Many cognitive linguistic studies have shown that metaphor plays an important role in the human conceptual system. Metaphors are often grounded in culture and can hence serve as a good resource for the investigation of cultural beliefs expressed in language. By comparing marriage metaphors in contemporary Chinese and English, this paper aims at analyzing how these metaphors reflect the differences in Chinese and English marriage beliefs.

1. Introduction

Cognitive linguistic studies have proved that metaphor is an important aspect of human thought. Metaphor mirrors as well as shapes our conceptual system. Lakoff and Johnson (2003 [1980]) describe the relationship between culture and metaphor as follows: “The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture.” (Lakoff & Johnson 2003 [1980]: 22) Metaphor is in many ways related to culture, as stated by Kövecses (2005). Conceptual metaphors are frequently articulated in language, which
is a key component of culture. In turn, language serves as a principal indicator of conceptual metaphors.

Adopting the cognitive linguists’ view of metaphor as the mapping between source domain and target domain, this paper examines the diversity between the marriage metaphors in Chinese and English and how these metaphors reflect different cultural beliefs.

2. Literature review

2.1 Metaphor and culture

Conceptual metaphor theory sees the connections between conceptual domains in terms of correspondences or mappings between elements within source and target domains. The source domain is the conceptual domain from which the metaphor is drawn, and the target domain is the conceptual domain to which the metaphor is applied. (cf. Knowles & Rosamund 2006: 33) In this essay, the target domain of all the metaphors is MARRIAGE.

One of the most influential works in contemporary metaphor theory is Metaphor we live by, written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, first published in 1980. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003 [1980]: 3), “[...] metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action”, and “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature”. They believe that metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon but instead a conceptual and experiential process which reflects our way of thinking and reasoning and structure the way we perceive the world.

Metaphor is common to all languages and cultures. Although the use of metaphor is universal, the choice of metaphor for interpreting the world may be cultural-specific (Liu 2002). Other cultures may interpret the same matter with different metaphors which may be poles apart. Therefore, conceptual metaphors expressed in language can serve as an indicator of culture.
2.2 Dimensions of metaphor variation

According to Kövecses (2006), there are two dimensions of metaphor variation: the cross-cultural dimension and the within-culture dimension.

2.2.1 Cross-cultural dimension of metaphor variation

Kövecses believes that cross-cultural variation in metaphors is mainly caused by the broader cultural context, which refers to “the governing principles and the key concepts in a given culture” (Kövecses 2002: 186), and the natural and physical environment in which a cultural is located.

One kind of the cross-cultural variation is called “congruence” by Kövecses (2006: 157). Congruent metaphors are “metaphors that are filled out in congruence with the generic schema” and “when the generic schema is filled out, it receives unique cultural content at a specific level”. In other words, “a generic-level conceptual metaphor is instantiated in cultural-specific ways at a specific level”. (Kövecses 2005: 68) There are also alternative metaphors. When one source domain is used for a particular target domain in one language and a different source for the same target is used in another language, it can be said that these mappings are is alternative metaphors.

2.2.2 Within-cultural dimension of metaphor variation

“Languages are not monolithic but come in varieties that reflect divergences in human experience”. (Kövecses 2006: 161) Metaphors vary not only across different cultures but also within cultures. According to Kövecses (2006), several dimensions including social, regional, ethnic, stylistic, subcultural, diachronic, developmental and individual dimensions cause the variation within cultures.

2.3 Variation in metaphorical linguistic expressions

As mentioned above, metaphors can be found across different cultures and different varieties of the same language. Metaphors also show variation in the metaphorical linguistic expressions which are anchored in a respective metaphor. “If two languages share the same conceptual metaphor, the linguistic expression of the conceptual
metaphor in the two languages may follow a variety of different patterns.” (Kövecses 2006: 165)

2.4 Metaphor and socio-cultural experience

According to Kövecses (2006), socio-cultural experience also shapes our metaphors. Firstly, metaphors we produce are influenced by the specific experiences provided by the environment, the socio-cultural context and the communicative situation that are specific to certain groups of people or individuals. Secondly, metaphors are shaped by the history of context and/or the history of an individual. These variations in histories of context and individuals across time bring variation in metaphors. Thirdly, the diverse concerns and interests that govern our life also affect the metaphors we employ to understand the world around us.

3. Methodology

Around 300 news articles from both Chinese and English newspapers were surveyed from January to March 2008. Chinese materials were mainly collected from: China Press, China News, Yangcheng Evening News, Beijing Morning Post, Xin Hua News, Ta Kung Pao, Shenzhen Evening News, and Liberty Times. English materials were gathered from Glens Falls Post-Star NY, The Press Association, Boston Globe US, Glasgow Daily, Record UK, Dorset Echo UK, Nashik News Line India, Daily Herald, The Straits Times Singapore, Daily Mail UK, and Wall Street Journal. A total of 168 expressions about marriage was collected. Among these expressions, 74% are literal, and 16% metaphorical expressions. 22 Chinese and English metaphorical expressions were selected as examples in this paper.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Congruent metaphors in Chinese and English

From the data collected, the following four congruent metaphors of marriage in Chinese and English are identified: MARRIAGE IS A JOURNEY, MARRIAGE IS BINDING,
MARRIAGE IS A JOINT ENTERPRISE, MARRIAGE IS A CUISINE.

4.1.1 MARRIAGE IS A JOURNEY

The metaphor which appeared most frequently is the MARRIAGE IS A JOURNEY metaphor. It can be seen that this metaphor works in the same way in both Chinese and English. For instance,

(1) 從年輕到年老，從相識到相愛，從熟悉到婚姻，從默契到爭吵，從为人父母直至祖父母，他們攜手走過了漫長而坎坷的50年婚姻之路。(China Press, 10 Feb 2008)

Cong nianqing dao nianlao cong xiangshi dao xiangai cong relian dao hunyin cong moqi dao zhengchao cong wei ren fumu zhi fumu tamen xieshou zou guo le manchang er kanke de wushinian huanyin zhi lu

From young to old, from acquaintance to love, from love to marriage, from becoming parents to becoming grandparents, they held their hands and have gone through a long and bumpy road of marriage of 50 years.

(2) 因此，對於這個好妻子，讓劉德賢十分感動，並笑言若是換了個當初暗戀的女孩，可能早已分道揚鑣，反目成仇了。(China Press, 10 Feb 2008)

Yinci duiyu zhe ge hao qizi rang Liudexian shifen gandong bing xiao yan ruo shi huan le ge dang chu anlian de nuhai ke neng zao yi fendao-yangbiao fanmu-chengchou le

Therefore, having such a good wife makes Liu Dexion feel very touched. He said if his wife was a girl whom he had loved secretly at first, perhaps they would have gone their own way to pursue their own goal and become enemies.

(3) 被問到婚姻觸礁，他首度打破沉默：「我們很好，多謝關心。」(China News, 15 Feb 2008)

Bei wen dao hunyin chujiao ta shou du da po chenmo women hen hao duoxie guanxin

Being asked if his marriage is on the reef, he first breaks the silence, “We are fine. Thank you for your concern.”
(4) We found something to continue sharing with each other, and our family, Griffin said. “We’re still in the middle of the marriage journey, and it’s been fun so far”. (Glens Falls Post-Star NY, 28 Feb 2008)

(5) There has been months of speculation that their marriage was on the rocks but in August 2007, Carey denied any rift, dismissing the stories as “just a bunch of trash talk”. (The Press Association, 22 Feb 2008)

(6) But while Susan's marriage flourished, Monica's foundered. (Boston Globe US, 10 Feb 2008)

It has to be noted that the word lu in Chinese literally means road or path. According to the definition in the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, its extended meaning is “journey”.

It can be seen from the above examples that the mapping between the source domain and the target domain and the inference of the MARRIAGE AS JOURNEY metaphor in both Chinese and English are practically identical. The husband and wife are the travellers who go on a journey together. The problems in the love relationship symbolize the troubles encountered during the journey. Love is represented as the travel tool. The couple has to overcome all the difficulties during the journey with love (the travel tool) so as to reach the common goals of the couple, such as being in love forever, which corresponds to the destination of the journey. In both Chinese and English, this metaphor emphasizes the uncertainty and the obstacles to be gotten over in marriage.

4.1.2 MARRIAGE IS BINDING

Nowadays, love is said to be the basis of marriage. There are many common features between love metaphors and marriage metaphors. What makes the two different is that a marriage is supposed to last longer and comes with more responsibilities and obligations between two people. (Quinn, 1987) The MARRIAGE IS BINDING metaphor highlights this aspect of marriage.

(7) 每個人都有自己獨立的個性和生活的空間，婚姻不應該是枷鎖和牢籠。 (Yangcheng Evening News, 7 Feb 2008)
Mei ge ren dou you ziji duli de gexing he shenghuo de kongjian hunyin bu yinggai shi jiasuo he laolong

Everyone has their own personality and living space. Marriage should not be the fetter and the cage.

(8) 他致詞時祝賀台上的 39 對夫妻幸福美滿・白頭偕老・永結同心永結同心永結同心永結同心。 (China Press, 22 Feb 2008)

Ta zhici shi zhuhe taishang de sanshijiu dui fuqi xingfu-meiman baitou-xielao yongjie-tongxin

He wishes all 39 couples to be happy, to be in love until they are getting old and to know two hearts as one.

(9) Bruce and Jackie opted to get hitched in Fort William because both love the stunning West Highland scenery. (Glasgow Daily Record UK, 1 Mar 2008)

(10) GOLDEN couple Sarah Ayton and Nick Dempsey will be tying the knot after seven years of engagement. (Dorset Echo UK, 26 Feb 2008)

(11) 101 couple to enter wedlock. (Nashik News Line India, 21 Feb 2008)

Under this metaphor, the husband and the wife are depicted as two people being tied together by marriage. In both English and Chinese, marriage is described as “knot” and “lock”/ “fetter” to bind the husband and wife together. (e.g. the phrase yongjie-tongxin in Chinese (which literally means to knot two hearts as one) and “tie the knot” in English; jiasuo (which literally refers to cage and lock in Chinese) and “wedlock” in English)

The MARRIAGE IS BINDING metaphor has an implicit negative meaning in Chinese. In the Chinese language, “fetter” and “cage” are more often used in a negative way, and their use implies losing one’s freedom. There is a folk idiom in Cantonese which refers to a man getting married as “a fool, being trapped ever after” (seng4 go3 lou5 can3 cung4 ci2 bei6 kwan3)
MARRIAGE IS BINDING highlights that marriage makes people lose their freedom, flexibility and individuality. At the same time, it hides the positive side that people get married because they want to stay together for the rest of their lives.

4.1.3 MARRIAGE IS A JOINT ENTERPRISE

The mapping of the MARRIAGE IS A JOINT ENTERPRISE metaphor is as follows: Husband and wife are partners who run a business together. The product of the enterprise corresponds to the relationship between husband and wife. The quality of the product reflects how love and relationship are maintained.

(12) 然而理論上我們有可能通過努力獲得成功的家庭和婚姻，所以你不得不花費你人生的大部分時間來經營這一切。 (Beijing Morning Post, 18 Feb 2008)

Raner li lun shang women you ke neng tongguo nuli huode chenggong de jiating he hunyi suoyi ni bude bu huafei ni rensheng de dabufan shijian lai jingying zhe yiqie

However, theoretically speaking, it is possible for us to achieve success in family and marriage by our own effort. Thus, you have to spend most of your life time to operate all these.

(13) 我國當代青年未婚比例越來越高，婚姻市場擠壓現象嚴重。 (Xin Hua News, 3 Feb 2008)

Wohuo dangdai qingnian weihun bili yue lai yue gao hunyi shichang jiya xianxiang yanzhong

The proportion of unmarried young people has become higher nowadays; the compression of the marriage market is a serious problem.

(14) I think we work at marriage every day, not hard, but some of the time," said Fern Cox. (Daily Herald, 14 Feb 2008)

(15) As grooms outnumber brides, experts worry that this may lead to a growing underclass of rootless, restless rural young men edged out of the marriage market. (The Straits Times Singapore, 1 Mar 2008)
Under this metaphor, unmarried people are described as a commodity that can be bought or sold in the market. This metaphor underlines the mutual cooperation between husband and wife to maintain the relationship. On the other hand, it also draws attention to the negative view that love is like a valuable substance that can be traded on the market.

4.1.4 Marriage is a Cuisine

Though different cultures and countries have developed their cuisines with unique styles, eating is a basic need of all human beings. The marriage is a cuisine metaphor can be found in both English and Chinese.

(16) 其實，真正的婚姻生活就像人生一樣，甜酸苦辣五味俱全。 (Ta Kung Pao, 26 Feb 2008)

Qishi zhenzheng de hunyi shenghuo jiu xiang rensheng yi yang tiansuan-kula wuwei jiu quan

In fact, marriage is like life, which has all sorts of joys and sorrows like the five tastes.

(17) 在這麼惡劣的天氣裡堅持舉辦婚禮，更象徵了他們的婚姻甘苦與共。 (Shenzhen Evening News, 13 Feb 2008)

Zai sheme elie de tianqi li jianchi juban hunli geng xiangzheng le tamen de hunyin ganku-yugong

Insisting on holding the wedding ceremony in such bad weather also signifies their marriage will be forever, no matter whether it is sweet or bitter.

(18) But the marriage turned sour and they divorced in January 2005. (Daily Mail UK, 20 Feb 2008)

(19) Their marriage ended in a bitter divorce, the reports of which filled the newspapers. (Wall Street Journal, 29 Feb 2008)

Under this metaphor, the husband and wife are the chefs and their marriage is the cuisine. Maintaining the relationship between husband and wife is like cooking a dish.
Some tastes are more preferable and tasty such as sweet while some are not, as, for example, sour and bitter. Therefore, different tastes refer to different relationship statuses. This metaphor highlights the different stages of marriage life which may be wonderful or painful at times.

Although this metaphor exists in both Chinese and English, it reveals the different view of the Chinese and Westerners towards taste sensation. In the west, it is generally accepted that there are only four tastes: sweetness, bitterness, sourness, and saltiness. In contrast, the Chinese believes that there are five tastes (sweetness, bitterness, sourness, saltiness and piquancy), which correspond to the five elements namely water, fire, wood, metal, and earth in the Five Elements Theory of Chinese philosophy. Still, in Chinese, the expression Tiansuan-kula refers to four tastes (sweetness, sourness, bitterness and piquancy literally) and implies all sorts of joys and sorrows.

4.2 Alternative metaphors in Chinese

Three alternative metaphors of marriage are recognized from the data collected. It is found that the source domains of the following three marriage metaphors – MARRIAGE IS A PALACE/SANCTUARY, MARRIAGE IS YINYUAN CULTIVATED FROM PREVIOUS LIFE, and MARRIAGE IS A “FORTRESS BESIEGED” – exist in Chinese but not in English. These three metaphors provide significant insights into the traditional Chinese beliefs and marriage models.

4.2.1 MARRIAGE IS A PALACE/SANCTUARY

Qingrenjie qianshou zou jin hunyin diantang huanyin dengji yuyue gao man (Xin Hua News, 14 Feb 2008)

Hold hands and walk into the sanctuary of marriage on Valentine’s; full booking for marriage registration

Marriage is depicted as a palace/sanctuary, and walking into this sanctuary signifies two people getting married. According to the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, diantang (literally “palace/sanctuary”) refers to places which are dignified, solemn and respectful. In the past, the palace/sanctuary is the place where people worshipped God and where the emperor held audiences with the officials and sovereign rulers or
managed government affairs. Thus, this metaphor highlights the decent and religious aspects of marriage.

4.2.2 **MARRIAGE IS YINYUAN CULTIVATED FROM PREVIOUS LIFE**

(21) 她說，能夠成為夫妻是前世修來的姻緣，因爲在人海茫茫中，能找到知心相愛的人，是一生最大的幸福。(*China Press*, 14 Feb 2008)

*Ta shuo nenggou chengwei fuqi shi qianshi xiu lai de yinyuan yinwei zai renhai-mangmang zhong neng zhao dao zhixin xiangai de ren shi yisheng zuí da de xingfu*

She said being able to become husband and wife is the *yinyuan* that cultivated from previous life because in the vast ocean of people, the biggest bliss in life is to be able to find someone who understands you and loves you.

In English, there is an idiom “Marriages made in heaven”. There is a similar yet different concept in Chinese called yinyuan, which refers to the fate or luck that brought two people together to become husband and wife. Influenced by Chinese myths and fatalism, the concept yinyuan was once a dominant belief of marriage because people could only marry the person who was appointed by parents and the matchmaker instead of the person they loved. (Hong 2006: 122) Marriage was not based on love. Rather, marriage was founded on the aim to have a son who could carry on the family name and provide the livelihood for the family when the parents get old.

If it happened that two persons got married who loved each other, it was a marriage said to be *yinyuan*, cultivated from previous life. Nowadays, the concept of *yinyuan* is no longer a popular belief of marriage but the Chinese still refer to love and marriage as *yinyuan* sometimes when they want to emphasize the fatalistic nature of marriage that is out of the control of human beings.

4.2.3 **MARRIAGE IS A "FORTRESS BESIEGED"**

(22) 女人過了35歲，會發現身邊的同學同事或好友們陸陸續續都結了婚，但也可能同時發現，更有不少人或高調或低調地走出了圍城。(*Liberty Times*, 3 Mar 2008)
When women are over 35, they would find that their classmates, colleagues and friends get married one after another. But they would realize at the same time that many people walk out of the besieged fortress openly or secretly.

Under this metaphor, marriage is described as a fortress besieged. Husband and wife are portrayed as locked inside a besieged fortress. This metaphor originates from a renowned Chinese novel *Fortress Besieged* (1947 [1980]), which was written by Qian Zhongshu. There is one famous quote from the book: “Marriage is like a fortress besieged: those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out.” It implies those who got married found that their relationship is not happy and their marriage has become a constraint for them. On the other hand, many people still want to get married in the hope that they will not end up in divorce as many others do. The **MARRIAGE IS A FORTRESS BESIEGED** metaphor points out the dilemma about marriage – first, it is something one yearns for, but then feels disappointed about after one has experienced it. Furthermore, the popularity of the novel gave rise to this metaphor, as it implies the erosion of the traditional beliefs of marriage in China in the 80s, when there were vast changes in the marriage system. After the May Fourth Movement in 1919, Western concepts such as freedom to choose one’s spouse, equality between men and women, monogamy etc. were gradually accepted by the majority of the Chinese. A series of reforms in the 80s, which were led by the leader of the Communist Party of China, Deng Xiaoping, brought further changes to the social outlook and ideology, including marriage (Gao 2003). In the traditional Chinese culture, marriage is considered to be one of the life events that one must accomplish in his/ her lifetime. Marriage is expected to last forever and, therefore, divorce is seen as a dishonourable matter, resulting in a lot of pressure from the families on the couple, and, in turn from society on both the couple and the families. Yet, these beliefs were challenged by the emancipation of mind derived from the reforms aiming at the opening up of China in the 80s. There was a rising divorce tide in the late 70s and early 80s after the implementation of the New Marital Law (Gao 2003). Despite the fact that more and more marriages end in divorced, many people still desire to be get married. Nowadays, the metaphor **MARRIAGE IS A FORTRESS BESIEGED** is usually used in a negative way to refer to a marriage which is in a difficult position.
5. Discussion of findings

As seen from the data analysis above, the congruent metaphors in Chinese and English are generic metaphors that are related to our embodied experience that are shared by all human beings. The source domain of the common metaphors (i.e. journey, binding, business, cuisine) comes from universal experiences that are not restricted by language and culture. The data in turn supports Lakoff and Johnson’s claim about the human conceptual system.

As revealed in the analysis, there are many congruent metaphors in contemporary Chinese and English with generic schemas, but these congruent metaphors possess exclusive cultural content at a specific level. For instance, although the MARRIAGE IS CUISINE metaphor can be found in both Chinese and English, it shows that Chinese and Westerners have different interpretations regarding taste sensation. Moreover, the Chinese tend to refer to several flavors at the same time to describe the different statuses of marriage (cf. the expression Tiansuan-kula), while in English we seldom see this kind of linguistic usage.

One important point to note is that the data analyzed in this essay does not include all the marriage metaphors in both Chinese and English as the data stems only from a certain period of time and set of sources. Nonetheless, the result sheds some light on the topic of Chinese and English marriage metaphors. As the above examples are adopted from contemporary materials, i.e., newspapers, the findings reflect contemporary Chinese marriage metaphors.

The metaphors shared by Chinese and English reveal to some extent the fact that the Chinese marriage system – which may include different and perhaps conflicting metaphors – has been influenced by Western marriage system(s). Western ideas, namely democracy and liberty, began to spread in China since the May Fourth Movement in 1919. In 1949, with the establishment of the new government, the People’s Republic of China, the feudal and obsolete ideas, including the marriage system, were seriously criticized. The new government thus revised the marital law according to the Western marriage system that advocates the freedom to love and marry. This change, apart from the aspect of universal experience, may also explain why there are more congruent metaphors than alternative metaphors in these two distinct cultures.
The four congruent metaphors in Chinese and English, i.e. MARRIAGE IS A JOURNEY, MARRIAGE IS BINDING, MARRIAGE IS A JOINT ENTERPRISE and MARRIAGE IS A CUISINE, which all refer to the union and the cooperation between husband and wife, suggest that both the Chinese and Westerners believe that the bond between husband and wife is essential for maintaining a good marriage relationship. Marriage in contemporary Chinese and Western culture is love-based and centres on the couple. This marks the difference to the concept of marriage in traditional Chinese culture, in which the family is the central and marriage primarily serves as a means to carry on the family name.

The three alternative metaphors in Chinese, namely MARRIAGE IS A PALACE/SANCTUARY, MARRIAGE IS YINYUAN CULTIVATED FROM PREVIOUS LIFE and MARRIAGE IS A FORTRESS BESIEGED have been inherited from the old days and are still retained and widely used today. For instance, the MARRIAGE IS YINYUAN CULTIVATED FROM PREVIOUS LIFE metaphor continues to shape our present-day view towards love and marriage to some extent. The concept of yinyuan is still pervasive in contemporary literature. Although at present days the Chinese have free will to choose their spouses, at times people would attribute breakup and divorce to yinyuan. In addition, it is noticed that the alternative metaphors that are specific to Chinese culture comprise richer Chinese historical and cultural backgrounds than those congruent metaphors that are common in both English and Chinese. This supports the view that socio-cultural experiences shape our metaphors.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, metaphors are widely used in Chinese and English to think and talk about marriage. While some metaphors have the same source domains in Chinese and English, there are some alternative metaphors in which the source domains are exclusive to Chinese. The congruent metaphors mainly come from our bodily and social experiences that are universal to all human beings regardless of language and culture. Still, these metaphors can be cultural-specific at a certain level. On the other hand, there are alternative metaphors that exist only in Chinese, as they reflect and are shaped by socio-cultural and historical experiences specific to the Chinese. Furthermore, as a result of the revolution of the traditional Chinese marriage system, the modern Chinese marriage system has been influenced by Western ideas of
marriage. This change has contributed to the formation of the modern Chinese ideology of marriage, which is a blend of the Chinese and Western ideas.

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