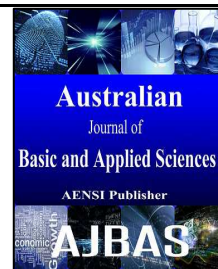




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Fish Metaphors and Chinese Cultures in Selected Malaysian Novels in English

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines fish metaphors in selected Malaysian Novels in English. Fish metaphor is considered as culturally specific metaphor. The objective of this study is to unveil the significance of fish metaphor as projected in Malaysian novels. The findings show that fish metaphors are related to emotions. As a conclusion, fish metaphors play an important in how Malaysian constructs the emotions.

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INTRODUCTION

Fish is a rather big biological category which includes many types of fishes in the oceans and rivers. Biologically, fish can be divided into two major categories namely, freshwater fish and saltwater fish (Campbell and Reece 2005).

Fish symbolism in Chinese cultures is prominent. In terms of food, fish is a main source of protein on our plates. In Chinese phonetics, the word 鱼 (fish), pronounced as *yu*, has the same meaning as 余 which is also pronounced as *yu* (Chang 1977), which here means “extra”. This influences the status of fish in Chinese cultures due to its symbolic meaning of “extra”, which carries a positive connotation, implying “prosperity”. During Chinese New Year, the Chinese will usually have fish to symbolise and hope that every year they will receive “extra” (Anderson 1990). Normally, this “extra” indicates wealth.

In Western culture, a metaphor, which is a fishing metaphor is found in the Bible (New International Version). Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee and He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother. They were casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. In Matthew Chapter 4, verse 19, “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” This is a powerful metaphor where saving people is mapped to the domain of fishing. Fishing is then considered as bringing salvation to people by helping

them and believing in Jesus. In the biblical context, Jesus was gathering his disciples to preach Christianity.

However, it is crucial to note that this metaphor talks about the act of fishing whereas in the selected novels, it is the fish metaphor that is found, not the act of fishing. Even though this fishing metaphor is not the primary concern in this thesis, it indicates a way of mapping fishing to bringing salvation to people in the religious sense. This metaphor is Christianity-specific.

Methodology:

This study utilizes ecological literary criticism and conceptual metaphor analysis as the research framework. Textual analysis is used to dissect and data from the selected literary texts.

Discussion:

Song (2009, p. 58-59) examines the comparative analysis of fish related metaphors in English and Chinese by stressing that there are very few cultural metaphors in English with the word “fish”. However, according to Song (2009, p.58-59), “in Chinese, there are many human body-part metaphors about “fish”, such as

1. Yu Chun (fish’s lip)
2. Yu Gan You (fish liver oil)
3. Yu Mu Hun Zhu (passing off a sham (fish’s eyes) as a genuine)

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4. Yu Rou (fish meat) Bai Xing (being cruel to common people)

5. Yu Du (fish belly) Bai (the color of the sky at dawn)

Generally the fish images and symbolism in the Malaysian Chinese cultures do not differ significantly from the Chinese cultures. Dragon fish, in the Malaysian context, is kept as “a symbol of elegance and beauty. Among the Chinese and the business community, its association with positive geomancy influence is even more meaningful” (Voon 2012, p.112). Geomancy and Chinese Feng Shui on fish have a long history in Chinese cultures. Some Chinese houses have a pond or aquarium with carp to signify monetary success. These are primordial sciences which originate from ancient China. (Chin 1998). Hence, fish metaphors signifies a particular set of cultural values of the fish in the Malaysian Chinese community.

In Chinese cultures, the fish plays a crucial role in symbolizing both wealth and peace. According to Eberhard (2002), the dragon fish, also known as the arrowana is a graceful species of the carp and is an expensive fish which symbolizes wealth. In Chinese mythology, it is believed that after one thousand years, the fish is ready to turn into a dragon. Once the fish leap over the Dragon Gate, it will become a dragon.

According to tradition, a carp that could leap the falls of the Yellow River at Dragon Gate (near Longmen, Zhejiang), would be transformed into a dragon. There is a Chinese proverb which comes from the above mention story, 鱼跃龙门, 身价百倍 (Translation: The carp has leaped through the dragon's gate, its value multiplies).

This motif of leaping carp over the dragon gate symbolizes success in the civil service examinations (Eberhard 2002, pp.57-58). This is, of course, merely a legend. However, these findings are important for the research as they display how positive the symbol of fish is in the Chinese cultures. This symbolism helps the researcher see the link between the Chinese and the fish.

Interestingly, one contemporary Malaysian writer, Chiew-Siah Tei (2008) wrote a novel titled *Little Hut of Leaping Fishes* and she uses fish imagery in that novel. Bennie (2008) writes,

Tei says she wants the story to act as a metaphor for China as a whole, what is happening to it and in it. "The little hut of leaping fishes?" she pauses. "That is my heart, the heart of the exile."

The little hut is metaphorically mapped to the HEART domain while the leaping fishes are mapped to the domain of emotions. The author chooses the leaping fish metaphor to signify the struggle of the protagonist, Mingzhi, and his strong will for a change in his and others' life (and for a better China) - to leap out of predicament. The metaphor is a direct translation from Chinese 鱼跃小筑.

(Translation: Little Hut of Leaping Fish) (C.S.Tei, personal communication, August 21, 2015).

Tei's usage of megametaphors in *Little Hut of Leaping Fish* is similar to Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2007) where metaphors of rain are vivid and sometimes transcendental, or even Christine Suchen Lim's *A Bit of Earth* (2001) where the images of earth, soil, land and are related to identity. Interestingly, all these authors use ANIMAL and ECOLOGICAL COMPONENT domains in their narratives. Megametaphors can be defined as metaphors that are discourse-level conceptual structures comprised of multiple metaphors that may come from disparate source domains (Werth 1999).

In *Once Upon a Time in Malaya*, Chong Seck Chim writes,

Despite the cosmetic changes... rather like estuarial fish trapped upriver, or freshwater fish lower down. But they were grateful to Ah Kiew nonetheless, for it had taken much effort and persuasion on his part to put them where they were. Ah Kiew had demonstrably excelled himself, and his stock rose accordingly with the family. (Chong 2005, p. 99)

In this narrative, the protagonist, Ah Kiew helps his family friends, the Howes, to move to Chinatown Kuala Lumpur (now called Petaling Street) so that the Howes can avoid harassment from the Japanese. The Howes also tried to change in terms of their attire and appearance so that they are less noticeable in Chinatown. The Japanese Kempeitai, Nishimura is also eyeing Shirley, Mr. and Mrs. Howe's daughter.

The shifting from Cheras (another town in Kuala Lumpur) to Chinatown has decreased potential dangers toward them and hence, lessened their fears. However, they are still living in constant anxiety during the Japanese occupation period. Their anxiety is metaphorically mapped to the domain of fish. Their emotion (anxiety) is volatile and they are trapped in constant fear which is then metaphorised into the fish, like estuarial fish trapped upriver, or freshwater fish lower down.

Similarly, in *The Gift of Rain*, Philip is worried that Endo-san has gone back to Japan. When Endo-san left a note telling Philip that he is back at his little hut on the island, Philip is happy and eager to meet his master. His emotion is described as a fish, metaphorically;

Tanaka became serious, his voice almost insistent. 'Endo-san has trained you well. Now it is up to you to find out why he has done so.' I was growing worried about Endo-san's absence when I found a note from him, telling me he had returned. Something in me leapt like a fish in clear water and a lightness danced within me as I rowed to his island. I approached the thicket of trees with eagerness and called out his name as I neared the house. He looked dark and sunburnt, and his hair shone brighter in contrast. 'Welcome home, sensei,' I greeted him, and I knew he was happy to see me. He invited me into

his house, and we sat in front of the hearth. (Tan 2007, p.158)

Philip is eager and rows to the island to meet his master, Endo-san. He finds that Endo-san is also eager to meet him. After some catching up, Philip tells Endo-san everything as he has decided not to keep any secrets. Shortly after that, they both practice the Japanese martial arts. After a few weeks, they meet again and practice the martial arts as usual. However, Endo-san notices that Philip has lost his concentration and this makes Endo-san unhappy. Philip is not concentrating as he is uneasy with what Kon has told him about Endo-san.

Lately our tempers had been swimming just below the surface, ready to leap out of the water like a marlin taking the bait, I bit back a reply, cursing him inwardly, cursing myself. Now, in my lessons with him, the taint of uncertainty and distraction often hung in the air. He often seemed preoccupied, his eyes distant and his thoughts far away in time. Sometimes I caught him staring at me, but I felt he was in another time. Then he would come back from where his thoughts had been drifting and turn away from me, making me feel as if I had done something wrong. As a result, my mind was everywhere but in the present and I lost my concentration, which only made him angrier. (Tan 2007, p.166)

What Kon has said haunts Philip. Kon is critical about Endo-san and of the reason why Endo-san has decided to teach Philip about Japanese martial arts, in return for a stay at the little hut on that island. Philip's emotion is tangled, torn between believing and not believing. He is aware that if Endo-san has planned the occupation, he has been helping the Japanese and betraying this country. His emotion is described as 'fish swimming below the surface' and at any time, the 'fish will leap' and this use of metaphors symbolises the emotional explosion existent in Philip's mind.

In a later scene, Kon's father paid a visit to Philip at his house. Kon's father is trying to talk to Philip about his only son, Kon, and how much he loves his only son. His words hurt Philip when he says that if anyone would survive the war, it has to be Philip. Kon's father believes that Endo-san, Philip's master will make sure Philip survives. Kon's father believes that Philip is a betrayer for helping the Japanese.

I got up from the flower box, not liking the way the conversation was heading. His words had bones in them, like the flesh of fish one bites into innocently. 'I have to go now. Please let me know when you find out where your son is.' (Tan 2007, p. 271)

To Philip, the words spoken by Kon's father are like bones of a fish. This narrative again shows that emotion is embodied in a fish. If one accidentally bites into the bones of a fish, one gets hurt emotionally.

On another occasion, Philip, Yasuaki the rubber buyer and Endo-san are on a sampan. They are out in the sea. Philip is anxious to know why Yasuaki says that Philip's association with the Japanese people will only bring disaster and harm to Philip. He is unable to understand this.

The shoal of fish in the narrative symbolises his emotion that is 'leaping fish out from the sea'. The fish metaphor here is mapped to his anxiety.

When we neared Port Swettenham a shoal of flying fish shot out from the sea and soared alongside us before dropping back into the water. I stood on the stern, waiting for them to appear again, to lose their ties to the sea and, for a few moments, to find a new identity as they took their breath not from water but from wind. (Tan 2007, p.102)

The excerpts above display that the concept of fish is somehow linked to the concept of emotion. Human emotion is one of the most central and pervasive aspects of human experience. Blount (1984:130) pointed that "the past decade has witnessed, in contrast to earlier periods, an efflorescence of interest in emotions" (Ortony *et al* 1988:3). There are many research on emotion metaphor such as those by Kovecses 1986, 1988, 1990, 1991, Lakoff 1987, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff and Kovecses 1987. In relation to literary works, one of the most significant scholarly works is by Ngai (2007, 2012) where she discusses ambivalent feelings and emotions in the works of modern writers.

Emotions are generally universal but different systems of emotions reflect different ways of conceptualising emotions. Conversely, any cross-cultural similarities in the conceptualisation of emotions will be reflected in the ways different societies converge in the labelling of emotions (Wierzbicka 1992:134). In almost all cultures, emotions are universal. These include happiness, sadness, anger, frustration, etc. However, the way emotions are conceptualised vary from culture to culture. This suggests that the Chinese and the Malaysian Chinese might construct their emotions metaphorically in ways that differ from one another.

Emotion is said to be contained in our brain. The human brain is a very complex organ and hence has been an object of research for a long time (LeDoux 2000). It is one of the human organs that is irreplaceable. Without it, human beings are not human beings anymore. The human brain distinguishes us from animals as humans have a far greater capacity to think and make judgement than animals. This is best summarised by Sherwood, Subiaul and Zawidzki (2008, p.426),

'We' are Homo sapiens and our species' intellectual abilities distinguish us from all other animals. Our technological sophistication, capacity for introspection, and ability to create and manipulate symbols is unrivalled. We engage in behaviors that are profoundly unique, such as the production of

personal ornamentation, language, art and music, and the performance of religious rituals. This behavioral discontinuity has prompted many to regard modern humans as standing apart from the rest of nature.

Ning Yu (1998) carried out an extensive research on emotion metaphor in Chinese. Ning Yu's main findings reveal that English and Chinese language share the same conceptual metaphor for some emotion metaphors. One of them is the metaphor ANGER IS HEAT. In English, it is in the form of FIRE IS A HOT FLUID and in Chinese it is in the form of ANGER IS THE HOT GAS IN A CONTAINER. Similarly, both languages share the same metaphors such as HAPPY IS UP, HAPPY IS LIGHT, and HAPPINESS IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER.

However, when describing happiness, both languages differ in terms of the domains used; in English, it is OFF THE GROUND while in Chinese, it is FLOWER. In Chinese, the idiom 心花怒放 (xinhua nufang) (translation: heart-flowers wildly-blossom) is a common metaphorical expression for happiness (see Yu 1995, 2002). This indicates that some metaphors are universal and cut across several cultures while some metaphors are specific to a particular culture. In this section, the researcher is more keen to examine the Malaysian Chinese culture (See Ning Yu 1998, 2008, 2009a and 2009b).

From the selected novels, linguistic expressions used by the authors suggest the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS A LEAPING FISH. Emotions are being constructed like 'a leaping fish in a container'. The verb "leaping" signifies movement and dynamics while "container" is a reference to the ocean, sea, lake or river. In addition, "container" can also be a symbol for the brain. Emotions are movement in a container.

The mapping constructed is on emotion as a leaping fish and the brain as the sea. The sea here is metaphorised as a human brain. This metaphor can be expanded using concepts in chemistry. The concept that can be used to illustrate this is the kinetic theory. The Kinetic Theory of Matter states that all matter is made of small particles that are in random motion and that have space between them. This means that no matter what phase matter is in, it is made of separate, moving particles (Chang 2009).

To illustrate, the researcher shall take an example in kinetic theory to describe this metaphor. If a gas is enclosed in a container, it exerts pressure on the walls of the container. The Kinetic Theory of Matter explains gas pressure as the total force exerted by gas molecules (the separate, moving particles) colliding against the walls of a container. This can be explained using the ideal gas law,

$PV=nRT$, where P =pressure, V =volume, n =amount, R =constant, T =temperature

In this case, the researcher draws a scientific connection between the leaping fish as the gas molecules, and the container as the brain.

The EMOTION IS A LEAPING FISH metaphor can be further expanded to EMOTION IS IN A CONTAINER. With the kinetic theory in mind, imagine that a container contains innumerable particles or molecules. Each particle is moving constantly in the container. The intensity of the movement is then described as the movement of the particles. The stronger the emotion, the stronger and faster the movement described as collision to the walls of the container.

The container can also be mapped on to the sea domain. Geographically, Malaysia is somewhat separated from China by the South China Sea – a wide span of water that is a paradise for fish. According to Hogan (2013) in the Encyclopaedia of Earth,

There have been 1,787 species of fish recorded within the South China Sea; however, only a few of these are endemic to this sea. Approximately four fifths of the fish species here are demersal, with some of the principal taxa being *Pseudoscianena crocea*, *Muraenesox cinereus*, *Nibea albiflora*, *Miichthys miiuy*, *Collichthys lucidus*, *Paragyrops edita*, *Epinephelus awoara* and *Lutjanus sanguineus*. Of the pelagic fishes, *Trachurus japonicus*, *Ilisha elongata*, *Scomberomorus guttatus*, *Sardinella aurita* and *Decapterus maruadsi* are some of the most commercially significant.

This explains the link between fish, sea and the Nanyang sojourns. The Nanyang journey across the South China Sea is historical in nature. The Nanyang experience relates the relationship between the sea, fish and human being. As the researcher has mentioned earlier, emotions are kinetic in nature. In Conceptual Metaphor Analysis, emotions resemble fish; they leap out of the brain but will somehow come back to the sea. The movement of the fish which represents our emotion indicates that our emotions are like atoms, moving freely in a container. This can then be expanded to the metaphorical representation of fish as molecules in a container.

These qualities of the fish indicate that emotions such as anger, happiness, and sadness, are all temporal in nature. Even when they leap out from the sea surface, they will fall back into the sea due to gravitational force (see Held 1980 for details on the theory of gravity). This finding is similar to Kovecses' (1990) EMOTION CAN BE LET OUT UNDER CONTROL. Emotion then is deemed to be moving all the time, just like the fish in the sea. When a fish is cold and without movement, it can be compared to a person who is indifferent or without. This can be seen in *Once Upon a Time in Malaya*, where Shirley's attitude towards the protagonist, Ah Kiew, is described as a cold fish;

He had found that Shirley in flesh and blood was quite different from the romantic vision he had cherished of her before. The chrysalis had turned into a moth, not a butterfly. Her highhanded ways irritated him no end, especially her snide remarks about the 'honky tonks', as she called the Chinatown types, criticising their manners—or lack of them. As if all this was not enough, she was also a cold fish. (Chong 2005, p.162)

In the narrative, Ah Kiew is a successful man who has helped the Howes. However, Shirley, as a member of the Howe family, is not really fond of Ah Kiew despite his success. Her reaction to him is described as a cold fish. At the end of the story, Ah Kiew gets married to another girl who has been with him from the beginning, Mei Lin. When they get married, Mei Lin's emotion towards him is a happy one. Here again, their emotions are also described in relation to fish and sea,

The combination of raw passion and a firm offer of marriage in ease and plenty proved irresistible. Their shared moments of intimacy returned in a flood of tender memories as she melted into Ah Kiew's embrace (Chong 2005, p.181).

This indicates that our emotions are kinetic in nature and not static. This also implies that the said emotions, symbolically viewed as fish, have movement in that all emotions are actively moving and alive in our brain.

However, some emotion metaphors are specific to a particular culture (Kovecses 1990). That is, there are cultural differences in the prevalent, modal, and normative emotional responses (Mesquita and Walker (2003). In the Malaysian Chinese culture, this fish metaphor is one of its kind; a peculiar one specifically due to its reference to the Malaysian Chinese culture.

This research findings show that Malaysian Chinese view emotions as 'leaping fish'. Yu (1998) also suggests that the Chinese use GAS, FIRE, LIGHT and CONTAINER in describing emotions. Before moving on, the researcher, for this research, focuses on emotion as a generic term to cover various types of emotion such as happiness, sadness, anger, inter alia.

Another key item to note is that the brain symbolism is apparent in this fish metaphor. The EMOTION IS LEAPING FISH conceptual metaphor indicates that the vastness of the sea is comparable to the human brain. This is not unusual in Western literature. In American literature, the brain and fish metaphor is present in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea* (1952). In this narrative, the fisherman (Santiago) in the book is trying to catch a fish. When the fish leaps out and takes the bait, it is the end of the fish's life. It narrates a desperate struggle between Santiago and the fish. After that Santiago realises that on the way home he has to fight a more desperate struggle with some dangerous giant sharks, which eat up a marlin, leaving only a

skeleton. The old man brings the marlin home and goes to bed to dream because he was too exhausted. However, his struggle wins him much respect from the villagers (Xie 2008). In this story, the fish symbolises our emotion, the sea symbolises our brain, and the bait symbolises our failure to control our emotion.

Conclusion:

In summary, the Malaysian Chinese use the fish metaphors in expressing their emotions. This is unique to the Malaysian Chinese. As suggested by Yu, the Chinese usually use other domains such as FLOWER and CONTAINER in describing their emotions. However, as pointed at the beginning of this section, fish is part and parcel of the Chinese culture. Hence, the use of the FISH metaphor is heavily influenced by the Chinese culture.

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