distances himself and therefore as one person, he is not coherent. The last situation is similar, although this time the issue of being next to each other comes to the fore, it is not each other in one category, which reinforces the emphasis placed on individuality.

This whole poem is based on the framework of the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, and orientational metaphors are displayed as well to illustrate the progress on the journey of life. However, words such as “journey” or “life” have never been mentioned from the beginning to the end. It is precisely because of the consistency in our cognitive system that we can understand this poem in a general way. This also confirms that metaphor is not a unique tool only for poets, instead, every ordinary person has universal metaphors in the cognitive system, but the poet expands these metaphors through skillful techniques, giving readers a broader understanding of them.

Summary

Above is the analysis of the four poems. The reason for choosing these four poems is not just that the authors are outstanding, but also because they are connected. The contents of the first three poems all concern with the activity of writing poetry, and all the four poems involve metaphors in everyday use, though not all of them contains evident similes, what they have in common is that there are metaphor-related thoughts hidden under their distinct linguistic expressions. And these metaphors not only show their conventional use in dictionary, but about irregular and novel use in the poems. Structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor is more or less manifested in each poem.

Another aspect of these four poems in common is that they all more or less involve things related to nature, which is closely relevant to Chinese culture. One of the most important characteristics of Chinese traditional culture is “the unity of nature and man” or “harmony of nature and human being”, manifesting in ancient Chinese works such as *Yi Jing* and *Tao Te Ching*.²³ Ancient Chinese philosophers Mengzi and Zhuangzi also had similar views of following nature.²⁴ It means human activities should conform to the laws of nature which contains rich ecological ethical wisdom. Among the four selected poems, the burning sun in *Writing poem is...*, the birds and beasts in *Strangeness*, the Gangesu river in *A Rare Container*, and the tree in *The man who walks too fast*, although the theme is not about environment protection, all of these natural objects reflect that in the poet’s opinion, man and nature cannot be separated.

²³Li, Dong, and Zhong Hai Qiu. “The Study on Ecological Ethics of “Unity of Man and Nature”.” *Advanced Materials Research* 807 (2013): 906-909.

²⁴Perkins, Franklin. “Following nature with mengzi or zhuangzi.” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2005): 327-340.

The analysis of metaphor is not only for these four poems; the same analysis can also be applied to other poems and even other types of texts. Although sometimes different cultures have different understandings of different things as well as different interpretations of different metaphors, human beings, as the same creature, still have some similar thinking patterns, thanks to which this study can proceed smoothly. Moreover, as mentioned before, the analysis involves three different languages, which did not hinder our study. Therefore, this is an effect of this analysis: it proves that metaphor is not only reflected at the linguistic level, but also at the cognitive level.

There are also limitations. First, due to the limitation of the space, although some results can be seen from the analysis of four poems, it will be better if more poems are analyzed in the future, not only Chinese poetry, but also poetry in English, Polish and other languages. Second, this article mainly chooses to use three common metaphor types (structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor) for analysis, in addition, there are many other metaphor types that can be used for text research and analysis in the future.

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KEYWORDS

conceptual metaphor

self-referential

metaphor

ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the use of conceptual metaphors as well as various manifestations of metaphorization in Chinese poetry through a comparative textual analysis of four contemporary Chinese poems and their Polish and English translations. Focusing on self-referential metaphors, where linguistic structures reflect their own metaphorical nature, the paper demonstrates how the structure of the text interacts semantically. Meanwhile, these findings underscore metaphor's role as a cognition-driven phenomenon beyond mere linguistic ornamentation. The study contributes to cognitive poetics by bridging Western metaphor theory (e.g., Conceptual Metaphor Theory) with Chinese literary practices, offering a framework for analyzing self-referentialism in multilingual poetry.

m u l t i - l a n g u a g e

CHINESE POETRY

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Jinlin Li – holds a Master's degree from the University of Sheffield, born in 1996, is currently a doctoral student at the Doctoral School of Languages and Literatures, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. Her research interests and PhD direction focus on metaphor studies in cognitive linguistics and its applications in language teaching, employing textual analysis as the primary methodology. She aims to explore how conceptual metaphors shape linguistic patterns and facilitate second language learning, with potential interdisciplinary connections to cognitive science and pedagogy.