

An Analysis of the Moon Image in Chinese and Western Cultures from the Perspective of Associative Meaning

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Abstract

The moon image has rich associative meanings in both Chinese and western cultures. Since the moon which is symbol of eternity is accompanied by the development of human beings, therefore its associative meanings have always been enriched and developed in both Chinese and western cultures. Although the moon image in Chinese and western cultures has similar associative meanings, the reasons for their formations are quite different. In addition, the moon image shows great differences in Chinese and western cultures, which is due to the uniqueness of the two cultures. This article aims to analyze the moon image in Chinese and western cultures from the associative meaning of Leech's categories, so as to find out their unique expressions of the moon image in Chinese and western cultures, which is of practical significance for cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: the moon image, associative meanings, Chinese and western culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, the associative meanings of the moon image in Chinese and western cultures have undergone a diachronic development. The moon image has similar associative meanings in both Chinese and western cultures. For example, when it comes to the moon, people always associate it with chastity, brilliance, loyalty, beauty, love, etc [1]. But in general, Chinese and western culture are the products of two different thinking modes, and the people of these two cultures will have different views on the same objects, therefore there are differences about the associative meanings of the moon image in the two cultures. The purpose of this article is to analyze the moon image in Chinese and western cultures from the associative meanings of Leech's classification, find out the ideological collision about the moon image in different cultures in order to better understand the expressions of the same image in different cultures. What's more, this article can help people achieve the goal of successful communication in cross-cultural communication.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leech [2] pointed out in *semantics* that words have their own characteristics. When people listen to or read them, they often associate it with other things. This is the associative meaning of words. It is a meaning that

can cause the listener or reader to associate. Leech divides meanings into seven types, namely: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning [3]. Except for the inherent meaning "conceptual meaning" and "thematic meaning" that related to accent and order, the remaining meanings are collectively referred to as the associative meaning of the words. And Leech [2] also believed that they all have "the same unrestricted and changeable characteristics, and can be analyzed in degree and scope, rather than in the isolated way of "not this is that". As a result, the key to mastering the meaning of a word is to grasp its associative meanings. There are so rich associative meanings of the moon image in Chinese and western cultures, so this paper takes the associative meaning of Leech's categories as the theoretical framework to analyze how the moon image is expressed in the Chinese and western cultures.

THE ASSOCIATIVE MEANINGS OF THE MOON IMAGE IN CHINESE CULTURE

The Associative Meaning of Female

First of all, in Chinese mythology, the Moon Goddess corresponds to the Sun God, which coincides with the Chinese culture of Yin and Yang. The well-known Moon Goddess is Chang'e in Chinese Culture. When it comes to the moon, Chinese people always

associate it with the Moon Goddess Chang'e. After a long development from ancient times to the present, the moon is connected with the beauty of tenderness and mildness of women in Chinese culture [4]. For example, the monthly cycle of the moon has been implicitly linked to menstrual cycles of women in Chinese cultures. Secondly, it's interesting that if a Chinese whose name has the Chinese character “月”(moon), even if you haven't seen her, from the name alone, you can guess that nine times out of ten this person is a woman. Because the Chinese character “月”(moon) is always associated with female in Chinese traditional culture, it has the associative meaning of female. Not only that, in some four character idioms including the Chinese character “月”(moon), such as “花容月貌”, “闭月羞花”(a beauty which obscure the moon and make flowers blush), which is used to describe female's beauty. In a word, the moon image has its female associative meaning since ancient Chinese mythology. Up to now, the moon image has abundant female associative meaning in Chinese culture.

The Associative Meaning of Homesickness

In the unique ancient culture of China, the literati like to express their emotions by ancient Chinese poetry, especially for the poets who live in other places far away from home. They wandered aimlessly in a strange land and wrote the moon to express their homesickness. So, many famous moon poetry that have been handed down for thousands of years, such as “举头望明月，低头思故乡”(Can it be hoarfrost on the ground? Looking up, I find the bright moon), “露从今夜白，月是故乡明”(Dew turns into frost since tonight; The moon viewed at home is more bright), “人有悲欢离合，月有阴晴圆缺，此事古难全。但愿人长久，千里共婵娟”(Men have sorrow and joy; they part or meet again; The moon is bright or dim and she may wax or wane. There has been nothing perfect since the olden days. So let us wish that man will live long as he can! Though miles apart, we'll share the beauty she displays.) etc., [5] all those Chinese poetry express poets' homesickness. As time goes by, whenever people want to express their homesickness, they always rely on the moon image, so the moon has the associative meaning of homesickness. Even now, when hearing someone recite a poem with the Chinese character “月”(moon), people naturally guess that he is expressing the feeling of homesickness. Interestingly, the traditional Chinese festival known as Mid-Autumn Festival is also closely related to the moon image. On August 15 of the Chinese lunar calendar, the moon hangs round in the night sky, which has a beautiful meaning of happy reunion in Chinese culture. Therefore, it has become a custom for Chinese people to eat moon cakes, enjoy the moon, have family reunions, or miss their relatives far away from home.

The Associate Meaning of Love

Similarly, in Chinese mythology, the moon image not only reminds people of the goddess of the moon, but also the God who unites persons in marriage, also known as “月下老人(the old man under the moon)”. He is the Red Joy God in charge of marriage in Chinese folklore, and an immortal in the heaven. In ancient times, when men and women were seeking marriage, they always went to the temple to worship the Red Joy God. Because Red Joy God often ties up marriage for people under the moon, gradually the moon image also has the associative meaning of love in Chinese culture. In some ancient Chinese poetry, the moon image is also used to express love, such as “长安一片月，万户捣衣声”(Moonlight is spread all over the capital, The sound of beating clothes far and near.), “海上生明月，天涯共此时”(Over the sea grows the moon bright; We gaze on it far, far apart.) etc [5]. The Chinese character “月”(moon) in these poems have the associative meaning of love. Even now, the associative meaning of love of the image moon has not been lost. When singing the song *The Moon Represents My Heart*: “my feeling will not change, my love will never fade, the moon shows my love to you”, the moon image's associative meaning of love also emerges in Chinese culture.

The Associative Meaning of Eternity

The moon hanging highly in the sky often causes the poets to think about philosophy in Chinese culture. History is advancing, times are changing, but the moon from ancient times to the present is always hanging in the dark night. When people face the unchanging moon, they will often lament its eternity and the continuous changed things in the world [6]. In Chinese ancient poetry, poets also use the moon image to express their feelings about life when seeing the eternal moon. Therefore, the moon image also has the associative meaning of eternity in Chinese culture. For example, in those ancient Chinese poetry such as “秦时明月汉时关，万里长城人未还”(The aged-old moon still shines over the ancient great wall, but our frontier guardsmen have not come back at all), “江畔何人初见月？江月何年初照人？人生代代无穷已，江月年年望相似”(Who by the riverside first saw the moon arise? When did the moon first see a man by riverside? Ah, generations have come and past away; From year to year the moons look alike, old and new) [5], all those ancient Chinese poetry express poets' feelings of life, which is also embedded the moon image's associative meaning of eternity in Chinese culture.

To sum up, in Chinese culture, the moon image not only has the associative meaning of cool and pure which is born from its own characteristics, but also reflects the associative meanings of female, love, homesickness and eternity into people's minds due to the unique Chinese myths, legends and ancient Chinese

poetry. Therefore, the moon image has rich associative meanings in Chinese culture.

THE ASSOCIATIVE MEANING OF THE MOON IMAGE IN WESTERN CULTURE

The Associative Meaning of Female and Love

In western culture, moon image is also often associated with female. In the west, Moon Goddess is Artemis. Later, Diana replaced Artemis with all her function and became the Goddess of fertility, childbirth and wildlife protection. According to the myth, Diana is slender, symmetrical, beautiful, and also the protector of virgins, so her name is often synonymous with virginity. In English, “to be a Diana” can be used to mean a young girl who is not married or never married for life [7]. When the moon is deified as a female, it becomes a symbol of reproduction and life. So in the west, people often give the moon image the associative meaning of female. In addition, when the moon image is mentioned in the west, people will think of the passionate love between men and women. Because in the west, the moon image is also compared to the protector of love [8]. In Shakespeare’s classical play *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a description of the moon image to express love between Romeo and Juliet.

Romeo: Juliet, with this round of bringing a moon, it’s sliver cover these fruit tree’s top, I promise.

Juliet: Oh, don’t swear with the moon, it changes often, every month has its own wax and wane; if you swear with it, your love will be like it perhaps?

From above dialogues between Romeo and Juliet, it can be clearly seen that Romeo thinks that the moon image can witness and protect his love to Juliet. In addition, in the unique western chivalric literature, knights and ladies always spend a good night under the moon to express their warm love, but they have to be separated when the dawn comes. Here, it embodies the associative meaning of love into the moon image in western culture.

The Associative Meaning of Terrible Things

In the west, the words related to the moon also contain the meaning of madness such as “moon-head” (idiot; fool; deranged person), “mooner”, (a criminal who often commits a crime at the full moon), “moon-struck” (the people who is insane because of the change of moon). Roman Goddess Diana, also known as Luna, originated from Latin. And its derivatives are “lunatic” which means crackers; “lunacy” which means Insanity; “lunatic asylum” which means mental hospital; “lunatic fringe” which means extremist [7]. Therefore, in western culture, the moon image often reminds people of terrible things. Besides, the moon always comes with darkness which is the best cover for all the terrible and evil things. So in western literature or movies, werewolves and vampires would appear on the full-moon night. Hence, the moon image also brings the associative meaning of terrible things in western culture.

The Associative Meaning of Changeable Things

The shape of the moon is not the same as that of the sun, but it always changes. Basically, the moon has three shapes, which are crescent, semicircular and circular respectively. So in the western culture, the moon always reminds people of the changeable things [9]. Similarly, in the above mentioned dialogues between Romeo and Juliet, Romeo associates the moon image with the guardian of their love for the moon image. But for Juliet, she is too cautious, and always afraid that the beautiful love will be fleeting. Hence she only associates the moon image with its negative association meaning that is changeable. From the sentence of Juliet, it clearly indicates that in the eyes of some westerners, the moon is not eternal changeless, but changeable and moving [10]. Again, the English word “moon-struck” which means the people who are insane because of the change of moon also expresses the changeable things. Clearly, the associative meanings of the moon image in western culture are very different from Chinese culture.

In brief, in western culture, there are also associate meanings of female and love, but it should be noted that there are also negative associative meanings of the moon image, which is the terrible things like werewolves and vampires. But all of these associative meanings of the moon image consist of the unique culture in west.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it can be clearly seen that in Chinese and western cultures, the associative meanings of the moon image have many similarities, that is, loyalty, beauty, love, female and so on. Although they have the same associative meanings, the reasons for their formations are quite different. The mythology systems in the two cultures are rather different, one originates the eastern mythology and the other originates ancient Greek and Roman mythology. As a result, both Chinese and western cultures associate female with the Moon Goddess in their respective mythological stories, which makes the moon image have associative meanings of female. In addition, in Chinese and western cultures, the associative meanings of the image moon are also different. The associative meanings of the moon image are almost commendatory in Chinese culture, while there are some derogatory associative meanings in western culture. What’s more, the moon image has a unique associative meanings of homesickness and eternity in Chinese culture, but in western culture, the moon sometimes associate the changeable terrible things. This reflects the difference of thinking modes between two cultures.

In a word, as two different language systems, English and Chinese inevitably have one or another deviation in their mutual understanding or conversion of semantics. Because people’s understanding of language must rely on certain cultural and social

historical background, they have great differences in cultural history, customs, logical thinking, language rules, structural forms, etc. Although the moon image has many associative meanings in both Chinese and western cultures, there are similarities and differences in these associative meanings. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, only by accurately grasping the moon image in various associative meanings in Chinese and western culture, can cross-cultural communicators truly understand Chinese and western cultures and achieve a successful communicative purpose.

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