

The Cultural Implication of the Chinese Lexicon Containing ‘Moon’

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Abstract—The present article tends to discuss the Chinese cultural implications by taking deep analysis of the words and phrases containing *yue* 月 (moon). It could help us discover the rich and profound Chinese culture and enhance our understanding of national thinking mode, cultural psychological structure, social system and living custom. From those words containing moon, we can understand the plain and poetic moon culture in Chinese traditional culture: First, the moon embodies the immortality and eternity of life in the phrases such as, *rishengyueheng* 日升月恒. Second, the moon itself constitutes a pleasant scenery which is a marvelously inventive scene and let people get beautiful enjoyment, for example, *chunhuaqiuyue* 春花秋月, or *yuelangfengqing* 月朗风清. Third, in the phrases containing moon find sustenance of fullness and success, for instance, *huahaoyueyuan* 花好月圆, *yuezhongzhegui* 月中折桂. Fourth, the moon is a symbol of purity, such as *yueguangrushui* 月光如水. Fifth, the moon phrases embody the beauty of women, and the pursuit of good love life, for instance, *huarongyuemao* 花容月貌, *yuelaojisheng* 月老赤绳.

Index Terms—moon, Chinese cultural implication, immortality and eternity, pleasant scenery, fullness and success, purity, pursuit of good love life

I. INTRODUCTION

Serena and Richard (2013) stated that ‘A lexicon often provides clues to culture because it tends to reflect the objects and ideas that members of that culture consider important.’ (p.85). China has a long history, during which Chinese words embedded strong cultural implication within it. Shen Xiaolong (1990) claimed that meaning is the significant characteristic of language and culture connotation, the meaning of a language system contains the national system to recognize and value evaluation of the world, contains all the culture and history of the nation. In this sense, the word has never been the object of a single closed, it’s the thinking way of the life, the source of cultural psychological structure, social system and living custom. According to Xinhua Dictionary (1980), Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (1985) and The Chinese Great Dictionary (Feikui Lu & Ouyang Pucun et. al, 1978), moon has the following meanings: First, it is the largest natural satellite earth (also known as the moon) as “Moonlight reflects the light of the sun”; Second, it is a timing unit, such as *yiyue* 一月 (January), *yuefen* 月份 (months in a year), *suiyuebuju* 岁月不居 (time went by constantly); Third, it is to appear on a monthly basis, monthly, such as *yuekan* 月刊 monthly magazine, *yuxin* 月薪 monthly salary; Fourth, it refers to something which is round-shaped, look like a moon, such as *yuebing* 月饼 (moon cakes), *yueqin* 月琴 (a four-stringed plucked instrument with a full-moon-shaped sound box); Fifth, it refers to the month of confinement after giving birth to a child.

There are colorful words about the moon in Chinese, especially in the folk language such as *zuoyuezi* 坐月子 (sitting the month or confinement in childbirth), *yuelao* 月老 (the god who unites persons in marriage). Furthermore, there are plies of idioms adopted about moon, such as *zhongxingpengyue* 众星捧月 (literally, it means a myriad of stars surround the moon, extensively, it means all the famous stars drawing a circle of admirers around him or her), *biyuexiuhua* 闭月羞花 (a beauty which would obscure the moon and make flowers blush), *yueyingzeshi* 月盈则食 (literally means the full moon is prone to a lunar eclipse, it extends as things will decline to the pole when they are at climax), *pixingdaiyue* 披星戴月 (go to work before dawn and when one comes home, the moon is up), *yuemingxingxi* 月明星稀 (The moon is bright and the stars are few), *chunhuaqiuyue* 春花秋月 (spring flower and autumn moon are seasonal views), *huahaoyueyuan* 花好月圆 (lovely flowers, round moon), *yuezhongzhegui* 月中折桂 (tearing the laurel branches in the moon), *yueluoxingchen* 月落星沉 (the moon is down and the stars have set, it describes the day breaking view), *buyuedengyun* 步月登云 (stepping onto the moon and cloud, it means someone is ambitious), *shuizhonglaoyue* 水中捞月 (catch the moon in the water, it means something a fruitless attempt), *yuezhuihuazhe* 月坠花折 (the moon set, flowers died, it is used to describe the death of a beauty). There are numerous words about moon. The moon also has many wonderful unique names such as *yinchan* 银蟾 (silver toad), *changing* 蟾宫 (toad hall), *chanjuan* 婵娟 (the moon), *guanghan* 广寒 (the palace Chang’er lived in), *yutu* 玉兔 (the jade hare), *yupan* 玉盘 (jade plate), *yugong* 玉弓 (jade bow), *yugou* 玉钩 (jade hook), just list a few of them, from which the profound Chinese moon culture could be found.

II. THE FIVE CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

A. The Symbol of Immortality

The phrases containing 'yue' in Chinese which mean eternity are *rishengyueheng* 日升月恒 (just like the sun rises, the moon at the beginning of top chord, metaphorically, it means things are at prosperity), *riyuejingtian, jianghexingdi* 日月经天, 江河行地 (just like the sun and the moon go through the sky every day, rivers running through the land. It metaphorically refers to the eternity and greatness of life), *riyuelitian* 日月丽天, *xuanruoriyue* 悬若日月 (just like the sun and the moon hanging in the sky, it metaphorically refers to the eternity), *jinyueguyue* 今月古月 (it refers that the moon is the same no matter in the ancient times or in the modern times, but the dynasties changed.)

The forever invariable moon, the miracle in time and space, often arouses the human's imagination. The eternity of moon reminds people the shortness of their life. Examples are the following, Cao Cao wrote in his poem *duangexing* 《短歌行》 (short poetry lament), '*mingminggruyue, heshikeduo?*' '明明如月, 何时可掇?' (the bright moon in the sky, when can you be picked up?), Li Bai wrote in *bajiuwenyue* 《把酒问月》 (ask the moon with a cup of wine in hand) '*jinrenbujiangushiyue, jinyuecengjingzhaoguren. gurenjinrenruoliushui, gongkanmingyuejieruci*' '今人不见古时月, 今月曾经照古人。古人今人若流水, 共看明月皆如此。' (the ancient and present people go away like flowing water; they both witness the bright moon as it is.) *Chuanjianghuayueye* 《春江花月夜》 (A Moonlit Night On The Spring River) by Zhang Ruoxu in Tang Dynasty, '*jiangpanhenianchuzhaoyue? jiangyuehenianchuzhaoren? renshengdaidaiwuqiongyi, jiangyueniannianzhixiangsi*' '江畔何年出照月? 江月何年初照人? 人生代代无穷已, 江月年年知相似。' 'Who by the riverside first saw the moon arise? When did the moon first see a man by river side? Ah, generations have come and passed away; From year to year the moons look alike, old and new.' The clear contrast between the eternal moon and the limit of life is made in the poem.

For an individual, his/her life is limited, and the eventual end of life is death. This is an inescapable fact, it comes sooner or later and in this or that way. It is impossible to go beyond the limit of life and achieve eternal of life. But people always hope to convert the impossible things to become possible, yearn for their life be as eternal as the moon. They even dream that once their life gone, they still could own a future new life. Which goes the same as the moon 'dies' at the end of each month and rises again early next month, as a sign of regeneration. Qu yuan in his poem *Tian Wen* 《天问》 complained that '*yeguanghede, sizeyouyu.*' '夜光何德, 死则又育' (what virtue does the moon have? So it could be immortal). In the sentence, *yeguang* 夜光 refers to the moonlight, the moon. The moon is immortal, the goddess of the moon is eternal. The goddess of the moon, also called *Heng'e* 嫦娥. 姮 *heng* shares the same sound with the Chinese character 恒 *heng* (immortal). *Heng'e* refers to an eternal immortal woman.

In front of the eternal Chang'e, no matter how individual life continues, it is fleeting. In modern natural science, although the moon can die and revive, but it still cannot escape the law that all things born will die, nothing could be immortal and eternal. And in myth and the religious world, the immortality of the moon refers to the God of the moon will be immortal, namely, the moon is given the meaning of god and becomes a symbol of immortality.

B. The Symbol of Pleasant Scenery

The beautiful moon itself also constitutes the pleasant scenery. In Chinese there are lots of words describe beauty of the moon, such as *chunhuaqiuyue* 春花秋月, *qiuyuechunhua* 秋月春花, *huazhaoyuexi* 花朝月夕, *jifenglangyue* 霁风朗月, *fangnianhuayue* 芳年华月, *yuelangfengqing* 月朗风清, *wubianfengyue* 无边风月. *Yuebaifengqing* 月白风清 describes a quiet beautiful night with bright moon and cool breeze. Just because of the beauty the scene, some new meanings are extended, such as *qianligongchanjuan* 千里共婵娟 used to express the thoughts of love and best wishes for your family and friends. *Jinshuiloutaixiandeyue* 近水楼台先得月 refers to have better opportunities; *Baixingburuyiyue* 百星不如一月 metaphorically means that quantity is not better than quality; *zunqianyuexia* 樽前月下 describes the relaxed situation of watching the moon with wine in hand. *Fangnianhuayue* 芳年华月 refers to the wonderful youth.

The beauty of the moon lies in her richness of the color and shape, in the different combination of color and form, also lies in the combination with the surrounding environment. All of the above factors and their combinations constitute a meaningful form which touches one's sensitive soul and arouses different aesthetic emotion. The wax and wane of the moon, from its crescent as an eyebrow to the full moon as a mirror, and wane as a bow, constitute the indispensable contents of moon physical beauty. The moon shape characterizes in circular and curve, *yuanyue* 圆月 (round moon), *wangyue* 望月 (full moon), *jinlun* 金轮 (golden wheel) or *yupan* 玉盘 (jade plate) are undoubtedly the most short and the most ideal form. *Chunhuaqiuyue* 春花秋月 (the seasonal views are spring flowers and autumn moon), the reasons for the moon in autumn is the most beautiful scenery all the year around have relationship with the air crisp, cloudless seasonal climate, which is the best time for moon watching. The beauty of the bright moon is more obvious in the landscape under the background of mountains and rivers. Conversely, the hazy moon can play a role of giving the landscape with unique charm, such as Tao Yuanming in his poem *xianqingfu* 《闲情赋》 (Ode of leisure)

wrote *yuemeijingyuyunduan* 月媚景于云端, which on the one hand, illustrates the moon itself is beautiful, on the other hand, the bright moon hanging high above the cloud adds beauty to the scenery in the world.

Diderot, a French philosopher, believes 'beauty in relation' (1984, 29). People's grasp of the essence of beauty should break through the individual factors, individual things and focus on the internal relationship. The aesthetic value of things changes with the relationship between things. 'Beauty always emerges, grows and then changes to decline and disappear with the relation'. The beauty of the moon lies not only in color but also in form and relation. The moon exists in the relationship with its surroundings, and its beauty is set off by contrast of the sun, night sky, rivers and lakes, high mountain plains, trees and flowers, and so on.

The image of the moon itself combines with some specific things together constitute a large number of new comprehensive meaningful form, which makes the aesthetic features of the moon more full-round and moving. The moon in the night sky is set the background of dark, opaque night which is mysterious and frightening. It is the round moon that eliminates gloom and terror in people's mind. Moonlight is like the fine fingers stretching from the moon give people light warm and soothe the people's soul.

C. The Symbol of Fullness and Success

Huahaoyueyuan 花好月圆 in Chinese metaphorically means being full and complete by using the image of flowers in blossom and round moon. *Yuezhongzhegui* 月中折桂 refers to break off laurel branches in the moon, metaphorically, means having passed the examination. The two phrases embody people's longing and pursuit of success. In the Chinese traditional agricultural society, people worship the god of land and goddess of moon pray for their protection in every autumn harvest season. According to *Zhouli* (a book about rites of Zhou), in the Zhou Dynasty, it was an important custom to sacrifice to and appreciate the moon on the 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar. People at that time believed that a phenomenon in heaven suits some kind of phenomenon on earth, such as departing, reunion and life opportunities. In the Chinese national character, looking for a full (complete) end is particularly strong. Yearning for being full or complete means an auspicious token of abundance, harmony, and luck. For which the moon on the fifteenth day can satisfy people's psychological expectation.

Mid-autumn moon, on the one hand, is a blend of aggregation and separation, unity and homesickness, completeness and the defects; On the one hand, the full moon has sparked the common expectations of reunion and harmony, life stability and enterprise harmony, family reunion and the world peace. The full moon has become people's ideal round moon. The traditional Mid-Autumn festival is a day for family reunion. *Yueyuanhuahua* 月圆花好 is a symbol of happiness, peace and reunion, which embodied in the following sentences: Zhang Jiuling, a poet as well as a prime minister, wrote the poem '*haishangshengmingyue, tianyangongcishi*' '海上生明月, 天涯共此时' (Rising is the bright moon above the sea, arising harmonious feeling you and me). Su Dongpo wrote '*danyuanrenchangjiu, qianligongchanjuan*' '但愿人长久, 千里共婵娟。' (Will live long as he can! Though miles apart, we'll share the beauty she displays.)

D. The Symbol of Purity

The moon is a symbol of purity. This kind of words are *guangfengjiyue* 光风霁月, *binghuqiuyue* 冰壶秋月, *yuebaifengqing* 月白风清, *yueguangrushui* 月光如水, *qiuyuehanjiang* 秋月寒江 and so on. In *guangfengjiyue* 光风霁月 describes a calm prospect after a storm comes, it can be extended to describe a person who has open mind and heart, *guangfeng* 光风 refers to the attendance of the wind after the rain, *ji* 霁 means the snow stopped. *Binghuqiuyue* 冰壶秋月, *binghu* 冰壶 is the jade kettle for holding water, *qiuyue* 秋月 is the moon on Mid-Autumn, metaphorically means one is as bright and pure-hearted as the clean, bright moon. *Yuebaifengqing* 月白风清 describes a nice beautiful night vision with bright moonlight and cool breeze. *Yueguangrushui* 月光如水 compares the soft bright moonlight as gently flowing water. *Qiuyuehanjiang* 秋月寒江 refers to a man of virtue has bright pure heart.

The moon arouses people's diverse colour sense. Sometimes it is bright and once in a while it is hazy. When it first appears in the sky it is red in yellow, and slowly it becomes pale yellow with the increase of brightness and, until the round bright moon shed silver radiance. The moon words such as *haoyue* 皓月, *shuangyue* 霜月, *lengyue* 冷月 highlight silver white and the color of jade in general. In this way, the full moon is called *yinlun* 银轮, the crescent moon as *yingou* 银钩 (silver hook), the moon as *yinyang* 银阳 (the moon looks like a mass of silver, were generally said that the moon silver color), like in a folk song composed by Wang Luobin *zainayinsedeyueguangxia* 《在那银色的月光下》 (under the silver moonlight), which leaves the impression of the bright moonlight and the nobility of the moon.

The jade color of the moon is pictured in the poems such as Li bai's *gulangyuexing* 《古朗月行》 (An Old And Bright Moon) 'As a little boy the moon I don't know, I call it a jade plate white like snow.' In it the moon is compared as a jade plate. There are other names for the moon as jade wheel and jade hook, which show its purity and nobility. Because of the color of jade in general the moon is given the meanings of light and open mind, good character, and the peaceful social atmosphere, etc.

E. The Anchorage of Love

In the ever-changing nature, the bright transparent moon, like a beautiful girl, always affects people's emotions and thoughts. In Chinese the words like *Chang'ebenye* 嫦娥奔月, *Chang'e* 嫦娥 is the goddess of the moon. In Chinese culture, the things about women are given name of moon. For example, the queen is called *yuefei* 月妃, *yuefang* 月房 refers to rooms for the female members of a family. *YueliChang'e* 月里嫦娥 and *huarongyuemao* 花容月貌 are used to describe the graceful, beautiful and charming ladies. *Biyuexiuhua* 闭月羞花 is used to highlight the beauty of woman which would obscure the moon and make flowers blush by using exaggeration. *Yuezhuihuazhe* 月坠花折 and *yuequehuacai* 月缺花残 describe the death or aging of a beauty.

God of love in ancient China, the matchmaker is called *yuexialaoren* 月下老人 (the old man under the moon), and lovers always choose places under the moonlight for their date meeting. The phrase *yueshangliushao* 月上柳梢 is adopted from *yuanye* 《元夜》 by Ouyang Xiu, '*yueshangliushaotou, ren yuehuanghunhou*' '月上柳梢头, 人约黄昏后.' 'The moon rose from behind the willow, I and my love had a date after dusk.' *Daiyuexixiang* 待月西厢 is derived from *Xixiangji* 《西厢记》 (a love story) "待月西厢下, 迎风半户开。月移花影动, 疑是玉人来。" In ancient China, when men and women in love they always swore their love in the moonlight or worshiped the moon to pray for their love. In Yuan Dynasty Guan Hanqing, a dramatist, wrote *Baiyueting* 《拜月亭》 to describe the story of a departing couple who worshiped the god of moon to pray for their reunion. Cui Yingying in *Xixiangji* 《西厢记》 also prayed devoutly to the moon and hoped to meet her Mr. Right.

In the classical tune *yueliangdaibiaowodexin* 《月亮代表我的心》 (The Moon Represents My Heart), it represents deep and faithful love. The word *yuelao* 月老, shortened for *yuexialaoren* 月下老人 (the old man of the moon), refers to a matchmaker. It originated from Tang Dynasty Li Fuyan's record of Wei Gu's travel in Song Cheng, 'Gu saw an old man sitting on the stairs by the side of a pack while he was turning books in the moonlight. Gu was curious and asked the old man what book he was reading. The old man answered it was the register book for all the couples on the earth. The red line are used to tie the feet of the husband and wife. Once a man and a woman was born they were tied, even if they are from the enemy's family, the rich and the poor, or ugly and beauty, they will become husband and wife.' *yuelaoqianxian* 月老牵线 or *yuelaojisheng* 月老赤绳 (matchmaker go between), which were derived from the previous story, became a symbol of marriage and love. In *yueshu* 月书, *yueshu* 月书 refers to register book the old man had. *Jisheng* 赤绳 means the red line used by the old man to tie the future couple, the advance of the engagement. Therefore, the moon became the anchorage of beauty and love.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, five cultural implications of the words and phrases containing 'yue' are analyzed in the previous writing: First, the moon embodies the immortality and eternity of life. Second, the moon itself constitutes a pleasant scenery which is a marvelously inventive scene and let people get beautiful enjoyment. Third, in the phrases containing moon find sustenance of fullness and success. Fourth, the moon is a symbol of purity. Fifth, the moon phrases embody the beauty of women, and the pursuit of good love life. All of these cultural implications entails rich and profound cultural implication, which is the history of living fossil, the carriers for thousands of years culture, verifying the Chinese traditional values and aesthetic outlook. As German philosopher Leibniz said meaning is determined by us, and people attach meaning to language signs. The significance of language symbols given by people, reflects people's cognitive activities, cognitive achievement value orientation and cultural psychology, etc.. Through in-depth analysis of the words containing yue 月 or the moon, people can glimpse into the extensive and profound Chinese culture, deepen awareness of Chinese national thinking mode, cultural psychological structure, social system and living customs. Through the analysis of the cultural significance of these words, can help us to discover and inherit our traditional culture, help to flourish our Chinese language teaching and the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and to promote intercultural communication.

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