

The Cultural Models of “Happiness” in Chinese : Metaphor, language and identity

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Dominated by the global Anglo-international discourse of happiness, the semantics of “happiness” in local culture has been greatly ignored or misinterpreted (Carsten 2014; Wierzbicka 2014). From a cognitive sociolinguistics approach, this research not only presents a systematic study on the cultural models of happiness in local Chinese culture but also looks into its social-cultural impact: how they are metaphorically constructed, how they are lexicalized and evolved, how do they relate to the core traditional Chinese values and ethos, how they play a role in constructing the cultural identity of nowadays Chinese about who they are, and what social effects these traditional cultural models might bring in the new context of the rapidly developing Chinese society. In doing so, two Chinese characters, **Xingfu** (幸福) from modern Chinese and **Le** (樂) from ancient Chinese are chosen as the counterparts of the English word *Happiness*. A corpus-based analysis is performed based on data from two Chinese corpora, the corpus compiled by the Centre for Chinese Linguistics by PKU (CCL) containing 477 million characters from both ancient Chinese and modern Chinese and the Leiden Weibo Corpus (Esch 2012) containing 101.4 million words from China’s most popular microblogging service, supplemented by the analysis of 167 four-character idioms of happiness from *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (2016) and aided by *Xingfu* survey among Chinese subjects. The study evidently shows that the core elements of the local semantics of *xingfu* markedly differ from the Anglo-international discourse of happiness, that cultural metaphors are guiding Chinese conception of happiness such as *happiness is music* embodied in the metonymy-based metaphorical use of **hexie** (和谐, harmony of music) as a feature of **Yue** (樂, music) to understand the abstract subjective experience **Le** (樂, happiness), that family is a core element in Chinese conception of individual’s *xingfu* involving a harmonious family relationship characterized by **Xiao** (孝, filial piety), that the local semantics of *xingfu* prescribes a sociocultural norm of various prototypical events culturally considered as happiness with many of them based on primary metaphors, gender/cultural metaphors or metaphors of collective happiness, and that the entrenched cultural models of *xingfu* constructing the cultural identity of the Chinese are posing challenges towards *xingfu* of both the young and the middle-aged generations in the new social-economical context.

Reference

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