Review of Zhao Ming. 2023. Cultural Semantics in the Lexicon of Modern Chinese. Leiden: Brill

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Traditional semantics, both structuralist and functionalist, mainly investigates the internal mechanisms of language. However, research into the cultural motivation of semantic change remains limited. This book, which combines lexical semantics with cultural linguistics, examines the cultural influence on Chinese lexical semantics based on linguistic determinism.

Apart from the Introduction (Chapter 1) and Conclusion, the book can be divided into two sections: the theoretical bases of the study (Chapters 2–5) and its practical application (Chapters 6–7).

Chapter 1 comprises a literature review of the issues within Chinese lexicology and outlines research questions and the layout of the book. Chapter 2 delineates the relationship between semantics and culture by discussing the following topics: culture, language–culture, and lexicon–culture relations. By limiting culture in this book to "Culture" with a capital "C", that is, culture in the broad sense, this chapter examines the relationship between language and culture. Regarding the relationship between lexicon and culture, the author exemplifies cultural factors in word formation, etymology, pragmatics and codability. It is pointed out that cultural semantics revolves around the influence of culture on the lexical system, and the above aspects are not included, thus defining the scope of cultural semantics. The author then elicits two types of cultural semantics: conceptual gap items and items with cultural meaning.

Further Chapter 3 delves into how to identify conceptual gap items. It is stressed that the latter include not only culturally reflective items but also those that contain unique cultural connotations within their lexical system. Besides, the author identifies these items according to whether their distinctive cultural background

directly influences the co-occurrence of word meanings, and whether there is no correspondence between the interlingual word meanings due to socio-cultural factors. Additionally, it is crucial to differentiate between conceptual and lexical gaps, as illustrated by *serendipity* and its Chinese equivalent *ǒurán fāxiàn yǒuqù huò zhēnguì zhīwù de jīyuán* 偶然发现有趣或珍贵之物的机缘. Subsequently, the characteristics of conceptual gap items have been elaborated with examples including Chinese *běnmìngnián* (referring to one's natal year). This chapter concludes by surveying conceptual gap items across different languages and dialects.

Chapter 4 focuses on definition and criteria of items with cultural meaning. Through specific instances, the author distinguishes items with cultural meaning from those with metaphorical and metonymic meaning. He then employs examples to discuss two types of items with cultural meaning: words with a shared conceptual meaning but different cultural meanings, such as the *hóng* 红 and *red*; and words with a shared conceptual meaning but unique cultural meaning, such as *sān* 三 and *three*.

Chapter 5 discusses cultural semantics analysis methods. Differing from the studies employing NSM (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014, Levisen 2012, Wierzbicka 2021), this chapter adopts cultural sememe analysis and cultural seme analysis. The former one is suitable for assessing conceptual gaps and special cultural meanings at the macro level, while the second one is used for judging them at the micro level. The author highlighted the challenges of polysemy in the process of cultural sememe analysis and the difficulty in establishing the semantic categories during cultural seme analysis. The author also suggests that combining these two analytical methods can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural semantics of words at both macro and micro levels. Furthermore, this chapter proposes the five-step process for analysis: establishing cultural semantic standards; selecting the meaning items; extracting semantic features; establishing semantic categories and uncovering the cultural semantics behind the meaning. The author then demonstrates the combination of cultural sememe analysis and cultural seme analysis with two examples aiming to provide a model for the cultural semantics analysis. The first example is the analysis of *wūyā* 乌鸦 *'crow', xǐquè* 喜鹊 *'magpie', and fènghuáng* 凤凰 *'phoenix'* while the second one is of *huángsè* 黄色 *'yellow', báisè* 白色 *'white', and hēisè* 黑色 *'black'*.

The practical application of the research is explored and exhibited in Chapter 6 by developing a conceptual gap items list. Special attention should be paid to several theoretical issues including the relationship between conceptual gap items and universal vocabulary, grammatical classification, semantic systems, morphological and lexical criteria, human intervention, and inclusion criteria. Additionally, the author claims that creating word lists requires four crucial issues: word selection, statistical word frequency, expert intervention, and the integration of meaning categories. Then, this chapter presents three sample lists of conceptual gap items: one list is based on grammatical classification, another on cultural

systems and the third one includes core conceptual gap items, such as the highly productive *xiào* 孝, *yì* 义 word series and less productive word series such as *huǒ* 火, *lóng* 龙. With these sample lists, obviously, it is essential to understand both lexical theory and analysis of cultural knowledge.

Chapter 7 investigates how the Commercial Press Learner's Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese interprets items with cultural meaning. Combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, this chapter demonstrates problems in interpreting cultural semantics in this dictionary, including the lack of the semantic category index for cultural semantic interpretations, insufficient categorization and explanation of conceptual gap items, and absence of annotations for special cultural meanings of certain words or explanations of the meaning of corresponding cultural semantics, which can be attributed to the unfamiliarity of the lexicographers with the characteristics and categories of cultural semantics. Accordingly, the author proposes targeted solutions such as establishing a semantic category index for cultural semantics annotations, defining different semantic parameters for conceptual gap items and items with a cultural meaning and focusing on word meaning in the annotation of cultural semantics.

The "Conclusion" part summarizes the book's–three-fold contributions and provides directions for further research.

This book encompasses an overview of existing cultural semantic theories, elucidation of core concepts, such as conceptual gaps and items with cultural meaning, introduction of identification standards for these concepts, discussion of analytical methods and exploration of the practical value of these theories in applied linguistics. From my perspective, this monograph is characterized by the following distinctive features.

First, in terms of content, the book establishes the discipline of Chinese lexical cultural semantics and proposes a systematic approach with precise definitions, clear criteria, and step-by-step analysis procedures, thereby bridging the research gap in this field, laying a theoretical groundwork for investigation and application of cultural semantics. Besides, the well-defined criteria, concrete procedures and the systematic analytical framework could be exported to other languages, thus inspiring and enkindling research within this field whilst facilitating exploration and comprehension of the relationship between language, culture, and cognition.

Second, from the methodological perspective, this monograph offers three-fold contributions to the field of lexical semantics. One is its application of a cognitive approach instead of traditional structuralism and functionalism, thereby diversifying the methodology of lexicon studies. Another contribution is its combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses, including comparative methods and textbook corpora, which yields compelling investigations. And the last one is that the citation of examples from a wide range of languages and dialects enriches the language materials in this field. For instance, to enunciate the universality of two types of cultural semantics, the author provides examples from

various languages including Russian, Spanish, Thai, Mongolian, Bahasa Indonesia, Canadian English, Hong Kong Chinese, Singapore Chinese, and Chinese dialects.

Third, this book is reader-friendly. To begin with, it discusses key concepts step-by-step, thus enhancing understanding. For example, in Chapter 2, the relationship between semantics and culture is dissected, layer by layer, from the concept of culture, the relationship between language and culture, to the relationship between lexicon and culture. Additionally, for similar concepts, the author adduces more examples to assist readers in differentiating them more effectively, as evidenced in Chapter 3 and 4. For instance, rich examples are included to distinguish conceptual gaps from lexical gaps.

However, this book is not without flaws. First of all, it could be more academically rigorous. For example, the author refers to Chapter 8 in the layout of the book in Chapter 1, but the Contents section concludes with a section labelled as "Conclusion". Also, in Chapter 2, after enumerating different academic classifications of culture, providing little justification, the author adopts "broad", "capital C" culture classification as the type of culture discussed in this monograph. Besides, the author cites an inaccurate reference when adopting the aforementioned cultural classification.

Additionally, it would enhance the value of the book as a more comprehensible and accessible learning and teaching resource if the index would cover all the culturally relevant content addressed previously.

Overall, this monograph, distinguished by its clarity, concision, and coherence, explores the cultural semantics of modern Chinese. It sheds light on this subject from both theoretical and applied perspectives, thereby contributing significantly to the field of cultural semantics. Therefore, the book is highly recommended for readers interested in cultural semantics and Chinese lexicon. It is appropriate for learners of Chinese language as well as postgraduate students and experienced professionals in this field.

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