

“El profesor es como una criada”: la posición de la mujer re-velada por los vehículos metafóricos femeninos en chino

“The Lecturer is Like a Housemaid”: the Position of Women Revealed by Female Metaphor Vehicles in Chinese

“讲师比通房丫头”：汉语女性隐喻载体所揭示的女性地位

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Abstract: Previous studies have shown that many metaphors conceptualize “women” in a derogatory way to present negative opinions about them. However, the issue of how “women” being metaphor vehicles function in discourse has rarely been addressed. This paper applies a discourse dynamics approach to conduct a multidimensional analysis of the linguistic, cognitive, affective, and

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socio-cultural-historical contexts of the 25 female metaphor vehicles identified in the modern Chinese novel *Wei Cheng*. The aim is to shed light on how this type of metaphors reflect the ideas, attitudes, and values towards women in Chinese discourse. The results show that, through highlighting certain negative features of their topics (i.e., male characters, female characters, university faculty and other non-human objects), these female metaphor vehicles at the same time display a corresponding view on women. Crucially, considering the historical background of the novel and the high degree of lexicalization of some of these metaphors in Chinese, these metaphor vehicles present a sexist view of women in traditional Chinese society and contribute to reinforce female gender stereotypes.

Key Words: Metaphor; Gender; Discourse dynamics framework; *Wei Cheng*.

Resumen: Estudios previos han demostrado que muchas metáforas conceptualizan a las "mujeres" de manera peyorativa para expresar opiniones negativas sobre ellas. Sin embargo, rara vez se ha abordado cómo las "mujeres" funcionan como vehículos metafóricos en el discurso. En este trabajo, se aplica un enfoque de dinámica del discurso para realizar un análisis multidimensional de los contextos lingüísticos, cognitivos, afectivos y socio-culturales-históricos de los 25 vehículos metafóricos femeninos identificados en la novela china moderna *Wei Cheng*. El objetivo es iluminar cómo este tipo de metáforas reflejan las ideas, actitudes y valores hacia las mujeres en el discurso chino. Los resultados muestran que, al resaltar ciertos rasgos negativos de sus temas (como personajes masculinos, personajes femeninos, profesorado universitario y otros objetos no humanos), estos vehículos metafóricos femeninos también reflejan una visión correspondiente sobre las mujeres. Es crucial destacar que, considerando el contexto histórico de la novela y el alto grado de lexicalización de algunas de estas metáforas en chino, estos vehículos metafóricos presentan una visión sexista de las mujeres en la sociedad tradicional china y contribuyen a reforzar los estereotipos de género femenino.

Palabras clave: Metáfora; Género; Marco de dinámica del discurso; *Wei Cheng*.

摘要: 以往的研究已经表明,许多隐喻以贬低的方式概念化“女性”,以此对她们表达负面的观点。然而,关于“女性”如何作为隐喻的载体在话语中发挥作用却很少被讨论。本文采用话语动力学方法,对中国现代小说《围城》中识别出的25个女性隐喻载体的语言、认知、情感和社会文化历史背景进行多维度分析,旨在阐明这类隐喻如何反映中国话语中对女性的思想、态度和价值观。研究发现,通过突出它们所描述的主题(如男性角色、女性角色、大学教师和其他非人物体)的某些负面特征,这些女性隐喻载体同时呈现出对女性的负面观点。重要的是,考虑到该小说的时代背景以及其中一些隐喻在汉语中的较高词汇化程度,这些隐喻载体呈现出了中国传统社会对女性的性别歧视观念和刻板印象。

[关键词] 隐喻; 性别; 话语动力学框架; 《围城》

1. Introduction

A cognitive perspective considers that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments, but tools that reflect our thinking (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). To date, many studies based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) have shown that metaphors frequently describe women as “ANIMAL”, “FOOD”, “COMMODITY” etc., reflecting a sexist view (e.g., Ahmed, 2018; Baidar & Gesuato, 2003; Chin, 2009; Li, 2023; Li, et al., 2023; Murashova & Pravikova, 2015; Vasung, 2020). In fact, similar to the metaphors with

“women” as topic, female metaphor vehicles can also enlighten how women and femininity are shaped in discourse. For instance, a “state” might be presented as a “mother” in public discourse, which contributes to deepen the gender stereotypes on women and confine them to the domestic sphere in the social division of labor, especially the reproduction (see Tomović-Šundić & Gvozdenović, 202). Till today, most of relevant investigations have focused on how women are conceptualized as the “topic” in metaphor, yet little attention has been paid to how the image of “women” functions in language as another component of metaphor, i.e., the metaphor vehicle.

The Discourse Dynamics Framework (DDF) considers that the use of metaphor in discourse depends not only on the linguistic and cognitive factors but also on the connection and integration of different dimensions (e.g., linguistic, cognitive, affective, physical, social-cultural, historical) (see Cameron et al., 2009). Based on this notion, DDF assumes that the systematicity of metaphorical patterns has the potential to reveal the thoughts, attitudes, and values about certain topics in the discourse (Cameron, 2007).

Therefore, applying the discourse dynamics approach, this paper conducts a multidimensional analysis about the use of female metaphor vehicles in the modern Chinese novel *Wei Cheng*, taking into account their linguistic, cognitive, affective and socio-cultural-historical contexts. The aim is to infer the beliefs, attitudes, and values about women in Chinese society reflected by the female metaphor vehicles. By doing so, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the female position in both the private and public spheres.

2. Metaphor in Discourse Dynamics Framework

Metaphors reflect the way we think and may create realities for us (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 156). In Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a distinction is made between metaphor as conceptual mappings and its linguistic manifestations. Deeply influenced by this theory, Cameron (2010) has developed the Discourse Dynamics Framework (DDF), shifting its attention from the conceptual level of metaphor across whole speech communities to the complex dynamics of real-world language use in social situations (see Cameron et al., 2009).

DDF argues that, besides the linguistic and cognitive factors, metaphors in use have other interconnected dimensions (e.g., affective, physical, cultural, social) (Cameron, 2010). Additionally, DDF proposed the notion of “systematic metaphor”, which refers to a collection of semantically related linguistic metaphors (i.e., vehicle-topic mappings)

that evolve and adapt as discourse progresses (Cameron, 2010: 91). Unlike a conceptual metaphor in CMT, a systematic metaphor is not a permanent fixture in the mind, but rather a local phenomenon that arises within a discourse based on a particular context and that potentially changes as the discourse unfolds (see Maslen, 2017: 91). Crucially, in DDF, the connection between linguistic metaphor and conceptual resource is no longer just a top-down “instantiation” from thought to language but an interaction between language and thought, and the discourse can be influenced by factors at all scales and levels (Gibbs & Cameron, 2008, cited as in Cameron, 2010). Hence, in an empirical way, by establishing a systematic relationship between metaphor vehicle terms and their topics in a complex and dynamic discourse, DDF proposes the potential of the systematic metaphors to give us insights into the thoughts, attitudes and values of discourse participants.

Within the landscape of metaphor-led discourse analysis, the application of DDF is often concerned with many social issues (Maslen, 2017: 91), such as people’s perception of the terrorism (Cameron et al., 2009), the trivialization of urban violence in Brazil by the media (Pelosi et al., 2014), metaphors in psychotherapy (Tay, 2011), metaphors used by patients to describe their experience during the epilepsy (Plug et al., 2011), the metaphorical framing of “obesity” in China’s official media (Huang & Bisiada, 2021), metaphors that carry strong emotions about pregnancy loss (Littlemore & Turner, 2020), metaphors frequently used by PhD students to view the academic assistance they have received (Nacey, 2022), as well as the reconstruction of gender relations in the literary translation (Li, 2023; Li et al., 2023).

3. Women in Metaphor

The feminist linguist Robin Lakoff (1973) pointed out that gender inequality can be reflected in the way language treats men and women. Currently, many studies grounded in CMT (e.g., Ahmed, 2018; Baider & Gesuato, 2003; Chin, 2009; Murashova & Pravikova, 2015; Rodríguez, 2009; Vasung, 2020) have shown that in different languages and cultures, metaphors about women often express prejudice and stereotypes about them in various aspects. For instance, Chin (2009) finds that in the *Oriental Sunday* - a Cantonese magazine available in Hong Kong, the metaphors of “WOMAN IS ANIMAL” and “WOMAN IS FOOD” tend to portray women in an eroticized and degrading manner, which may jeopardize the social status of women in the long run. Likewise, Rodríguez (2009: 82-83) indicates that both in English and Spanish, men are usually conceptualized as larger, stronger, wild animals (e.g., wolf, *toro*/bull), while women are more often

seen as small domestic animals (e.g., hen, *periquita*/parakeet), suggesting that the position of women should be restricted to the domestic sphere.

Indeed, focusing on “woman” as the topic of the metaphor in discourse has provided us with insights into the expectations, norms and stereotypes that the society assigns to women. However, what happens when “woman” appears as a metaphor vehicle in discourse? Can these metaphors also shed light on how the female roles are constructed in the private and public sphere?

Kaufmann (1987: 16-17) argues that the willingness of ecofeminists to use “mother” as a metaphor for the earth (e.g., “Mother earth”) stems from their belief in the biological connection between women and the earth. He finds this metaphor problematic as it may perpetuate traditional roles and stereotypes assigned to women, namely that they are more “naturally” caring, nurturing and focused on external aspects such as children and family. Consequently, Kaufmann (1987: 44) proposes making rhetorical changes and incorporating a more feminist perspective to strengthen the ecofeminist movement.

Subsequently, Kittay (1988: 64) argues that “the use of the vehicles of woman to form men’s conceptualization of the world and their relation to it is pervasive and goes unquestioned”. She further points out that there has been insufficient analysis of metaphors such as “NATURE IS A WOMAN”, “INTELLECTUAL CREATIVITY IS GIVING BIRTH”, which are rooted in retaining the Otherness of woman. Therefore, Kittay (1988: 80) emphasizes the need for greater attention to how “women” as a general image are conceptualized across different cultures, social classes, and racial groups.

More recently, through analyzing the political discourse during the period of 2018 presidential elections in Montenegrin society, Tomović-Šundić & Gvozdenović (2020) find that the use of the metaphor “A STATE IS A MOTHER” can help discourse participants develop a stronger emotional attachment (e.g., belonging, care, unconditional love) to the state by reinforcing the biological link between a mother and her sons and daughters (i.e., citizens of the state). Further, the homeland is a female body, and any invasion and violation of the nation will be considered as “rape”, symbolizing the humiliation of the nation or state. Therefore, Tomović-Šundić & Gvozdenović (2020) argue that while these metaphors serve to make the nation more tangible, they also reveal the patriarchal structure of Montenegrin society, which induce a sexual separation of labor in Montenegrin patriarchy, where men are associated with production and women with reproduction.

Both the first two theoretical reflective studies and the recent empirical study suggest that, similar to metaphors for women, the use of “feminine” as metaphor vehicles is also a significant embodiment of how femininity is linked with the structured biases and stereotypes regarding their duties and moral disciplines. Nevertheless, to date, studies on female metaphor vehicles still do not receive the attention they deserve, and the available research in this field is very scarce. Hence, there is still a lot of space remains to be filled regarding this issue.

On the one hand, since metaphors are not isolated but function within the social interactions (Cameron, 2010: 77), our examination of metaphors intimately associated with socio-historical complexity (i.e., gendered metaphors) should be multifaceted. In other words, it is indispensable to consider the interrelation of their linguistic, cognitive, affective, social, historical and cultural dimensions, as well as their impact in the discourse. On the other hand, in addition to studying the conventional female metaphor vehicles that may exist globally in public discourse, it is crucial to scrutinize specific metaphors in different cultures. Whether being used as a highly lexicalized metaphor by the linguistic community or being newly created by discourse participants, these female metaphor vehicles can provide a more complete picture of how “femininity” is employed to depict the world. Therefore, as a qualitative research, despite the limited amount of data, this study takes into account the two aspects mentioned above and intends to contribute to the field from the perspective of the Chinese language and the specific socio-historical context of China in the selected material.

4. Data Collection

The source of data for this study is the modern Chinese novel *Wei Cheng* (Qian, 1947/2017), with a length of around 253,000 Chinese characters. Written by Qian Zhongshu in 1946, it vividly depicts the realities faced by a group of Chinese intellectuals in the 1930s. This period was marked by conflicts arising from wars (mainly between different parties in the country and between China and Japan), as well as a profound collision between China’s domestic traditions and Western culture.

The Chinese literary critic C. T. Hsia (1961: 441-442) considers *Wei Cheng* as “the most delightful and carefully wrought novel in modern Chinese literature; it is perhaps also its greatest novel”, and highly praises the novel’s comic exuberance and satire. In recent years, many scholars have discussed the literary value of this novel from a feminist perspective. Focusing on the portrayal of female characters in the novel, these studies

attempt to uncover the dilemmas faced by women, particularly female intellectuals, in various aspects of Chinese society. These include the constraints imposed on them by patriarchal marriage and the feudal society's expectation that "a woman without talent is virtuous" (see Hu, 2011; Liu, 2010; Liu, 2012; Li, 2023). Moreover, in addition reputation for sardonic humor, this novel contains a wealth of metaphors, making it an appropriate material for metaphor studies (Wang, 2007).

Furthermore, this literary work has had a significant national impact and wide transnational circulation. Since 1947, the novel has been published in over 20 different official editions in China, including an electronic version in 2017 (see Li & Yu, 2020). In addition, since the 1960s, the novel has been translated into numerous foreign languages, such as English, Japanese, Russian, French, German, Spanish, Korea and Vietnamese. This wide translation availability facilitates an international dialogue through literature, allowing individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to gain insights into the ideas and ideologies about women conveyed in the novel.

In light of the points mentioned above, we believe it is meaningful to start from *Wei Cheng* to initiate a qualitative study that employs metaphor-led discourse analysis to examine the depiction of women's status reflected in female metaphor vehicles within the Chinese discourse.

5. Methods

The methods of this research consist of three steps: (1) marking the female metaphor vehicles in the whole novel; (2) specifying the topics of these vehicles; (3) establishing the systematic pattern of these vehicle-topic mappings (i.e., linguistic metaphors).

For the first step, we applied a modified version of MIPVU (*Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit*) (Steen et al., 2010), extending the form of the vehicle terms from lexical units to phrases (see Cameron & Maslen, 2010: 105). Previously, MIPVU has been shown to be adapted to identify linguistic metaphors in Chinese discourse (see Lu & Wang, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). In this identification process, we follow the operational definition of metaphor proposed by DDF (see Cameron & Maslen, 2010: 102). Specifically, we focus on words or phrases related to female that can be considered as somehow anomalous or incongruous in the ongoing discourse but can be understood through meaning transfer in the context. Additionally, metaphors with analogical signals as "像 [*like*]", "仿佛 [*as if*]" (i.e., similes) are included in this study, as they also reflect the metaphorical thinking of the discourse participants.

In general, an important preparatory work of building the systematic metaphorical pattern is to collect the semantically related metaphor vehicles into the same group and assign each group a semantic label (see Cameron et al. 2010). In this research, as we have predetermined the “metaphors with female vehicles” as the focus of study, there is only one metaphor vehicle group for the data collected, with its semantic label “WOMAN”. We then proceed directly to the second step, which involves determining the “topic” of these female metaphor vehicles contained within this unique vehicle group, namely, the specific objects or characters they depict in the novel. This requires a thorough reading of the entire novel and, in particular, the co-text (i.e., the surrounding discourse of the metaphor vehicle in the text) of these vehicle-topic mappings. As for the third step, we connect the vehicle group of “WOMAN” to each of the identified topics to build the systematic metaphorical patterns presented in these female metaphor vehicles. This allows us to examine the thoughts, attitudes, and values about women in Chinese society at that time. The detailed results obtained after completing the whole procedure are presented in the next section.

6. Results

In the whole novel, 25 female metaphor vehicles were identified. Given the notable emotional states conveyed by these metaphors in their context, a preliminary categorization was made to classify their affective valence as “positive” or “negative”. Besides, recognizing that this division lies on a pleasant-unpleasant continuum (see Sopory, 2005: 438), a category of “neutral” was remained. In Table 1, the 25 vehicles are listed with their respective topics, the number of metaphor vehicles corresponding to each topic, and ID numbers. The affective valence is presented by (+) for “positive”, (-) for “negative”, and (o) for “neutral”.

¹ Those capitalized terms mentioned before (e.g., “WOMAN”) indicate a conceptual metaphor in CMT. To distinguish from them, the italicised capital terms (e. g., “WOMAN”) indicate a systematic metaphor proposed by DDF, which reflects the possible metaphorical thinking and patterns of the discourse participants, without giving them an independent a priori existence at the level of the social group as in CMT.

Table 1: Metaphor vehicles in the group of “WOMAN” and their corresponding topics

General topics	Topics	Number of vehicles	Female metaphor vehicles marked with ID number and affective valence
Human	1.Male characters	7	1. (-) 婆婆妈妈 (Mothers-in-law and mothers) 2. (-) 穷小姐 (Poor lady who lacks of money) 3. (-) 老太婆 (Old woman) 4. (-) 信女 (Faithful religious women) 5. (-) 女人 (woman) 6. (-) 新姨太太 (New concubine) 7. (-) 情妇 (Mistress)
	2.University faculty	6	8. (-) 通房丫头 (Housemaid) 9. (+) 夫人 (Wife) 10.(o) 如夫人 (Almost wife/Concubine) 11.(-) 丫头 (Female servants) 12.(o) 姨太太 (Concubine) 13.(+) 大太太 (Big wife)
	3.Female characters	5	14.(-) 旧式女人 (Old-fashioned women) 15.(-) 处女 (female virgin) 16.(-) 半老徐娘 (The half-old Xu Concubine) 17.(+) 母亲 (Mother) 18.(-) 婆婆妈妈 (Mothers-in-law and mothers)

Non-human object	4. Moon	1	19.(-) 孕妇的肚子 (The belly of a pregnant woman)
	5. Poem	1	20.(-) 日本女人 (Japanese women)
	6. Shanghai	1	21.(-) 希腊神话里的魔女岛 (The island of Circe in Greek mythology)
	7. Steamed bread	1	22.(-) 玷污了清白的大闺女 (A young and unmarried (but) tarnished girl)
	8. Course	1	23.(-) 容易到手的女人 (The easy-to-get woman)
	9. Science	1	24.(-) 女人 (Women)
	10. A medicine bottle that has been opened	1	25.(-) 嫁过的女人 (Women who have married before)

As Table 1 shows, the topics of these 25 female metaphor vehicles can be divided into two general categories: Human and Non-human objects, corresponding to 18 and 7 vehicles, respectively. Besides, these two categories can be further divided into 3 and 7 more specific topics, respectively. On the one hand, to establish the systematicity of the 18 metaphors about the topic of “Human” in a more specific way, the semantic label “WOMAN” has been associated with its subcategories, resulting in three systematic metaphors: “MAN IS WOMAN”, “UNIVERSITY FACULTY IS WOMAN”, “WOMAN (a female character) IS A WOMAN (another type of female figure)”. On the other hand, since each subcategory in “non-human object” appears only once, the metaphorical pattern built on them may contain little information. Hence, the remaining 7 vehicles are assigned directly to the systematic pattern of “NON-HUMAN OBJECT IS WOMAN”. As a result, our findings suggest the presence of four distinct systematic metaphorical patterns in our data.

Regarding the affective dimension of the 25 metaphor vehicles, 20 of them convey a negative affective valence for their topics, while 2 exhibit a neutral valence (i.e., ID10 and ID12), and 3 carry a positive valence (i.e., ID9, ID13, and ID17). These affective valences not only influence the perception of the specific topics but also contribute to shaping the overall image of “women”. Moreover, in addition to considering emotion as a phenomenon that varies on a two-dimensional space (i.e., a linear change from negative to positive), it is also valuable to adopt a discrete categorical perspective that views emotion as a set of distinct states such as sadness, anger, fear and happiness (Sopory, 2005: 438). In the following section, we will further specify the different emotional states conveyed

by these female metaphor vehicles in order to provide a more in-depth interpretation of their connotations.

7. Analysis

7.1. MAN IS WOMAN

(1) 方鸿渐为这事整天惶恐不安，向苏小姐谢了又谢，反给她说‘婆婆妈妈’。(ID1)

Fang Hongjian was all day fearful and uneasy for this incident, he thanked miss Su again and again, but she called him **“Mother-in-law and mother.”** (ID1)

In this excerpt, we marked the phrase “婆婆妈妈/pó po mā ma” as a female metaphor vehicle. The basic meaning of 婆婆/pó po is “mother-in-law” of a married woman², while 妈妈/mā ma means “mother”. This four-character idiom comes from the classical Chinese novel 《红楼梦》/ hóng lóu mèng (Dream of the Red Chamber) and it is nowadays widely used in Chinese to describe a person who speaks long-windedly, always dwells on trivial matters, or is emotionally fragile. This idiom has become a highly lexicalized metaphor in Chinese discourse.

In this local context, this metaphor is pronounced by a woman to describe a man: as this female character has a crush on the male character, she offers to help him wash his soiled handkerchief, but he acts frightened for accepting her kindness, and keeps thanking her again and again, so she thinks he is “婆婆妈妈/pó po mā ma”. In this specific discourse, although not really blaming in essence, but flirting, this metaphor vehicle still conveys a negative evaluation of this male character with a sarcastic, mocking connotation. And the source of this negative valence lies in the simple idea that this man does not act like a “real man”, but rather a “tiresome old woman” who just cannot stopping talking about insignificant things.

Proverbs in the language are often characterized by internal cohesion and concise rhythmic structure, thus condensing what is generally considered to be a collective conceptual awareness (Lomotey, 2019: 327). Likewise, the Chinese four-character idioms have the same features, and the existence and usage of this idiom also reflects the default ideas about women within the Chinese linguistic community. That is, these unpleasant

² In some dialects of China, the word “婆婆/pó pó” can also be used as a term for a child to address his or her mother’s mother, but here we take the meaning of the word in Mandarin Chinese as its most basic meaning.

qualities presented in this metaphor have been framed in the general image of women (especially older women). Since metaphors do not only reflect our thinking, but may also create realities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 156), this deep-rooted association between femininity and negative implications may lead to and reinforce the prejudices and stereotypes of Chinese speakers about women. More importantly, due to its highly lexicalization, the related metaphorical associations it may inspire, although do not disappear completely, often has been overlooked. Just as the example (1) shows, this metaphor vehicle may also be used by women, making themselves unaware in being framed in this irrational misogyny.

(2) 这种精神上的顾影自怜使他写自传、写日记，好比女人穿中西各色春夏秋冬的服装，做出支颐扭颈、行立坐卧种种姿态，照成一张张送人留念的照相。(ID5)

This spiritual narcissism had prompted him to write an autobiography and keep a diary, like a woman who puts on Chinese and Western dresses of all colors and all seasons, making every kind of pose, supporting chin in hand while twisting the neck, walking, standing, sitting, lying, and having a picture taken of each to give other people as a moment. (ID5)

Different from the example (1), in this excerpt, the overall image of “女人/nǚ rén” [Woman] appears as a vehicle in a novel metaphor created by the author. In this context, a narcissistic man who concentrates on writing his autobiography and diary is compared to a woman who likes to pose for pictures and invite others to admire her. This conceptualization demonstrates a negative valence toward women, tinged with irony and contempt. The special nomination of “women” in this sarcastic description of that man leads to the belief that not only this man, but also the women as a collective are deviants who are always spiritually self-satisfied and frantically seeking the approval of others.

In sum, in the systematic pattern of “A MAN IS A WOMAN”, those male characters, as the topic of the metaphor, has been consistently given a negative evaluation because of their association with femininity (or rather femininity in stereotypes). And the underlying logic of all this lies in the idea that women are inferior to men, and they always tend to behave in anachronistic ways.

7.2 UNIVERSITY FACULTY IS WOMAN

(3) “...讲师升副教授容易，副教授升教授难上加难。我在华阳大学的时候，他们有这么一比，讲师比通房丫头 (ID8)，教授比夫人 (ID9)，副教授呢，等于如夫人 (ID10) ——”

鸿渐听得笑起来——

“这一字之差，不可以道里计。丫头(ID11)收房做姨太太(ID12)，是很普通——至少在以前很普通的事；姨太太要扶正做大太太(ID13)，那是干犯纲常名教，做不得的”。

“...It's easy to be promoted from lecturer to associate professor, but it's twice as hard to be promoted from associate professor to full professor. When I was at Hua Yang University, they used to make this analogy: A lecturer is like a housemaid (ID8), a professor is like a wife (ID9), as for an associate professor, he is equal to an almost wife (concubine) (ID10). -”

At this Hongjian burst out laughing -

“The difference of one word can't be measured in terms of miles.

For a **servant** (ID11) to become a **concubine** (ID12) is quite common—at least it used to be so. But for a concubine to gain legitimate status as a big wife (ID13) goes against all moral principles and obligations, and it just can't be done.”

The systematic pattern of “UNIVERSITY FACULTY IS WOMAN” includes 6 metaphor vehicles that appear in this local discourse in a concentrated manner and there is a high degree of intertextuality among them. These characteristics make them form a “metaphor cluster” that has the potential to reveal the conceptualization and thought processes of the speaker or author (see Cameron & Stelma, 2004).

In this excerpt, the three job levels in the modern university system: lecturer, associate professor, and professor are conceptualized as the three states of women in the traditional Chinese patriarchal marriage system: housemaid, concubine, and wife. In traditional Chinese society, a “通房丫头/ tōng fáng yā tou” [housemaid] (ID8) was a woman's personal maid who was brought to the her husband's family when she married (or was brought up to serve in the husband's house). Generally, the status of these housemaids was slightly higher than that of general maids doing odd jobs, because in addition to serving them in their daily affairs they would also have intimate relationships with their male masters. If they are appreciated by the master, they may be upgraded to become the male master's concubine, thus gaining a higher status than before.

In the feudal marriage system, a man could have several concubines at the same time, but only one wife, which would have a higher voice in the household than any maid or concubine. Even though the duties performed by a concubine are almost equivalent to a wife, her status can never be equal to that of the master's wife. As a result, among the three different status of women, the “夫人/ fū ren” (ID9) or “大太太/ dà tài tai” (ID13) (i.e., formal wife) had the highest status, the maid was the lowest, and the concubine was in the middle. Due to this, in this co-text we marked

the “通房丫头/ tōng fáng yā tou [housemaid]” (ID8) and “丫头/yā tou [servant]” (ID11) as negative, “夫人/ fū ren” (ID9) and “太太/ dà tài tai” (ID13) as positive, while “如夫人/rú fū ren (ID10)” and “姨太太/yí tài tai” (ID12) as neutral.

However, the affective evaluation here is only based on the contrast between the status of these three types of women. Even if as a “formal wife” of a man, labeled with positive valence, these two female vehicles are still confined to this traditional marriage system that objectifies women as private property and establishes a strict hierarchy among women to serve patriarchal authority. In addition, without a lower-class maid as a foil, the neutral valence of the concubine is dissolved (as the case of ID6) and becomes the loser in the game with the formal wife.

In short, in a systematic manner, the metaphor cluster of “UNIVERSITY FACULTY IS WOMAN” elaborates the degree of difficulty in promotion for different levels of university faculty, in turn, it also reveals the power relations of women in the family in traditional Chinese society, and the dilemmas they each faces in the patriarchal marriage system.

7.3 WOMAN (a female character) IS WOMAN (another type of female figure)

(4) 鸿渐气得脸都发白，说苏文纨是半老徐娘。(ID16)

Hongjian was so angry that his face turned white, saying that Su Wenwan was the half-old Xu Concubine. (ID16)

In example (4), the four-character idiom “半老徐娘/bàn lǎo xú niáng [the half-old Xu Concubine]” is marked as a female metaphor vehicle. Originally, “徐娘/xú niáng” refers to a concubine of an emperor in the Dynasty Liang (A.D. 502-557), which was recorded in the 《南史·后妃传下》 [*The Southern History - The Second Book of the Consort*]. This emperor thought the concubine Xu was no longer young, but still had her unique charm. In modern Chinese, as a highly lexicalized metaphor, this idiom generally refers to women who have reached middle age but still are charming and attractive. Yet, in this particular discourse, according to the plot of the novel, when Hongjian (the male character) uses it to describe Su Wenwan (a female character), he simply wants to highlight the fact that this lady is no longer young and does not have sufficient attraction for men. Hence, in the affective dimension, with mockery and derogatory connotations, the negative valence rendered in this metaphor vehicle focuses on attacking the issue of women’s age.

(5) 鸿渐骂他糟蹋东西，孙小姐只是笑，像母亲旁观孩子捣乱，宽容地笑。(ID17)

Hongjian blamed him for wasting things, while miss Sun only smiled tolerantly, like a **mother** watching her child make a mess. (ID17)

In this excerpt, Hongjian (male protagonist) is scolding another male character for wasting food, while the girl, younger than the two men, says nothing but looks at them and smiles. She is portrayed as a “mother”, while the two men are conceptualized as her “children”. Through this metaphor, their collegial relationship becomes that of mother and child, in which she shows infinite tolerance for her kids. Accordingly, this metaphor vehicle is marked with a positive valence, stressing a mother’s unconditional love.

In sum, among the 5 female vehicles for the topic of “female character” that we have identified, the vehicle of “mother” is the only one with positive valence, while the other 4 are negative, presenting derogatory and mocking connotations for their topics.

7.4 Non-Human Object is Woman

(6) 旁边一碟馒头，远看也像玷污了清白的大闺女，全是黑斑点，走近了，这些黑点飞升而消散于周遭的阴暗之中，原来是苍蝇。(ID22)

There is a plate of steamed bread, from a distance, like **a big girl (i.e., young and unmarried girl) who has been tarnished**, (because) there are many black spots (on them). Getting closer, these black spots soar and dissipate in the surrounding gloom, it turned out to be flies. (ID22)

In example (6), some steamed bread covered with black spots (they are actually flies) are conceptualized as a defiled girl. “馒头/mán tou [steamed bread]” is a traditional Chinese food, made by steaming fermented flour. Generally, an appetizing steamed bread should look white in color. The literal meaning of “大闺女/dà guī nǚ” is “big girl”, but usually it refers to “young unmarried girls”. This vehicle-topic mapping implicates that a good steamed bread is just like an unmarried young woman, because they both are white (pure). Accordingly, if a unmarried young woman has been 玷污/diàn wū [tarnished] (i.e., has physical contact with a man or had non-consensual sex), she is no longer 清白/qīng bái [clean and white], and her pre-marital sexual experience (whether consensual or forced) becomes a black mark on her body and reputation. Hence, the usage of this female metaphor vehicle embodies the disciplines and norms imposed on women. Moreover, the negative valence and sense of disgust rendered in this vehicle has reinforced the sexual shame limited to women.

(7) 科学家像酒，愈老愈可贵，而科学像女人，老了便不值钱。(ID24)

Scientists are like wine, the older they get, the more valuable they are, while science is like **women**, when they get old, they are worthless. (ID24)

In this excerpt there are two opinions about both the value of “scientist” and “science”. An older scientist is considered to have a higher value due to the possession of more scientific resources, experience, and results than a younger scientist. Nevertheless, for a science that needs to evolve after its birth, it is considered obsolete if it stays the same without updating the existing knowledge. Regarding “women”, this mapping from “women” to “science” presents the idea that as women get older, they become less and less valuable. Moreover, this metaphor also tends to link women’s so-called “value” only to their “attractiveness” to men, assuming that women cannot create value equal to that of men in both the private and social spheres. In the affective dimension, this metaphor vehicle shows both contempt and disrespect for older women and disdain for the gender, treating them as crippled and less capable in a general way.

(8) 鱼肝油丸当然比仁丹贵，但已打开的药瓶，好比嫁过的女人，减了市价。(ID25)

Cod liver oil pills are certainly more expensive than Ren-dan, but once opened the bottle of medicine, it is like a **woman who has married before**, only get the price reduced in the market. (ID25)

In this excerpt, the “medicine bottle that has been opened” is conceptualized as a “woman who has been married before”. In its context, a group of people are going to a university for induction. One of the male characters carries a lot of medicine, which he intends to sell in their destination city, since medicine has become scarce due to the war. On the way, a female companion falls ill. Instead of giving her Ren-dan (a refreshing and antiseptic medicine), which could cure her, he gave her a cod liver oil pill that had been opened long ago. This man feels glad that this would show his generosity to his colleague, and at the same time save him the money of a whole bottle of medicine. This is due to that even though cod liver oil itself is more expensive, once opened, it is no longer a new and complete commodity, and therefore does not bring him the economic value it should have brought, while he can still make money with that unopened Ren-dan.

In this metaphor, women are treated as a commodity waiting to be evaluated, and this assessment focuses on the marital relationship between men and women: an unmarried woman is immaculate (i.e., new and complete) and can be bought at a good price (picked up by a good man), whereas a divorced woman who wants to re-enter the marriage market must lower her standards and wait for someone else to buy her out at a low price and be in no position to bargain. Moreover, if a woman is married once, even if she may be better than another woman (just like a more

valuable bottle of medicine), she is not as valuable as another unmarried woman who may not be “good enough”. Taking these into consideration, the metaphor clearly conveys an unfriendly attitude towards women who have experienced marriage, with a sense of contempt. Furthermore, once again, the underlying logic of this metaphor is to emphasize that the most precious things for a woman are her “youth” and “virginity”, showing a very unequal gender relationship. In brief, by emphasizing the “negative characteristics” shared between women and some non-human objects, the use of these female metaphor vehicles reflects a bias against the “feminine” as a whole, thus depriving women of their subjectivity in the discourse.

8. Discussions

Through establishing systematic mappings between “women” and its topics, the metaphors with female vehicles intend to interpret or emphasize specific aspects of the depicted characters and objects. It is evident that, similar to the metaphors that have “women” as topic, this type of metaphors enables us to infer the ideas, attitudes, and values about women in discourse. It is noteworthy that the size of the set of metaphors does not necessarily correspond to its importance, since a small set may contain powerful metaphors (Cameron et al., 2010: 129). In this qualitative study, the 25 metaphor vehicles belonging to the semantic label of *WOMEN* and their 4 systematic metaphor patterns demonstrate strong explanatory power in respect of the status of women.

Regarding the systematic metaphor of “*MAN IS WOMAN*”, the negative evaluation of a man who is “acting like a woman” is grounded in the belief that it is inappropriate and ridiculous for a man to perform against the expectations established by the society based on their biological sex, i.e., the male gender roles (see Blackstone, 2003). Fundamentally, this mindset perpetuates the notion of women being an inferior gender to men. Consequently, these vehicles, whether being highly lexicalized in the form of idioms or novel metaphors created by the author, embody and reinforce gender stereotypes and discrimination to women in various respects. As for the metaphor cluster in the systematic pattern of “*UNIVERSITY FACULTY IS WOMAN*”, it gives us a vivid picture of women’s survival in the domestic sphere under the feudal polygamous marriage system dominated by male power in traditional China. However, it is important to acknowledge that monogamy was formally established through legislation in the People’s Republic of China in 1950. Consequently, the bondage imposed on women by this feudal marriage system has disintegrated in contemporary Chinese society.

In addition, in our data we also found a metaphor that conceptualize women as a “mother”. Consistent with previous related research (e.g., Kaufmann, 1987; Kittay, 1988; Tomović-Šundić & Gvozdenović, 2020), this type of metaphors constrains women to the domestic sphere and depersonalizes them. As one of the few metaphor vehicles marked with relatively positive affective valence, it constitutes a “positive stereotype”, which is a rigid stereotype that certain group members are perceived as superior in a certain domain because of their group identity (see Czopp et al., 2015). In Chinese society, women’s traits related to family roles are particularly associated with “virtuousness”, which has become a typical stereotype when describing Chinese women (Zuo, 2016). Therefore, we consider that the metaphor vehicle of “mother” is not motivated by genuine appreciation of female subjectivity but rather reinforces the idea that feminine goodness should be equated with “being a loving mother”.

Likewise, by creating a systematic pattern between female vehicles and various non-human objects, a series of misconceptions about women concerning age, marriage, education, and other aspects are brought to the forefront. By devaluing feminine characteristics and women’s social values, these metaphors strengthen the subordinate position of women and refuse to deem them as dignified social agents. Indeed, the oppression, degradation, and humiliation of women have a long historical lineage in feudal China, developed by Confucian scholars during the Han Dynasty and reaching its peak between the late Ming and early Qing dynasties (Pearson, 1995). In contemporary Chinese society, although women’s rights in politics, economics, culture, and education have been recognized at the legal level, the status of Chinese women is still inferior, especially in public life (Attané, 2012). Studies about Chinese television and social media discourses have uncovered that female PhDs, both in the marriage market and in academic field, continue to face marginalization for having broken the gender stereotypes assigned to them by society in respect of education level (see Feldshuh, 2018; Peng et al., 2021). They are plagued by age anxiety and experience the othering of their identity as a group of accomplished female intellectuals by patriarchal discourses. Hence, these dilemmas and challenges faced by Chinese women today can be seen as a continuation of the sexist perspective presented in the female metaphor vehicles found in the modern Chinese novel *Wei Cheng*.

Finally, as discussed by Li (2023: 265), the demeaning attitude towards women presented in the metaphors about gender relations and gender

roles in *Wei Cheng* is not a reflection of the author's personal opinions. On the contrary, through these metaphors, the author Qian Zhongshu has vividly exposed the tensions and conflicts between men and women, as well as between tradition and modernity, prevalent in early 20th-century Chinese society. Accordingly, the examination of the systematic restrictions and degradation of women conveyed by the female metaphor vehicles in this study does not aim to criticize Qian Zhongshu's "sexism", but rather to emphasize the interpretive power of the ideological implications inherent in the female metaphor vehicles, using *Wei Cheng* as a research material. Importantly, it allows for an interpretation that takes into account the unique linguistic and cultural characteristics of the Chinese language.

9. Conclusions

This paper has applied a discourse dynamics approach (Cameron & Maslen, 2010) to examine the female metaphor vehicles in the modern Chinese novel *Wei Cheng*. Through a comprehensive analysis of their cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural-historical contexts, this research confirms the importance of this kind of metaphors for our understanding of the thoughts, attitudes, and values about women. Although our material is a modern Chinese literary work, the findings of this study have implications beyond the realm of literature. It astutely identifies the stereotypes and sexism faced by women in both private and public spheres, which have been internalized into the traditional Chinese society through the language. In a broader sense, what it has revealed about the status of women resonant with the social and cultural attitudes towards women in contemporary Chinese society as these biased values may still perpetuate in today's China. Crucially, by revealing the entrenched biases and sexism conveyed through these metaphors, this research has a social and practical significance in arising awareness and fostering critical discussions surrounding gender equality, prompting us to reflect on the power of language and its impact on societal perceptions and treatment of women. In future, more studies can be designed to examine how women have been presented as metaphor vehicles in larger corpora, in more public discourses and in different languages. In this way, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which images of women are constructed in language and the perspectives they convey, thus scrutinizing and revising the discrimination against women in language.

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