

The role of the body parts in emotion

Pu Qing-hong

School of Humanities & Social Sciences
North China Electric Power University
Beijing, P.R. China
qhpu@ncepu.edu.cn

Abstract

The present article attempts to discuss in detail how the Chinese language makes a principal use of the heart in the conceptualization of emotion. The role of some of the body parts in emotion will also be examined and discussed.

Keywords: heart, conceptualization of emotion

1. Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss in detail how the Chinese language makes a principal use of the heart in the conceptualization of emotion. The role of some of the body parts in emotion will also be examined and discussed. While discussing the conceptualization of emotion in Chinese, I will illustrate each of the conceptual metaphors with linguistic examples, all of which are taken from native speakers' daily conversations, contemporary Chinese short stories and novels as well as Chinese dictionaries.

2. The conceptualization of emotion

As demonstrated by several of the major prior studies (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987, Kovecses 2000, inter alia), emotions have an extremely complex concept structure which brings about a wide variety of non-trivial reference. In this section, I will focus on the conceptualization of emotion in the Chinese language and its culture setting, based on the cognitive framework set up by the above-mentioned research, and try to show that underlying the Chinese language of emotions there is a coherent conceptual organization, where the heart is at the heart of metaphorical and metonymical expressions.

alization of emotion in the Chinese language and its culture setting, based on the cognitive framework set up by the above-mentioned research, and try to show that underlying the Chinese language of emotions there is a coherent conceptual organization, where the heart is at the heart of metaphorical and metonymical expressions.

3. The heart in emotion metaphors

Much like the general English metaphor for emotions, which says that THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS (Kovecses 2000), the Chinese language of emotions embodies more or less the same idea, except that Chinese metaphors and metonymies express more specifically that THE HEART IS THE CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS. For example,

14) the anger in the heart

15) the heart is full of joy

This general metaphor for emotion, however, is two-fold. On the one hand, it consists of a variety of source domains, that all express some facet of the general metaphor of THE HEART CONTAINER, some (e.g. the physical force) applying to several or all seven basic emotions while other (e.g. sweet dew) applying to a specific emotional feeling. On the other hand, most of these expressions characterize the negative effect of emotions on the heart. I will start with the concept of THE HEART CONTAINER first.

The first concept on my list is anger since it seems to be the most studied emotion topic from a cognitive-semantic perspective. There are a number of metaphorical sources (Lakoff 1987) that characterize anger in English metaphors, the major domain of which is “anger is a hot fluid in a container”. The major corresponding source domain in Chinese metaphors for anger in daily uses is *nu*-qi, or simply *qi*, rather than *nu*, except in idioms. As a matter of fact, the word *nu* used alone in spoken Chinese sounds quite pedantic and archaic, *Qi* is also regarded as energy that flows through the body. When *qi* rises in the heart (or body), anger comes, and when it calms down, the anger subsides and the harmony is restored in the body (e.f., King 1989).

The gas metaphor is illustrated by the following examples.

- 16) Anger rises in the heart.
- 17) Indignation fills the chest.
- 18) the belly full of gas (anger)

When anger becomes more intense, the gas rises; anger sets up fire in the heart. Very often, more intense anger is characterized as fire simmering, smoldering, and burning in the heart rather than released. This is so because of the traditional and cultural ideology of keeping control. Even when anger is out of control and explosion results, the explosion usually occurs inside, e.g., in the heart or another internal organ, hence the damaged or broken heart. This scenario gives rise to the following two source domains:

- 3.1 Anger is heart/fire in the heart.
- 19) anger smoldering in one's heart
- 20) burning with rage in the chest
- 21) fire burning in the heart
- 3.2 Anger is a natural force kept in the heart
- 22) The rage in his heart was a dormant volcano.
- 23) The tide of anger was seething in his heart

Similarly, the concept of hatred is also a substance/gas in the heart, and characterized by heat/fire as well because hatred often includes anger or fury. For example,

- 3.3 Hatred is heat/fire or pressure in the heart
- 24) to keep one's hatred in the heart
- 25) hatred burning in one's heart

While anger is heat or fire, it can also be cold or ice in Chinese conceptual. This source domain is illustrated by the following examples.

- 3.4 Anger is cold/ice in the heart
- 26) She was shaking with rage. Her bulky sweater couldn't ward off the cold from her heart.
- 27) again and again, the anger finally froze his heart.

On the other hand, sorrow, including melancholy, never seems to be associated with the concept of heat, but is treated as cold/ice in Chinese metaphors. Of all seven basic emotions, sorrow seems to have the most negative affect on the heart and almost all sorrow metaphors make use of a cold, icy or broken heart. The following metonymies illustrate the concept of ‘sorrow is cold/ice’:

- 3.5 Sorrow is cold /ice in the heart
- 28) Her heart became ice.
- 29) Her heart was thoroughly cold.
- 30) His heart froze solid (at hearing a sad news).
- 31) Her heart was frozen in sorrow.

Moreover, the ‘substance in the heart’ metaphor is most productive in the expressive language for love in Chinese. Specifically, it is characterized by positive and pleasant imagery of sweet dew, a living organism, a bond, treasure, etc. in the heart, which gives rise to a number of metaphorical source domains as follows:

- 3.6 Love is a living organism (especially a flowering plant) in the heart.
- 32) She sowed the seed of love in her heart.
- 33) The seed of love had sprouted in her heart.

34) The sprout of love was growing fast in her heart.

35) The bud of love suddenly started to blooming in her heart.

3.7 Love is sweet dew in the heart.

36) The sweet dew of love moistened his heart.

37) Her heart yearned for the sweet dew of love.

3.8 Love is a breeze in the heart.

38) The gentle breeze of love had touched his heart.

3.9 Love is heat/fire in the heart.

39) Love melted his heart and soul.

40) Love warmed up his heart.

3.10 Love is a bond that connects two hearts.

41) Love bound their hearts together.

42) Love comes along when two hearts collide.

43) Love is engraved heart to heart (having mutual affinity between lovers.)

3.11 The object of love is treasure in the heart.

44) She treasured up her love for him in her heart.

45) She was in his heart and he in hers.

46) Don't you know that you are the only one in my heart?

47) She occupies his heart (she is his sweetheart).

Whereas anger is commonly gas/energy in Chinese metaphors, 'love is a fluid' metaphor does exist in Chinese, as indicated by the phrases of yi('brim') and liu('flow') in (48) and (49) below. Both characters have a semantic radical shui('water'), indicating that love is fluid flowing in or out of the heart. In (50), 'love is a fluid' is explicitly expressed by the phrase ai-he (literally: 'love-river').

3.12 Love is a fluid in the heart.

48) Her heart was brimming with love.

49) love flows out of one's heart

50) love flows in one's heart

Finally, metaphors for fear and joy also include the 'substance in the heart'. For example,

51) having fear in the heart

52) happy in the heart

Nevertheless, the 'substance in the heart' metaphor is not central to the understanding of the concepts of fear and joy. While fear is more commonly metaphorized to be a violence done to the heart, joy is hardly containable in the heart. I will return to these topics later in the paper.

Besides the aspect of the SUBSTANCE IN THE HEART, the general HEART CONTAINER metaphor is characterized by an equally, if not more, important aspect, i.e., EMOTION IS A DAMAGING FORCE DONE TO THE HEART. Even 'joy', a positive emotional feeling, should be put under control since extreme joy may also cause tragedy, as indicated by the following idiom:

53) Extreme joy begets sorrow

This is so because, on the one hand, emotions cause illness, as cautioned by the traditional Chinese medicine, and on the other hand, emotions blurs one's vision and confuses one's heart, as frowned by the traditional ideology, hence both literally and figuratively.

4. Emotion is a damaging physical force done to the heart.

This aspect of the general emotion metaphor is specified by a number of subordinate source domains, as listed below, followed by illustrating examples.

4.1 Anger is explosive

54) anger explodes one's heart

55) so angry that one's lungs explode

4.2 Anger is a physical/psychological agitation.

56) anger disturbs one's heartbeat

57) anger bewilders one's heart

The 'damaging force done to the heart' metaphor is more explicitly embodied in the following metonymical expressions for sorrow:

- 4.3 Sorrow is a knife of a sharp object.
 58) (one feels) as if the heart is being cut/twist by a knife
 59) (one feels) as if a knife stabs one into the heart
 60) (one feels) as if the heart is being pierced by thousands of arrows
 4.4 Sorrow is a tormentor.
 61) His heart was tormented by sorrow.
 62) (one feels) as if one's heart is torn into pieces
 63) one's heart is bleeding
 4.5 Sorrow is down.
 64) Her heart was sinking.
 65) His heart sank to the abyss.
 4.6 The ultimate sorrow is a dead heart.
 66) His heart died.
 67) No sorrow can surpass a dead heart

Similarly, fear and shock are physical/psychological forces that may damage your internal organs, especially the heart and the gall. The concept of gall is specifically associated with fear and shock, which may be based on the folk understanding of the human anatomy and the bodily functions, i.e., the courage comes from the gall (and the heart as well). Hence quite a number of metonymical idioms expressing the concept of fear illustrate the correspondence between intense fear/shock and the gall, as shown in the following examples:

- 4.7 Fear is a violence.
 68) the heart trembling and the gall shaking (very fearful)
 69) fear breaks one's gall (extremely terrified)
 70) one's heart and gall are both broken (extremely terrified)
 71) to lose one's gall at hearing the wing (terror-stricken at the news)

Love, on the other hand, may be a positive substance in the heart such as a flowering plant, sweet dew or treasure, it can also be a negative force ruining the heart. In other words, metaphors for love include the 'damaging force' one.

- 4.8 The result of lovesickness/lost love is a broken heart.
 72) ever-lasting lovesickness destroys one's heart
 73) Separate lovers have broken hearts
 74) She loved him so much that her heart broke.
 75) The lost-love broke her heart.
 Finally, human desires such as lust and greed are also damaging forces, as illustrated by the following source domain:
 4.9 Greed/lust is an enemy.
 76) greed suffocates one's heart
 77) lust attacks one's heart

5. Conclusion

The above discussion has demonstrated that Chinese abounds in emotion idioms and expressions that employ the concept of the heart. The heart metaphor conceptualizes almost all human emotional feelings, and has its roots in the traditional Chinese medicine and ideology, and the folk theory of the physiological effects of emotion.

References:

- [1] Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire and dangerous things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [2] Kövecses, Z. (2000). *Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [3] Wang, S. H. (1994). *China at a glance*. Beijing: Beijing University Press.