

Conceptual Metaphors for “Xin” in Confucianism

Based on “Xin” in *The Four Books*

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Abstract—“Xin” is usually understood as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, faithfulness, or sincerity. It is considered as an essential concept of Confucianism and is commonly recognized as the standard of value and virtue for Chinese people. Up to now, a lot of scholars have studied “Xin” from multiple perspectives, including its translation, definition, connotation, influence, rhetoric devices, and its counterpart in western concept. Although they have made great achievements on this topic, almost all of their researches focus on the concept of “Xin” itself in isolation, which is insufficient for further studies. Therefore, this thesis is trying to investigate the conceptual metaphors for “Xin” in *The Four Books* based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their work: *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Here, by analyzing the conceptual metaphors for “Xin”, this paper is going to discuss the cognitive mechanisms and conceptual system behind these metaphors. And I hope that it can at least provide a reference and inspiration when using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to study traditional Chinese culture or philosophical concepts like “Xin”.

Keywords—conceptual metaphors; “Xin”; Confucianism; *The Four Books*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Xin” is considered as one of the essential concept of Confucianism, together with “Ren” (benevolence), “Yi” (righteousness), “Li” (etiquette or reverence), “Zhi” (wisdom), are the so called “five constant virtues” or “five nature principles”. “Xin” can be understood as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, faithfulness or sincerity, Confucius concluded it in one of the four things which should be taught: letters, ethics, devotion of soul, and truthfulness (Confucian Analects: XXIV). This justifies the significant status of “Xin” in the moral system of Confucianism.

A lot of scholars have studied “Xin” from multiple perspectives, including its translation (Yang Bojun & Liu Dianjue, 2008; Pan Fuen & Wen Shaoxia, 1993; Waley, 1997), definition (Yang Bojun, 1980, 2008; Wang Wenjing, 2008) connotation (Slingerland, 2011; Koehn, 2001) influence (Bruce, 1922), rhetoric devices, and its counterpart in western concept (Wee, 2011), yet limitation and deficiencies still exist. Because what real matters, is to supply a more powerful and unique basement for establishing a common theory on metaphor through investigating and exploring the characteristics of Chinese metaphors. Therefore, here we choose to study “Xin” in a cognitive perspective based on The

Conceptual Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which is further illustrated by many linguistics including Barcelona (2000), Croft (2004), Evans and Green (2006), Fauconnier and Turner (2002).

The Four Books or *Si Shu* is chosen as the corpus here to study “Xin”, and these four books (*The Great Learning* or *Da Xue*, *The Works of Mencius* also *Meng Zi*, *Confucian Analects* or *Lun Yu*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* or *Zhong Yong*) were selected by Zhu Xi to serve as general introduction to Confucian thought. So, it can be served as a perfect corpus to study “Xin” in Confucianism. Although there are many translated versions of each book in *The Four Books*, the English translation here is James Legge’s version, including *The Chinese Classics, Volume I: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean* (1893) and *The Chinese Classics, Volume II: The Works of Mencius* (1895). As a famous Scottish sinologist, James Legge has systematic and coherent translations of Chinese classics, which can be taken as a valuable reference.

The metaphorical study on “Xin” in this paper will be divided into three aspects and analyzed by some typical examples in *The Four Books*. In structural metaphor, “Xin” can be metaphorically expressed as color and music. (2) In UP/DOWN metaphors of orientational metaphors, one example is used to prove how the metaphor on “Xin” is worked. (3) Ontological metaphors project “Xin” onto concrete entity, like tools.

II. CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS FOR “XIN”

A. Structural Metaphors for “Xin”

In *The Four Books*, “Xin” as a core idea and value is illustrated by many ways, it is not just emphasized directly by Confucian scholars, but also expressed metaphorically with every aspect of our lives, like eating, housing, and transporting. First, this thesis will illustrate how it is metaphorically expressed as color, as follows:

Example (1):

Kongzi yue: “wu si er fei zhe: wu you, kong qi luan miao ye; wu ning, kong qi luan yi ye; wu li kou, kong qi luan xin ye; wu zheng sheng, kong qi kuan yue ye...wu zi, kong qi luan zhu ye.”

Confucius say, hate like but not one: hate daniel, afraid it messes up corn; hate glib-tonguedness, afraid it messes up righteousness; hate sharp tongue, afraid it messes up sincerity; hate Zheng music, afraid it messes up music; hate purple, afraid it messes up red.

Confucius said, "I hate a semblance which is not the reality. I hate the daniel, lest it be confounded with the corn. I hate glib-tonguedness, lest it be confounded with righteousness. I hate sharpness of tongue, lest it be confounded with sincerity; I hate the music of Chang, lest it be confounded with the true music: I hate the reddish blue, lest it be confounded with vermilion. (The Works of Mencius: Tsin Sin Part II)

This line expresses the idea of Mencius's teacher Confucius, who hates people with sharp tongue, or people who is acrid or being mean, because he thinks they may confound or make a mess of people who has sincerity ("Xin"). And, he also set up a relationship of these two kinds of characters as two different colors, specifically, reddish blue and vermilion. In order to apprehend the relationship between sharpness of tongue in color and sincerity in personality, Confucius brings forward reddish blue and vermilion to explain. Metaphorically speaking, we are going to understand the target domain of personality of sincerity in terms of source domain of color, of vermilion in "Table I".

TABLE I. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN TARGET DOMAIN ("Xin") AND SOURCE DOMAIN (COLOR)

Target domain	Source domain
Sincerity("Xin")	Vermilion (Color)
Sharpness of tongues	Reddish blue

Back to the Pre-Qin period in China, different colors actually stand for different things or attitudes. Purple or reddish blue was understood as something adulterated or something not pure. Vermilion, however, is orthodox, and can stand for the noble quality. That is to say, for Confucius and people at that time, reddish blue is blurring vermilion just like sharpness of tongues is making a mess of people with sincerity. In a word, "Xin" is metaphorically expressed as vermilion in color for it is a valuable and highly regarded personality in Confucianism and in Chinese culture.

In example (1), another pair: the music of Chang and the so called "true music" are also employed to demonstrate the meaning of "Xin" (sincerity) in personality. The music of Chang means the music from the country of Chang in the period of Warring states. And the true music at that time refers to the classical court music, which is usually played in the royal palace. So, metaphorically speaking, personality as the target domain is understood by the source domain of music, in which the character of "Xin" (sincerity) has correspondences with the so called true music, while sharpness of tongue is compared with the music of Chang. The analogy between them is displaying on the "Table II".

The music in the country of Chang is considered as decadent music for it usually describes the life of normal people. So some scholars and officers in ancient time hold that it is a kind of music that is too informal and casual to play in solemn situations. The true music, however, is the classical music played in the court or in the royal fiesta. So, this kind of

music is formal, official, and noble for traditional scholars. When we look back at this metaphor for "Xin", it is clear that "Xin" in Confucianism is regarded as formal and noble, just like the true music, it is personality canonized by most great philosophers and Confucianism in ancient time. On the other side, being acrimonious in language is disapproval just like the music of Chang in ancient time.

TABLE II. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN TARGET DOMAIN ("Xin") AND SOURCE DOMAIN (MUSIC)

Target domain	Source domain
Personality("Xin")	Music
Sharpness of tongue	The music of Chang

A. Orientational Metaphors for "Xin"

Except structural metaphors for "Xin", orientational metaphors for "Xin" are also mentioned in the Four Books, especially UP/DOWN metaphors. From those metaphors we can grasp that the orientation or direction was a kernel in the ancient society for most people to comply with. People combined the spatial structure with everything in their daily life, such as social position, social class, polite, feelings. The following example is how to use this spatial metaphor to explain the connotation of "Xin" from Confucian Analects.

Example (2):

Shang hao li, ze min mo gan bu jing; shang hao yi, ze min mo gan bu fu; shang hao xin, ze min mo gan bu yong qing.

Up like rite, people aren't dare not respect; up like righteousness, then people not dare not subordinate; up like trustworthiness, then people not dare not use heart.

If a superior (UP) love propriety, the people will not dare not to be reverent. If he loves righteousness, the people will not dare not to submit to his example. If he loves good faith, the people will not dare not to be sincere. (Confucian Analects: IV-3)

Example (3):

Zai xia wei bu huo hu shang, min bu ke de er zhi yi; huo hu shang you dao; bu xin hu peng you, bu huo hu shang ye; xin hu peng you you dao

At down, no obtain up, people cannot get and govern; obtain up has a way; no trust friends no obtain up, trust friends has a way.

When those in inferior situations do not obtain the confidence of the sovereign, they cannot succeed in governing the people. There is a way to obtain the confidence of the sovereign; if one is not trusted by his friends, he will not get the confidence of his sovereign. There is a way to being trusted by one's friends. (The Doctrine of the Mean: XX-17)

Both example (2) and example (3) can justify that for Confucius, superior (or UP in other translated version) refers to the lord who loves rites, rightness and good faith ("Xin") in this cited line. This means people who have those virtues are UP (SHANG), or in the higher position. Because in the ancient time, or even today, those with righteous morality (good faith, justice, rites) are respected by other, so to have a higher position among normal people, are UP in spatial orientation.

On the contrary, people who demonstrate sordid and decayed qualities are considered as inferiors by others are DOWN. This is why we have the metaphor: VIRTUE IS UP and DEPRAVITY IS DOWN. In a word, to combine “Xin” with the UP orientation metaphorically is a way to express it as a noble quality in “Table III”.

TABLE III. THE METAPHORICAL CONCEPT OF UP/DOWN

Target domain	Source domain
Morality	Virtue (“Xin”) is up
	Depravity is down

Furthermore, UP and DOWN can be used to understand the sovereign and the normal people directly. For instance: “Never has there been a case of the sovereign loving benevolence, and the people not loving righteousness.” (The Great Learning: X-21) in which, a sovereign is metaphorically expressed as UP while normal people as DOWN.

B. Ontological Metaphors for “Xin”

Ontological metaphors give an ontological status to general categories of abstract target concepts, which refers to that we regard our experiences as objects, substances, and containers in general. In the Four Books, the abstract and obscure concept “Xin” is identified as objects, so that people can refer to them, categorize them and quantify them, and consequently, reason about them, as follows.

Example (4):

Zi yue: “ren er wu xin, bu zhi qi ke ye. Da che wu ni, xiao che wu yue, qi he yi xing zhi zai?”

Man but no trust, not know he can stand. Large cart no pin, small cart no pins, it how can go?

The Master said, ‘I do not know how a man without truthfulness is to get on. How can a large carriage be made to go without the cross-bar for yoking the oxen to, or a small carriage without the arrangement for yoking the horses?’ (Confucian Analects: XXII)

“Xin” which translated as trustfulness here, is a noble quality that people holds as very respectable. In this example, obviously man is compared to large cart and small cart, while the “Xin” is compared to Ni and Yue of a cart. Ni in the ancient time refers to cross-bar for yoking the oxen to. Yue refers to the arrangement for yoking the horses or crossbar in carriage hitched to two parallel bars for guiding direction. Both of these two tools play a very crucial role in starting a carriage. A correspondence is set by Confucius that Ni and Yue for a cart to work out are just like trustfulness (“Xin”) for people to be a real man, to get on.

Ni and Yue are concrete objects to figure out, while “Xin” is an abstract concept to grasp for normal people. Through the analysis, associations between them can be justifiably hinted as in “Table IV”:

TABLE IV. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN TARGET DOMAIN (“Xin”) AND SOURCE DOMAIN (TOOL)

Target domain	Source domain
Ni, Yue (Tool)	Trustfulness (“Xin”)
Carriage	People

Ni and Yue in the domain of tools correspond to “trustfulness” in the domain of people. Carriage in the domain of tools corresponds to people in the domain of people. We can conclude the metaphor that “Xin” is indispensable for being human like Ni and Yue is crucial for making a large carriage start.

III. CONCLUSION

The paper devoted to a study of conceptual metaphors underlying the doctrines of “Xin” in The Four Books within a cognitive linguistic framework. Together, we have explicated metaphors for “Xin” in Confucianism into three kinds, and the findings are as follows:

First, in the section of structural metaphors, “Xin” can be metaphorically expressed as color, in which a mapping crosses the target domain “Xin” and source domain vermilion is established. Then, it is metaphorically expressed as music, and “Xin” is understood in terms of the true music, which is gracious and noble as morality. Second, in the orientational metaphor, or the UP/DOWN metaphors, this thesis finds that being sincere is considered as UP in the society while being deprave is DOWN.

Third, in ontological metaphors for “Xin”, “Xin” is compared with Ni and Yue of a carriage and ancient people holds that “Xin” is indispensable for being human just like those tools for starting a cart. “Xin” can also be expressed as weapon, and it shows the inner strong of characteristic.

From all the conceptual metaphors for “Xin” we analyzed above, we can find that conceptual metaphor is not only a kind of language phenomenon but also a cultural phenomenon. The cognitive law of abstract concepts actually emerges from the realistic experiences of human beings, which is systematic, which means that cultural background and experience are the soil of cultivating metaphors and build the unique mechanism behind those metaphors.

Due to the length of this thesis and limited ability of myself, there are still limitations and suggestions. In further researches, it is valuable to investigate conceptual metaphors on other concepts of Confucianism as well as other schools and to probe into their influence on Chinese culture and philosophy.

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