Color Conceptualization of AGE in English and Chinese

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Abstract—Both in English and Chinese there are extensions of color to human age. For gaining some knowledge of the differences in the extension in the two languages, color categories are discussed and compared first and then evidences in dictionaries and corpora are collected and compared as well. It is found that there is a higher possibility of color associations with age in Chinese than English. What’s more, there are more colors involved in color associations in Chinese.

Index Terms—basic color term, color categories, color association

Color shift is often conceived as the growth process of plants or human beings in Chinese. When it is applied to plants, there are green and yellow for ripeness. When it is referred to human beings, there are black and white for young and old age. Generally speaking, color is a distinctive property of objects and human beings usually attach much figurative associations to it. In other words, color is a basic concept which often serves a middle stage for figurative associations, metonymically and metaphorically.

As for different cultures like English and Chinese, are there any similarities or differences in the association between age and color? For example, in Chinese a person’s life can be compared to be li-míng (黎明 black bright or dawn) and huáng-hūn (黄昏 yellow dim or dusk), as seen in the expression huáng-hūn-liàn (黄昏恋 yellow dim love) which metaphorically refers to a love affair between two old people. In addition, the daytime is báo tian (白天下 white sky) and the nighttime is 黑夜(black night). A busy work life is said to be qǐ-zào-tān-hēi (起早贪黑 to work from dawn to night). Do English have similar conceptualization of color for age as Chinese does? These questions require a consistent comparison between English and Chinese in terms of the data collected from dictionaries like The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (CCD), and from corpora such as British National Corpus (BNC) and Center for Chinese Linguistic PKU (CCL).

II. COLOR CATEGORIES IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE
It has been discovered that color term inventories vary across languages (Davies and Corbett 1997:494). This means that color categorization is not always universal but varies from language to language, possibly because color is not just a physical phenomenon but our perceptual interpretation of light, which exists in socially anchored linguistic systems (Lucy 1997:340-341). Color terms are linguistic categories concerning both physical perception and cultural beliefs. It is a universal conduct among almost all languages to divide the continuous color spectrum into a restricted inventory of color categories. The naming of these categories may vary from culture to culture. Similar cultural needs and the cultural contact between speakers of different languages are regarded as factors for similarities across different cultures and contribute to the origins of linguistic color categories in different societies (Roberson and Hanley 2010:190, 194).

English is believed to have 11 basic color terms and this also holds in Chinese, but the inventory of basic color terms are different, which is a main topic of the study of color categorizations in English and Chinese. What’s more, the ranking of basic color terms in English and Chinese shows that some basic color terms are more psychologically salient than the others in a given culture.

Based on the evolutionary sequence, both English and Chinese are similar, with white and black followed by red and yellow. But they differ much in the order blue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>BNC Frequencies</th>
<th>Chinese Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19,140</td>
<td>bái (白 white)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>18,317</td>
<td>hóng (红 red)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>11,094</td>
<td>qīng (青 qing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>9,307</td>
<td>hēi (黑 black)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>8,304</td>
<td>huáng (黄 yellow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>4,812</td>
<td>lǜ (绿 green)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>4,344</td>
<td>huī (灰 gray)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>3,850</td>
<td>lán (蓝 blue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>2,714</td>
<td>zī (紫 purple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>2,045</td>
<td>hē (褐 brown)/zōng (棕 brown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>1,097</td>
<td>chēng (橙 orange)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s partly due to the culturally specific color term qīng (青 qing) in Chinese, which can cover the spaces of green, blue and even black. By referring to the frequencies of the 11 basic color terms in these two languages, both white and red have much higher frequency as seen in Table 2.

In English the most frequently used color term is black, whereas in Chinese it is white. What’s more, English tends to use green and blue more frequently than their Chinese counterparts, while Chinese has the tendency to use qīng (青 qing) and huáng (黄 yellow) more often than English.

Seen from the two tables, the earlier the color terms appear, the more figurative they are, and the more frequently they are used.

III. THE METAPHORICAL EXTENSION OF BASIC COLORS

The association between color and age can be found both in English and Chinese. Firstly, an investigation is made into the dictionaries for linguistic data for the association between COLOR and AGE. Second, corpora of native languages like BNC and CCL are compared for further evidence of such association.

Dictionaries are collections of recorded usage of language in practical life and they are able to provide well-established usage with relation to cultural experiences. The 11 basic color terms in English and Chinese are investigated into dictionaries LDOCE and CCD in search of evidence for the associations between color and life.
The color

青衣 (qing) is an ironic expression when referring to a woman, especially a married one whose red face), 红颜 (red face), usually refer to young people, who are often thought to have redness in the face, i.e., physical color for youth, good health and thus beauty. On the other hand, 灰老 (gray) and 青老 (black) and 紫老 (gray). And these color terms often co-occur with words for hair, including 突 (thread), 发 (hair), 毛 (hair), 头 (head) or 头 (head). 发 (hair) occurs most in the collocation with 黑 (black), 白 (white), 灰 (gray), 黄 (yellow) and 青 (green), and 突 (thread) usually occurs with 银 (silver) and 翠 (青).

Chinese also correlates facial color with age. For example, redness in the face means ‘being young and thus attractive’ while yellowness in the face means ‘being old and thus unattractive’. For example, 红颜 (red face), which is more likely associated with attractiveness of a woman or her beauty. The expressions, like 红颜 (red face) and 红颜 (red face), usually refer to young people, who are often thought to have redness in the face, i.e., physical color for youth, good health and thus beauty. On the other hand, 灰老 (gray) replaced by a yellow face, a symbol of lost youth and beauty. In addition, the color of the other body parts and the color of clothing can represent age, such as 灰老 (gray) and 灰衣 (gray clothing), and so on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>LDOCE</th>
<th>CCD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In English a young and inexperienced person can be compared to be a young plant or animal such as be green and greenhorn. An old person is often referred as gray which is an ordinary hair color of an old man, thus the gray vote refers to the votes of the old people and gray pound means the money which the old have. Besides gray and yellow, blue sometimes is extended to old age as blue rinse, originally a rinse for tinting gray hair, later picks up the reference to an elderly woman with conservative views. Comparatively, Chinese has more color terms involved in the association between color and age. For example, there are many opposite color pairs for young and old age including 白 (white) and 黑 (black), 红 (red) and 白 (white), 黄 (yellow) and 白 (white), and 黑 (black) and 灰 (gray). And these color terms often co-occur with words for hair, including 突 (thread), 发 (hair), 毛 (hair), 头 (head) or 头 (head). 发 (hair) occurs most in the collocation with 黑 (black), 白 (white), 灰 (gray), 黄 (yellow) and 青 (green), and 突 (thread) usually occurs with 银 (silver) and 翠 (青).

In Table 4, it is clear that the extension between color and age has 4 patterns: a) The hair color stands for age; b) the facial color stands for age; c) age is the color of the body parts; d) age is the color of clothing. For more linguistic evidence, the inquiries into the corpora are made. The results are shown in Table 4.

According to the results in Table 4, in English gray, usually in the collocation with hair, is often associated with old age, while the other colors do not often have such tendency. On the other hand, in Chinese there are more colors...
associated with young and old age, mostly represented in the combination with hair. What’s more, color terms in Chinese can be combined with body parts, clothing and accessories to refer to different ages.

IV. FIGURATIVE ASSOCIATIONS OF COLOR FOR AGE

Color is mainly a visual perception. People tend to employ different visual perception of objects to express various age. Some associations are directly based on the visual perception while some are conceived as abstractions on the basis of color.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color metonymies</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>body parts</td>
<td>huáng-mào-xiǎo-zi (黄毛小子 yellow-haired boy), huáng-lǎo-pó (黄脸婆 yellow-faced wife), bái-fù-rén (白发人 white-haired man), qīng-tóu-zi (青头仔 qing head boy)</td>
<td>grey hair, green hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clothing</td>
<td>fěn-lǐng (粉领 pink collar), qīng-yī (青衣 qing clothing)</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accessories</td>
<td>Huáng-huā-nǚ (黄花女 yellow flower girl), hóng-zhū (红妆 red makeup)</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though Table 5 cannot list all color metonymies for age, it can still help to shed light on the cross-cultural difference. The color metonymies in Chinese are more fixed than the counterparts in English.

A. Color of Body Parts Stands for Age

Langacker (1987: 149; see also Lorena Pérez Hernández 2000: 261) contends that time is a primitive, non-derived, basic notion. Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 137) hold that in English time is primarily conceptualized in terms of SPACE, and MOTION through space, THE TIME ORIENTATION METAPHOR, THE MOVING TIME METAPHOR, THE MOVING OBSERVER METAPHOR. This argument is supported by Croft (2006: 278) states that motion involves time, change and location. Time is ontologically understood in terms of things (that is, entities and locations) and motion (Lakoff 2006: 201). Age, as a subcategory of time, is no exception. The growing process from young to old is often understood in terms of color variation, generally from dark colors to light colors. In English pink and blue are often cognitively interpreted as color for babies. Then gray is metonymically associated with old age. On the other hand, in Chinese it is common to find variant color terms associated with age in Chinese, such as qīng (青 qing), huáng (黄 yellow), lǜ (绿 green), bái (白 white) and hēi (黑 black).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>language</th>
<th>Hair color</th>
<th>examples</th>
<th>age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>gray</td>
<td>Gray hair</td>
<td>Old age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Seen from Table 6, HAIR COLOR STANDS FOR AGE exceeds over FACIAL COLOR STANDS FOR AGE. In addition, Chinese tends to have more colors involved in color metonymies of body parts for age. In English the most striking hair color indicating old age is gray and it is hardly to find a reversed color for young age.

(1) a. He had aged: **his hair was touched with grey**, and his face was haggard. (BNC-AC6 1889)

b. There is the age at which I will grow into my own maturation, and there is the age at which my hair has started to **turn grey**. (BNC—G2V 3447)

c. She was sitting beneath the narrow, barred window when he entered the room, and the first lying ashen in her **fair hair**; there was **more grey** than gold in it now. (BNC—K8S 2102)

Examples of (1) indicate that when one is aging, his or her hair color will be gray. In Example a and b, there are obvious clues like the noun phrase **the age** and the verb phrase **have aged** to hint that hair turning grey is caused by the age, while in Example c there are no hints like **age** or **aged**, the readers can still predict regarding to the hair color that

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she is not as young as the one he once remembered or knew. Thus, here the combination of the color grey and the body part hair is associated with age, or time, metonymically referring to the aged person.

The contrast in HAIR COLOR STANDS FOR AGE can be shown in Figure 1, which further shows the color white in Chinese, reversed to black semantically, is opposite to different colors lexically. For example, the contrast between black and white hair refers to different ages, young and old. When referring to an old man, it is accepted to say bái-fà-rén (白发人 white hair man), or more outspokenly bái-fà-lào-zhē (白发老人 white hair old man) or bái-fà-lào-bái (白发老人 white hair white man). When referring to a young man, it is common to say hēi-fà-rén (黑发人 black hair man) or qīng-tóu-xiǎo-huái (青头小伙子 qing head young man), or in Cantonese qīng-tóu-zái (青头仔 qing head boy). The color terms hēi (黑 black) and qīng (青 qing) form a contrast of hair color with bái (白 white) to indicate different ages.

![Figure 1. reversed colors of HAIR COLOR STANDS FOR AGE in English and Chinese](image)

(2) a. 这个道理是很容易理解的。相濡以沫的几十年夫妻生活，从[青丝到白发](#), 还有什么是对方不了解的呢？(It’s easy to understand that a couple who have lived together from black hair to white hair, caring for each other for scores of years, are sure to know each other well.) (CCL)
b. 舞台四周，[白发老者](#)，[青头小伙](#)，坐满了前来看戏的人。(The audience, including the white-haired old men and black-haired young men, was seated around the stage.) (CCL)
c. 现在他们已经作古，未曾想这[白发人](#)却去送[黑发人](#)，真是不可思议！(Now they are no more. it’s never thought before that the white-haired joined the funeral procession of the white-haired. So incredible!) (CCL)
d. 从1947年在美国研究WTO开始，五十年过去了，我也从[白发到黑发](#)，到白发直到现今的无发。(Fifty years has passed by since the start of WTO research in US in 1947. I have experienced from black hair to gray hair, to white hair and to hairless now.) (CCL)

In the examples of (2), it is obvious that the color terms hēi (黑 black), qīng (青 green or blue) and bái (白 white) appear in the combination with words like sī (丝 silk), fà (发 hair), or tóu (头 head) referring to the young or the old respectively. It seems a common sense that the young are usually black-haired while the old often have white hair. Therefore, people commonly tend to associate youth with black hair and old age with white hair in their cognition. Examples of (2a) and (2b) show that the color term qīng (青) doesn’t refer to the same color as in the expressions like qīng-tiān (青天 blue sky), qīng-cǎo (青草 qing grass), etc. The color term qīng (青) in (2a) and (2b) stands as the opposite color to bái (白 white), an equivalent to the color hēi (黑 black).

The reversion between yellow and white is exceptional. In huáng-tóng-bái-sǒu (黄童白叟 yellow child white old man)¹, the two color terms huáng (黄 yellow) and bái (白 white) form a contrast of hair color for different ages, with huáng (黄 yellow) for young and bái (白 white) for old. But yellow can be an embodied color for old age in the idiom huáng-fà-chuí-tái (黄发垂髻), in which huáng-fà (黄发 yellow hair) literally refers to the hair of an old man turning from white to yellow, symbolizing longevity among ancient Chinese, thus metonymically meaning an old man.

(3) a. 《论衡·定言》: “吕望之徒, 白首乃显; 百里奚之知, 明于[黄发](#).” (Lun Heng.Zhang liu: Wang Lü’s talent was shown till white hair; Xi Ball’s wits were shown till yellow hair.) DAC

(4) b. 这是一个反传统的思路。过去一直号召的是“扎根农场,”[黄毛丫头](#)干到老太婆; 认为只有死守农场, 才能办好农场。(This thought ran against the tradition. In the past the slogan was settling down on the farm” and “working from a yellow-haired girl to an old woman”; it was believed that only sticking to the farm could run it well.”) (CCL)

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¹ In Jiuyong Idiom Dictionary, edited by Wen Tang, huáng-tóng-bái-sǒu (黄童白叟) is similar to the idiom huáng-fà-chuí-tái (黄发垂髻), in which huáng-fà (黄发 yellow hair) literally refers to the hair of an old man turning from white to yellow, symbolizing longevity among ancient Chinese, thus metonymically meaning an old man. For avoiding misunderstanding and inconsistency in the explanation of the thesis, it is not included in the text. Similarly, in another idiom like huáng-huá-wán-jíe (黄花晚节 yellow flower late morality), huáng-huá (黄花), referring to chrysanthemums, which can endure the coldness in winter, which people conceptualize the same as wán-jíe (晚节 the moral integrity in one’s later years).
(3)a shows both white hair and yellow hair refer to old age, and (3)b describes a young girl in terms of yellow hair. When yellow is associated with old age, it has no color terms for its opposite. It is common sense among Chinese that ducklings and chicks have yellow feathers. People tend to ontologically conceptualize this into thinking that a boy or a girl of the tender age is called huáng-mào-xiǎo-zǐ (黄毛小子 yellow hair boy) or huáng-mào-yá-tóu (黄毛丫头 yellow hair girl) in (3)b. It does not necessarily mean that he or she does not have yellow hair. Here the color term huáng (黄 yellow) features a person’s body parts, stressing on the tender age of the person.

The expressions like hóng-yán (红颜 red face), zhú-yán-lǜ-fà (朱颜绿发 red face green hair), huáng-liàn-pó (黄脸婆 yellow face wife) show that besides hair color, facial color is also extended to age. These involve colors terms like red and green. It’s an embodied cognition that a young man usually has ruddy or rosy cheeks.

B. Clothing Color Stands for Age and Color of Accessories Stands for Age

Besides body parts, the color of clothing or accessories are also related with age in Chinese. However, there are hardly any such color metonymies related to age to be found in English.

As explained above, the color term huáng (黄 yellow), contrasting with qīng (青 qing) and lǜ (绿 green), is associated with oldness. Interestingly, the color term huáng (黄 yellow), on the other hand, can also be related with someone inexperienced or young, as shown in the examples of (4).

(4) a. 直到那些 黄花闺女 被好，有的身遭摧残，声名狼藉，才逐渐引起人们的关注。(Until those virgins were raped, even some having their health seriously harmed did it become the public concern.) (CCL)

b. 他不能不时刻小心，都是不到 20 岁的 黄花女 啊，如果出了闪失，如何向人家父母交代呢！(He had to be careful all the time, because they were all maidens of less than 20 years of age. Once something bad happened to them, how could he account for your parent?) (CCL)

The relation between huáng-huá (黄花 yellow flower) and inexperience possibly originates from the fashion especially in Tang and Song Dynasties that young maidens wore yellow paintings or attached yellow paintings onto the forehead, which they did not do after marriage. The paintings or cuttings carry the symbol of virginity then. It is also possibly related to the conviction that things made of yellow were usually regarded as noble and bright ones and virginity was often thought to be precious possession for an unmarried woman. What’s more, huá-huáng (花黄色 yellow flower) was regarded as beauty, as seen in the examples of (5).

(5) a. 当窗理云鬓，对镜贴花黄—《乐府诗集之横吹曲辞．木兰诗》(Combing hair by leaning against the window, rubbing huā-huáng by looking into the mirror. —Cross Blow ∙ Mulan Poem of Yuefu Poetry)

b. 留心敷广鬓，轻手约花黄—《咏镜照》费昶 (南朝梁) (Drawing black eyebrows carefully, rubbing huā-huáng softly—Ode to Looking into the Mirror by Chang Fei in Liang, South Dynasty)

c. 骊黄裁锦袖，翡翠贴花黄—《踏歌词》崔液 (唐) (Embroidering Mandarin ducks onto the silky sleeve, attaching huā-huáng with emerald—Chants by Ye Cui in Tang Dynasty)

Thus, huá-huáng (花黄 flower yellow) or huáng-huá (黄花 yellow flower) develops an indication of a woman without sexual experience or a virgin in modern language. This metonymy indicates the innocent youth, manifesting the sub-metaphor INEXPERIENCE IS YELLOW due to their young age.

Red is also a color often thought to be a symbol of youth, especially young and beautiful women in Chinese, reflected in clothing color such as hóng-xiū (红袖 red sleeve), hóng-qín (红裙 red skirt), hóng-zhùhuāng (红妆 red clothing), fēng-lǐng (粉领 pink collar), and so on, and represented in color of accessories such as hóng-zhùhuāng (红妆 red makeup). In Chinese Peking Opera, black clothing is usually worn by young women characters, thus the character qīng-yī (青衣 qing clothing) particularly refers to young women in the opera.

In CLOTHING COLOR STANDS FOR AGE and COLOR OF ACCESSORIES STANDS FOR AGE, it is common that youth, especially youth of a woman, gets special attention and stands out in Chinese’s conviction of age, which is hardly seen in English. There are no opposite colors involved in this metonymical association.

C. Color Metaphor Age Is Color

Color, as one feature of things and a sub-domain of SPACE, is coordinated with the extension of the visual field. Both Chinese and English have associated the color green with youth, based on daily observation of plants or animals which co-exist as human beings. Again, Chinese overtakes English in the involvement of colors, especially opposite colors. For example, The metaphorical association of color with age is shown in terms of color changes of plants, as shown in the examples in (6):

(6) a. ...远不如他坟头的野草，会今年黄了，明年又绿地持续下去，十年也还如一日。(CCL) (not better than the wild grass on his tomb, which can keep on turning yellow this year and turning green next year.)

b. rén-lào-žī-huáng (人老 珠黄 as one grows old, the pearl turns yellow; the old age, especially referring to an old woman)

The examples in (6) exemplify the time orientation metaphor. In (1a), the color terms huáng (黄 yellow) and lǜ (绿 green) are grammatically verbs. Here the alternative change of colors—from huáng (黄 yellow) to lǜ (绿 green)—manifests a circulation of seasonal changes: In autumn the grasses become yellow and dry, while in spring, the grass
turn green. And in daily life we also see that most of the fruits turn from green to yellow when getting ripe. Such is what a human perceives in daily experiences. Thus, change of time is defined in terms of color, i.e. AGE IS COLOR. Then in (6b), the expression rén-lǎo (人老 person old: one grows old) is paralleled with zhū-huáng (珠黄 pearl yellow: the accessories turn yellow because they are well-worn.) Here lǎo (老 old) and huáng (黄 yellow) form a pair of synonyms. Similar to the state that a human grows old or lǎo (老 old), her accessories zhù (珠 jewelry) are worn out. Metaphorically, The yellowness of something indicates that the best time (especially referring to one’s youth) has gone forever. These examples manifest a habitual Chinese way of thinking that yellow is a color associated with the concept of oldness while green is a color related with the concept of youth. The color huáng (黄 yellow) in (6a) and b stands contrast to lǜ (绿 qīng) in ancient Chinese, indicating different periods of time: lǜ (绿 qīng), the color for something newly born, is then associated with somebody who is young, while huáng (黄 yellow), the color for something well grown but fading in vitality, is related with somebody old, as shown in the following correspondences:

The color metaphor: AGE IS COLOR
Correspondence: difference periods correspond to different shades of color
A person corresponds to a leaf
Something new or somebody young corresponds to lǜ (绿 qīng)
Something old or somebody old corresponds to huáng (黄 yellow)

In this sense, the metaphor AGE IS COLOR entails two sub-metaphors: YOUTH IS QING and OLDNESS IS HUANG. YOUTH IS GREEN can be found in English, but not its opposite.

In ancient Chinese, there was no distinction made between the color blue and green. Both colors were terms as the color term qīng (青 qīng), as in the examples like qīng-tiān (青天 qīng sky), qīng-cǎo (青草 qīng grass), etc. And in the expressions like qīng-nián (青年 qīng year), qīng-chūn (青春 qīng spring), qīng-chōng-sui-yuè (青葱岁月 qīng onion years: the teenage years, the adolescent years), etc., the color term qīng (青 qīng) is thought to refer to green only. The color terms huáng (黄 yellow) and qīng (青 qīng) form a pair of color contrast to refer to different periods of time. Thus in the color metaphor AGE IS COLOR, the correspondences are changed accordingly:

The color metaphor: AGE IS COLOR
Correspondence: difference periods correspond to different shades of color
A person corresponds to a leaf
Something new or somebody young corresponds to the color qīng (青 qīng)
Something old or somebody old corresponds to the color huáng (黄 yellow)

Here the metaphor AGE IS COLOR entails two sub-metaphors: YOUTH IS QING and OLDNESS IS HUANG. Colors huáng (黄 yellow) and qīng (青 qīng) form a pair of color contrast, referring to different periods of time.

(7a) presents the literal meaning of the expression qīng-huáng-bù-jìě (青黄不接 qīng yellow not connected): qīng (青 qīng) refers to the period when the crops are not mature or ripe: huáng (黄 yellow) refers to the period when the crops are already mature enough to yield. Thus, based on such cognition, qīng (青 qīng) is thought to be associated with immaturity while huáng (黄 yellow) is related with maturity. (7b) shows the metaphorical understanding of qīng-huáng-bù-jìě (青黄不接 qīng yellow not connected): there is a shortage of young cadre who can take the place of the old cadre. In practical use, qīng (青 qīng) and huáng (黄 yellow) show different tendency in word construction. huáng (黄 yellow), as the opposite to qīng (青 qīng), either appears in the combination with qīng (青 qīng), or occurs in the expressions like ‘rén-lǎo-zhū-huáng (人老珠黄 person old pearl yellow: an old person)’ and ‘huáng-dián-pò (黄脸婆 yellow face wife)’. As shown above of the same section, when the color huáng (黄 yellow) stands as the opposite to the color qīng (青 qīng), it means old age. Comparatively, qīng (青 qīng) is more productive. More examples are shown in (8) as follows.

(8a) 唯一的遗憾是我老了，而且还在变老，不复返的是宝贵的青春。(The only regret is that I am old, and I am getting old. What was gone is the precious youth.) (CCL)
b. 他说他也感到了温暖，能从我的身上感受到一股强烈的青春气息，这种气息彷佛昨日时光中似曾相识的再现，但是他不敢奢望。(He said he also felt the warmth, and he could feel a strong breath of youth in me, which to him was like reoccurrence of yesterday’s familiar images, but he would never dare to have) (CCL)
c. 面对这些情况，教师应该采取适当的方法进行青春期卫生和性知识教育。（In the face of these situations, teachers should take proper measures to conduct adolescence health education and popularize sexual knowledge) (CCL)
d. 添加青年的例子
e. We hope this article can have some beneficial reference for promoting the enterprises to pay close attention to the young worker’s skills learning and intensive study.) (CCL)

f. ...these身处异地的上海：知识青年唯一揪心的，是自己的子女在读书和就业上所面临的诸多困难。(...The only thing making those displaced educated youths anxious was the numerous difficulties in schooling and employment their offspring were facing.) (CCL)

g. If failure would make you lose your courage, or when you were restless, you would call the lawyer and fight for your rights... (If failure cost you a heavy loss, or made you restless, you would call a lawyer, just as a rookie teenager did when in trouble.) (CCL)

In practical use, qīng (青) can be an independent unit to combine with lexical items such as qīng-nián (青年 qing year), qīng-chūn-qì (青春期 qing spring period), as shown in (8). In (8a) and b, qīng-chūn (青春 qing spring) literally means that the youth is like the spring often in the color of qīng. There is a famous Chinese saying that yī-nián-zhī-jī-zài-yá-chūn (一年之计在于春 Spring is the beginning of a year). Cognitively, qīng (青), combined with chūn (春), means the tender years of one’s life. In (8c), qīng-chūn-qì (青春 qing spring) presents the literal meaning green spring period, known as the period which starts at the age of 11 or 13. Thus it is not difficulty to understand the idiom qīng-chūn-nián-shào (青年少年 qing spring year little) which stresses the freshness and innocence of youth. The expression qīng-nián (青年 qing year) literally means the immature age, i.e. the period when everything is still qīng and fresh. It refers to the youth who are at the immature years of life.

What’s more, qīng (青) can be an abbreviation of qīng-nián (青年 qing year), as in expressions like qīng-gōng (青工 qing worker) in (8e), zhī-qīng (知识 qing knowledge qing) in (8f), lèng-tóu-qīng (愣头青 reckless qing) in (8g), etc. Then qīng-gōng (青工 qing worker) refers to the abbreviation of qīng-nián-gōng-rén (青年工人 qing year worker) and zhī-qīng (知识 qing knowledge qing) is an abbreviated form of zhī-shí-qīng-nián (知识青年 educated qing year). Zhī-qīng (知识 qing knowledge qing) is a by-product of a particular historical era in Chinese history, “referring to secondary school graduates who were sent to the countryside for reeducation during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)”. (Hui Yu 2004: 209)3 In the example of (8g), lèng-tóu-qīng (愣头青 reckless qing), also called lèng-tóu-qīng-nián (愣头青少年 reckless qing year) vividly describes a young man who is not experienced and sophisticated.

V. CONCLUSION

Comparing metonymical and metaphorical extensions of color to age, it is evident that more basic color terms are involved in Chinese than in English.

In addition, Chinese has opposite colors pairs metonymically or metaphorically for age, which is rarely seen in English. For example, seen from the contrastive color pairs like qīng (青) and huáng (黄 yellow), là (绿 green) and huàng (黄 yellow), huáng (黄 yellow) and bái (白 white), qīng (青 black) and bái (白 white), hēi (黑 black) and bái (白 white), etc., the Chinese are more likely to conceptualize age in terms of colors than the English peers.

**Metonymies:**

- BLACK HAIR STANDS FOR YOUTH, WHITE HAIR STANDS FOR OLDNESS
- BLACK HAIR STANDS FOR YOUTH, GREY HAIR STANDS FOR OLDNESS
- YELLOW HAIR STANDS FOR YOUTH, WHITE HAIR STANDS FOR OLDNESS
- YELLOW HAIR STANDS FOR OLDNESS
- YELLOW FLOWER STANDS FOR YOUTH
- RED CLOTHING STANDS FOR YOUTH
- BLACK CLOTHING STANDS FOR YOUTH

**Metaphors:**

- YOUTH IS GREEN, OLDNESS IS YELLOW (PEOPLE ARE PLANTS)
- YOUTH AND INEXPERIENCE IS QING, OLDNESS AND EXPERIENCE IS YELLOW

This is not a total list of color conceptualization in Chinese. For example, both Chinese and English have conceived gray hair as a symbol of old age, green symbolizing youth based on embodied experience. Such common conception manifests that both languages conceive color as a distinctive property of objects, which entails COLOR IS A DISTINCTIVE PROPERTY OF ORGANISMS. Here organisms is a broad term which includes people, plants, animals and things. The only difference lies in the fact that Chinese has more diversified color conceptualization of age in terms of color than English.

REFERENCES


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