

# Reinterpretation of Qian Zhongshu's Thought of "Disenchanted Words by Words"

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**Abstract.** Qian Zhongshu suggests that Zhuangzi intended to "disenchant words by words" when he used the metaphor. Qian explains it from the uncertainty of metaphor (two handles and multi-sides). I believe that Qian only understands metaphor from the level of rhetoric. It is impossible to reasonably explain why metaphors can cancel each other out, so that they can "disenchant the words". We should go deep into the human thinking mode hidden behind the metaphor, that is, affirmative thinking. The juxtaposition of two extremely metaphors can play a role in dissolving this mode of thinking and thus disenchanting the language.

## 1. Introduction

Qian Zhongshu discusses that in order to prevent the readers from sticking to the surface meaning of words, Chinese ancient philosophers usually use the way of "disenchanted words by words" and "the irony". He thinks this is because the metaphor has ambiguity and contradiction. I believe that it is impossible to fully explain why language can break the language from the rhetorical level. Only by deepening into the thinking level can we truly understand the "disenchanted words by words."

## 2. Qian Zhongshu on "disenchanted words by words" and metaphor

In the "Zhou Yi Zheng Yi" article, Qian discusses the relationship between words and meanings from the method of using metaphor. He believes that language can express meaning, but may also hinder people from understanding meaning, that is, "let the words interfere with the sense" [1]. He cited the Buddhist classics "Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom", "Guan Yinzi", the ancient Greek skeptics, Zhuangzi and other texts as examples. He believes that the ancients have already seen the problems of the language arguments, especially the metaphorical analogies and other methods to argue. So how to avoid "let the words interfere with the sense"? Or as the ancients said, "only the saints do not leave a word". However, it is meaningless to completely cancel the language. If you have to "speak reluctantly", Qian believes that you can use the "disenchanted words by words" method: using the words themselves to eliminate misleading words, and each time you write a sentence, you can use the opposite words to deconstruct it. [1]

"Letting the words interfere with the sense" is based on the separation of words and meanings. Zhuangzi has already discussed this separation, that's why he proposed to "forgetting words after grasping the meaning" (*Zhuangzi Waiwu*). Zhuangzi believes that language is the source of the chaos in the world. Only when we equal everything in the world and forget the famous words, is it possible to eliminate chaos and move toward great harmony. In the "linguistic turn" of Western philosophy, the separation of word and meaning is also the focus of discussion. For example, Adorno, the philosopher in Frankfurt School, believes that the objects expressed by words and words themselves have been separated. "In this way, between words and things that are assimilated and determined by words, there is a kind of opposition." [2]

The separation of word and meaning discussed by Qian is mainly focused on the ambiguity of metaphor. He believes that metaphor is rhetorical and should not be used in logic arguments. This is because the meaning of metaphor may be contradictory and ambiguous. The same tenor will have

different vehicles. This the "two handles and multi-sides" of the metaphor proposed by Qian.

Qian said: "The metaphor has two handles and is multi-side". Because one thing always has not only one performance or effect, people may have multiple meanings for the metaphor of this thing. The denotatum is same, but the significatum are different. [1] The two handles refer to the same metaphor that can refer to two contradictory tenors, such as the water moon, which can be compared to the constant nature of life, and can be compared to the illusory life appearance. Multi-sides mean that the same tenor can have multiple metaphors. Each metaphor has only a certain similarity with the tenor, but each metaphor can be different. Qian believes that this kind of contradiction and ambiguity makes it unsuitable for using in philosophical arguments. "The metaphor is which the literary language's good at. When it is in philosophical speculation, it becomes a shortcoming: it is reasoning of analogy which is less rigorous and could not be based on".[3] Qian believes that metaphor is an indispensable method in literary works. It is only an expedient and convenient method in the ideological argument, and it is only to make the abstract concept more understandable. However, after all, the abstract concept is not equal to the metaphor, so if the reader discarding the idea that need to be understood, and getting caught in the metaphor, it would be "letting the words interfere with the sense". Qian regards the "image" of *Zhou Yi (The I-Ching)* as a metaphor and believes that the truth ("Tao") is obtained through metaphor, and when the truth is revealed, the metaphor and image can be discarded.[1] I believe that the "Image" in *Zhou Yi* includes but is not limited to the metaphor described in Qian here. The metaphor is only part of the "image". "The image of thing" (Wu Xiang) itself is to interpret and understand things in language, rather than pointing to an abstract truth by means of an image. However, the image of the thing will eventually rise to the truth of human and nature. For example, Kong Yingda said in the *Zhouyi Zhengyi*: "Every 'Yi' is an image. The image of the world is used to clarify the truth of the world, just like the metaphor of the Book of Songs." This so-called metaphor is somewhat different from the so-called metaphor of today. This inevitability of reasoning from object to person is based on the so-called "harmony between human and nature". Although the image of thing is the part of all truth's appearance, this image can reveal the truth. Qian confuses the "metaphor" of Chinese traditional concept "image"("Xiang") with the Western analogy. In Kong Yingda, *Zhou Yi* and *Book of Songs*, philosophy and literature are not completely different, they are based on a common thinking, that is, the "harmony between human and nature", some people call it "relative thinking". Qian distinguishes philosophical arguments from literary rhetoric. He distinguishes between metaphors in thought and in literature. He believes that the metaphor in thought discourse is only a sign, the metaphor can be replaced, not one-to-one correspondence, however, the metaphor in literature is the icon, the implication is inseparable.

Thus, Qian criticizes the practice of introducing metaphor into argumentation, criticizing those who regard metaphor as a way of thinking and knowing, such as Herder, who likes to use novel images and compelling metaphors, while Nietzsche claims that knowledge is committed to the most popular metaphor, Bergson sees intuition and image as a way to the truth. Qian believes that this is completely reversed [1].

Qian was influenced by the new criticism theorist I. Richards and mainly looked at metaphor from the perspective of rhetoric. He was not actually aware of the rediscovery of metaphor in Western modern philosophy. In ancient Greece, metaphor was regarded as a rhetorical method, so it was not valued by philosophers. Aristotle in *Poetics* believed that metaphor was a hidden comparison based on the principle of analogy. Plato claims metaphor should be excluded from philosophical argumentation. But he often uses metaphors in his philosophical works, such as "Cave", "Mirror" and so on. Some later philosophers suggest that metaphor is not only a rhetoric but also a way of thinking. Derrida, a Deconstructionist, believes that philosophy is a kind of metaphor. Traditional philosophy tries to eliminate metaphor and its uncertainty with logos, drive metaphor from truth to poetry and literature. With the formation of traditional metaphysics and of the "hegemony" of the "rational language", "metaphor" seems to be "wore away", and this "wearing away" is precisely a kind of "metaphor". The original language does not have the so-called "original meaning", but only the "multiple meaning" of "metaphor". The linguists Lacoff & Johnson said in their book "*Metaphors we live by*", metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our

ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”[4]

Precisely because of this, Qian believes that in some ancient texts, the use of contradictory metaphors is not in order to use language to effectively demonstrate, but to make people no longer obsessed with language, never use words instead the meaning. “Simulations and metaphors also have methods of canceling each other, which can be verified from ‘Zhuangzi.’”[1] Indeed, we see that in the *Zhuangzi* text, a large number of contradictory examples are cited. He himself concluded that the book *Zhuangzi* was written in a ridiculous, infinite language. But the language is very varied but inspiring [5]. Language itself is not credible, it is the root of things chaos, therefore, Zhuangzi uses this way to break the reader's obsession with language.

I believe that it is not only from rhetoric to understand Zhuangzi's "disenchanted words by words". If only from rhetoric and literature, readers may only fall into the attention of the text representation and be unable to break the illusion made by the text. To understand the "disenchanted words by words", it's necessary of starting from the operation of thinking. The enchantment of Zhuangzi's "uneven words"(Cenci) is not attributed to rhetoric, but owing to the tension of thinking created by the great language tension.

Zhuangzi inherited Laozi's thought, "no name" (Wu Ming). He objected to Confucian "rectifying name" (Zheng Ming) and tried to eliminate the politic dimension in language. Laozi said: "Since Name is existed, we should know the limitation." [6] Different with this conservative method, Zhuangzi is more aggressive and advocates thorough "No name". He uses a lot of gorgeous rhetoric, metaphor and fable language to break people's attachment to the "name", this is the so-called "disenchanted the words by words."

### **3. The Paradox of Metaphors: A New Interpretation of “Disenchanted the Words by Words”**

Zhuangzi's text contains a lot of metaphors and fables, and he often puts metaphors together with opposite meanings to form a paradoxical text. For example, in "Zhuangzi", "the debate of the small and big", with the small fox and the huge cow to analogy all the small and big creatures, but both two can not preserve life.

The reason why we use metaphors frequently is actually to create more extensive language illusions, and to make people understand that these seemingly opposite things have the same essence, which finally makes people doubt the language and even the whole understanding. This is Zhuangzi's argumentation strategy. So why does metaphor create an extensive illusion? I think this is because metaphor contains a certain degree of affirmative thinking, that is, the metaphor plays a role in connecting language and objects, words and things. It has been strengthened through some kinds of figurative metaphor. This mode of thinking was also criticized by the French writer Alan Robbe-Grillet, who believes that metaphor is false and hinders people's understanding of things. Therefore, in literature, metaphor should be eliminated, only objective narration is allowed. Unlike Robbe-Grillet, Zhuangzi clearly understands the problem of metaphor and uses metaphor to break people's affirmative thinking by juxtaposing the opposite metaphor.

#### **3.1 as a metaphor for "constructing words"**

In the dictionary, Metaphor is defined as a kind of rhetoric. “A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them”.[7] Aristotle believes that metaphor is a hidden comparison based on the principle of analogy. G.Lakoff and M.Johnson believe that the basic role of metaphor is to map the type of reasoning from the “source domain” to the “target domain”. Metaphor associates two different things because we have similar associations when we recognize two things, so that we can interpret, evaluate, and express our feelings about the objective world. Therefore, this similarity is actually the result of cognition. Qian also pointed out that “metaphor” is “analogy”.

In the article “Nature, Humanism, Tragedy”, Robbe-Grillet writes: “Metaphor, in fact, is never an innocent figure of speech.”[8] In addition to metaphor, he also criticizes the "analog". In Robbe-Grillet, metaphor and analogy are the same, and they all become a kind of obstacle to people's

understanding of the world and are illusions of understanding. He believes that metaphor itself has some kind of prejudice, emotional and moral tendency. First of all, metaphors are prejudicial, and many metaphors are customary, such as pigeons and peace. This unthinking association is likely to cover up the essence of things. The metaphor "always carries a more serious dangerous side: the danger lies in this kind of participation, because it implies a hidden whole." [8] When we use a metaphor, we are likely to accept the stereotypes behind this metaphor. Second, metaphors are personified. Many metaphors have moral judgments and emotional tendencies, such as metaphors of color.

I think, as mentioned above, when people use metaphors, they try to compare the relationship between tenors and vehicles, words and things. The cognitive model used is exactly what Adorno said the "affirmative thinking", that is, the model of identification which uses the language to assimilate objects and lets the subject to devour the object. In this mode of thinking, we cannot actually express or recognize each other, but only a self-projection of human beings. Different with Robbe-Grillet's critical metaphor, Adorno criticizes the "concept" as an intermediary, but whether it is a concrete metaphor or an abstract concept, it is a representation of the affirmative essence of language. We should also notice that not all metaphors are clichés. Some artists try to break the traditional illusion through creating new metaphors. However, these new metaphors could be identified in the affirmative thinking after accepting by the mass.

Metaphor is to bridge and unify the fragments of words in the language. The separation between words and things, symbols and images achieves a certain degree of unity through the metaphor (specific image). Nonetheless, if we want to break the illusion of language and affirmative thinking, we need to "disenchant the words".

### **3.2 "Disenchanting the words" - the paradox of metaphor**

There are different methods of disenchantment in Zhuangzi's text. Eg. Paradox is the method of juxtaposing two opposite metaphors. Another important way is going beyond metaphors, thus forming a vertical contradiction, that is, "Irony."

The first way is "the debate of small and big" in the article "Xiaoyaoyou". Here, Zhuangzi mainly uses two opposite animals (one big and one small) to metaphorize those who hold ideas of debate. By juxtaposing the two opposite things, the result is only the same result, which makes people realize the same essence from the opposite image and feel the ambiguity of language.

The second way is to use metaphors or fables, and then further use some kind of irony to break this metaphor. In general, this kind of irony needs to have a subject of speaking, which is why the use of "Repetitive speaking" (Chong Yan) in the text of *Zhuangzi*. More obvious examples includes "skeleton" and "madman."

In Qian's *Fortress Besieged*, there is also a way of juxtaposing two quite different metaphors to break the illusion of language. "Someone called her 'charcuterie', because only the delicatessen would display the many warm-colored meats publicly; some people called her "truth" because the "truth" was said to be naked." Miss Bao was not naked, so they revised it to "partial truth".

Metaphor: 1 Miss Bao (tenor) – "Delicatessen" (vehicle 1) – "Partial Truth" (vehicle 2)

Metaphor 1: The metaphor of "Delicatessen" reveals the nakedness of Miss Bao's appearance. It is a kind of derogation, "restraint statement."

Metaphor 2: The use of partial truth is too high and is an "exaggeration statement".

At the same time, there are strong contrasting tensions between the delicatessen and the partial truth, the material vs. spirit. The juxtaposition of this contradiction breaks the way of thinking that people connect the tenor with vehicle in metaphor, thus rising a sense of absurdity about the existence of the tenor itself.

## **4. Summary**

In summary, we can see that from the rhetorical level, it is impossible to fully explain why metaphors can cancel each other out. The contradiction and ambiguity of metaphor in Qian cannot explain the text of Zhuangzi. The mode of thought, an affirmative mode of thinking, may explain why

contradictions between two different metaphors can break language. Therefore, the author believes that from Zhuangzi to Qian, they used a special rhetoric and argumentation technique, “the metaphoric paradox”: putting two completely opposite metaphors together, thus making the reader's suspicions about metaphor and even language itself. Finally, it comes to “disenchant the words by words”. This is not only a rhetorical method, but also a negation of the identified thinking.

Unlike Zhuangzi and Qian whose aim is deconstruction, Adorno hopes to reconfigure the language. Adorno once proposed in his early work "Theses on the language of the Philosopher": people need to completely break the language that has been materialized, and then reconstruct and reunite the language, finally restore the true state. [10] This is because Adorno believes that language is not just a tool. It is truth and understanding. Therefore, we need to rescue human's ration and eventually redeem human beings by saving the language.

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