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Linguocultural Connotations of the Lexeme willow ‘ИВА’ in Russian and Chinese Languages

Yunuo Sun  , Mikhail A. Rybakov , Marina V. Lysyakova 

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia,
6, Miklukho-Maclay Str., Moscow, Russian Federation, 117198
 876136269@qq.com

Abstract. This paper attempts to explain linguocultural connotations of phytonomen WILLOW by analyzing the results of process that Russian and Chinese perceive this object in our surrounding world and their aesthetic ideas about it. The relevance of the study is due to the need for an accurate understanding and transmission of the information received in the communication of representatives of different cultures, as well as insufficient knowledge of linguocultural connotations of phytonomen in Russian and Chinese, especially in comparative aspect. The aim of this paper is to study connotations of the lexeme WILLOW in Russian and Chinese linguocultures. The material of the study is proverbs and lyrical works containing the phytonomen WILLOW with special linguocultural connotations for the Russians and Chinese. The paper uses such methods as descriptive, paremiological, contextual, comparative, component analysis, cognitive modeling. The study belongs to the sphere of the current direction in linguistics — comparative linguoculturology and paremiology. The scientific novelty lies in clarification of the historical and cultural associative meanings of the lexeme WILLOW in Russian and Chinese linguocultures. The result of the study is establishing of the fact that WILLOW occupies an important position in both linguocultures. It symbolizes strong life and graceful female image in the two languages. In addition, WILLOW personifies grief, soreness and even funerals in Russian linguoculture and has connotations of «frivolous girl», «farewell», «longing for someone absent or the homeland» in Chinese. Hence follows the conclusion that linguocultural connotations of the lexeme WILLOW in Russian and Chinese do not completely coincide, they have both similarities and differences.

Keywords: linguoculture, connotation, Russian language, Chinese language, willow, contrastive lexicology

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Лингвокультурные коннотации лексемы ИВА в русском и китайском языках

Ю. Сунь  , М.А. Рыбаков , М.В. Лысякова 

Российский университет дружбы народов,
117198, Российская Федерация, г. Москва, Миклухо-Маклая, д. 6
 876136269@qq.com

Аннотация. Предлагается обзор лингвокультурных коннотаций фитонима ИВА через анализ результатов процесса восприятия данного объекта окружающего мира и эстетических представлений о нем носителей русского и китайского языка. Актуальность исследования обусловлена потребностью точного понимания и передачи полученной информации при коммуникации представителей разных культур, а также недостаточной изученностью лингвокультурных коннотаций фитонима в русском и китайском языках, в особенности в сопоставительном аспекте. Цель работы — изучение коннотаций лексемы ИВА в русской и китайской лингвокультурах. Материалом исследования является фитоним ИВА с особыми лингвокультурными коннотациями в сознании россиян и китайцев. Методы исследования: дескриптивный, контекстуальный, сопоставительный, компонентного анализа, когнитивного моделирования. Исследование принадлежит сфере интересов актуального направления в языкознании — сопоставительной лингвокультурологии. Научная новизна предпринятого анализа состоит в уточнении историко-культурных ассоциативных значений лексемы ИВА в русской и китайской лингвокультурах. Результатом исследования стало установление того факта, что ива занимает высокое положение в обеих лингвокультурах, тесно связана с мотивами «спасения» в русской и рассматривается как священное дерево в китайской. Ива символизирует весну, жизнь и грациозный женский образ в двух языках. Кроме того, она еще олицетворяет скорбь, горе и даже похороны в русской лингвокультуре, а в китайской ива обладает коннотациями «легкомысленная девушка», «расставание», «тоска по кому-нибудь отсутствующему или по родине». Отсюда вытекает заключение о том, что лингвокультурные коннотации лексемы ИВА в русском и китайском языках не полностью совпадают, они имеют как сходства, так и различия.

Ключевые слова: лингвокультура, коннотация, сопоставительная лексикология, русский язык, китайский язык, ива

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Introduction

Russian encyclopedic dictionary [1. P. 725], Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary [2. P. 31] and the Big Encyclopedic Dictionary [3. P. 563] give the following definition of connotation: connotation — in linguistics, an additional, accompanying meaning of a language unit or category. It includes semantic and stylistic aspects related to the main meaning.

Connotation has become the object of systematic analysis in L. Hjelmslev's «connotative semiology» [4. P. 139]. In structural semantics, taking the definition of the concept of the word according to F. de Saussure («valeur») into account, L. Hjelmslev presented arguments that in order to describe the semantic content of a word, the designated objects (extension) and features (intention) of the designated objects also include judgments and evaluation related into a single linguistic community [5. P. 187].

In 1950s the ethnolinguistic approach to the meaning of a word leads Yu. Naida to recognize the role of culture in the formation of the accompanying meaning (connotation) [6. P. 45–71].

In 1962 T. Pavel expressed the idea of researching the semantic structure of a metaphor with the help of connotations for the first time [7. P. 84], in which the denotative meaning is replaced by contextual, figurative, connotative. Since that time the view of connotation as an integral part of the language system, which cannot be limited only by stylistic framework, has been increasingly strengthened in linguistics.

O.H. Rakitina connects the connotation with the cultural and national identity of associations due to the «layered impact of practical, theoretical, cultural and linguistic experience itself» and defines the connotation as an emotive-evaluative and stylistically marked coloring of a language unit, expressing the attitude of the subject of speech to reality of a usual or occasional nature [8. P. 32].

This paper attempts to explain linguocultural connotations of the phytonomena WILLOW in minds of Russian and Chinese speakers. It is impossible to obtain the necessary information only from explanatory dictionaries that fix only «pure» semantics. It is necessary to refer to the knowledge about this object of the surrounding world, reflected in the linguistic consciousness of Chinese and Russians [9. P. 1179]. The relevance of this study is due to the need for accurate understanding and transmission of the information received in intercultural communication. Despite of a significant number of works devoted to similar and specific for different linguistic cultures features of perception and characteristics of zoonym [10. P. 252] and color terms [11. P. 729–730], however, there is insufficient comparative study of linguocultural connotations of the phytonomena in Russian and Chinese, so this topic seems to be especially relevant. The aim of the work is to clarify connotations of the lexeme WILLOW in Russian and Chinese linguistic cultures.

Linguocultural connotations of the lexeme WILLOW in Russian

According to «Big Encyclopedic Dictionary», WILLOW is a genus of trees and shrubs of the willow family [12]. Among Russian willow is widely known. This is evidenced by signs, sayings and riddles about willow. For example, «Ива рано инеем покрылась — к долгой зиме» ‘The willow was covered with frost early — by the long winter’.¹ The saying «От ивы яблоко не родится» ‘An apple will not be born from a willow’² indicates the similarity of children and parents, the value of family traditions. There are such riddles as «Живёт в низинке, из неё плетут корзинки» ‘He lives in a lowland, baskets are woven from it’; «Вышли девицы весне подивиться, Сели гурьбой над самой водой. Ноги в воде купаются, Руки в воде плещаются, Косы с плеч опускаются, Серёжки висят, качаются» ‘The girls came out to marvel at the spring, They sat down in a crowd over the very water. Feet bathe in the water, Hands splash in the water, Braids fall from the shoulders, Earrings hang, sway’; «Кудри в речку опустила, И о чём-то загрустила, А о чём она грустит, Никому не говорит» ‘She lowered her curls into the river, And she was sad about something, And what she is sad about, She doesn’t tell anyone’.³

Willow is salt-tolerant, extremely resistant to water and dampness, it loves warm and humid climate conditions, but can also grow in dry areas with high temperatures. Even if you take one willow branch and insert it into the soil as you like, it will be able to grow normally. It is obvious that willow has a strong vitality, therefore, it is a symbol of life and contains the meanings of ‘growth’, ‘fertility’. The proverb «Ива из тычка растёт» ‘The willow grows from a poke’⁴ testifies to the high adaptability and survival of willow, i.e. willow will grow in any place in which it is planted without much care. This proverb can also be said about a simple, unpretentious person. A similar proverb «Гибкую иву ветер не ломает» ‘The wind will not break a flexible willow’ can indicate such human qualities as perseverance, resistance to life’s adversities.

In Russian, willow is beautiful, and is often associated with youth, female harmony and beauty of the figure. As they sing in the song «Beauty Willow»:

Живёт на лужайке красавица ива...

Она будто дева красы неземною

Раскинув прекрасные косы свои

И словно принцесса в шикарном наряде

A beautiful willow lives on the lawn...

She is like a virgin of unearthly beauty

Spreading their beautiful braids

And like a princess in a chic outfit

¹ Белов Н.В. Загадки, скороговорки, считалки, потешки, стишки. Минск: Харвест, 2021. С. 230—231.

² Интернет-ресурс о русском языке (афоризмы, пословицы, поговорки, приметы). Режим доступа: <https://rich-language.ru/primety/primeta-1689> (дата обращения: 10.02.2022).

³ Там же.

⁴ Санжаровский А.Н. Природы краса. М.: Книга по требованию; 2017. С. 230—231.

<i>По ветру качается в танце весны.</i>	<i>Swinging in the wind in the dance of spring.</i>
<i>Ах ива ивушка краса</i>	<i>Ah willow willow-ear beauty</i>
<i>Ты так прекрасна и мила...</i>	<i>You are so beautiful and sweet...</i>
<i>Ах ива ивушка моя</i>	<i>Ah, my willow willow</i>
<i>Ты очень нежна и добра</i>	<i>You are very gentle and kind</i>
<i>Ты королева доброты</i>	<i>You are the queen of kindness</i>
<i>Приносишь лишь покой души [13].</i>	<i>You bring only peace of mind.</i>

People admire willow as a beauty, a princess in a chic outfit, she is beautiful, gentle, sweet, and kind, bringing peace to the soul.

At the same time, in addition to positive symbolic meanings of willow in Russian, there are stable expressions: *sad willow*, *weeping willow*. It symbolizes sorrow, grief, and even funerals.

For example, Afanasy Fet is a poet who used the image of willow many times in his work, expressing significantly different emotions. His work as a whole can be divided into two periods. At first, he wrote sweet, light and carefree poems, but then deep melancholy took possession of his poetry. «Willows and Birches» was written in the last period:

<i>Но ива, длинными листьями</i>	<i>But the willow, long sheets</i>
<i>Упав на лоно ясных вод,</i>	<i>Falling into the bosom of clear waters,</i>
<i>Дружней с мучительными снами</i>	<i>Friends with painful dreams</i>
<i>И дольше в памяти живет...</i>	<i>And lives longer in memory ...</i>
<i>Всю землю, грустно-сиротлива,</i>	<i>The whole earth, sad and lonely,</i>
<i>Считая родиной скорбей,</i>	<i>Considering the birthplace of sorrows,</i>
<i>Плачущая склоняет ива</i>	<i>Weeping willow bends</i>
<i>Везде концы своих ветвей [14].</i>	<i>Everywhere the ends of their branches.</i>

The reason for the abrupt change in the style of Afanasy Fet's poetry was the death of Maria Lazich, his dear beloved girl. They had a great relationship, but Afanasy Fet rejected his marriage to Mary in order to receive a title of nobility. The trouble is that Maria Lazich later died in a fire. The poet remembered his girlfriend all his life and regretted that everything collapsed because of his mistake. Indeed, it was possible to acquire a title of nobility, but happiness was lost forever. This event greatly changed Afanasy Fet, there was no more joy in his work. It is not for nothing that in the poem «Willows and Birches» the poet creates an extremely gloomy atmosphere with the help of the words *torturous*, *sad*, *sorrow* and the characteristic image of a weeping willow.

At the same time, willow in Russian carries linguocultural connotations associated with such concepts as “cemeteries”, “funerals”, since willow often grows on the grave. For example, under the pen of Marina Tsvetaeva there is a weeping willow on the granite grave of Napoleon:

<i>Длинные кудри склонила к земле, Словно вдова молчаливо. Вспомнилось, — там, на гранитной скале, Тоже плакучая ива. Бедная ива казалась сестрой Царскому пленнику в клетке, И улыбался пленённый герой, Глядя пушистые ветки. Помните, там на могиле Его Тоже плакучая ива... [15].</i>	<i>Long curls bent to the ground, Like a widow silently. I remembered — there, on a granite rock, Also weeping willow. The poor willow looked like a sister To the king's prisoner in a cage, And the captive hero smiled, Stroking fluffy branches. Remember, there at His grave Also a weeping willow...</i>
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In the poem «Funeral», written by Nikolai Nekrasov in 1861, a young man who committed suicide was buried by the villagers precisely under weeping willows:

<i>Под большими плакучими ивами Успокоился бедный стрелок [16].</i>	<i>Under the big weeping willows The poor shooter calmed down</i>
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The ideologist of Russian symbolism Zinaida Gippius also associates willow with death, including the lines of the poem «Women's 'No'»:

<i>Где гниёт седящая ива, где был и ныне высох ручеёк, девочка, на краю обрыва, плачет, свивая веноч... [17].</i>	<i>Where the graying willow rots where the brook was and now dried up, girl on the edge of a cliff cries, twisting a wreath...</i>
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Linguocultural connotations of the lexeme WILLOW in Chinese

Among more than 550 species of willow all over the world about 257 grow in China. According to archaeological data, willow has existed since the Paleolithic, and willow pollen was found in the Malan loess of the Loess Plateau more than 50,000 years ago [18. P. 34], later the character «柳» [Liu] (willow) appeared in Jiaguwen (bone and tortoise shell inscriptions) of the Yin and Shang dynasties.

Цзягувэнь Jiaguwen	Цзиньвэнь Jinwen	Чжуаньшу Zhuanshu	Лишу Lishu	Кайшу Kaishu

Fig. 1. The character «柳» (willow) in different stages of Chinese calligraphy development

Рис. 1. Иероглиф «柳» (ива) в разные периоды развития китайской письменности

Since Chinese ancestors used the scheme as a written sign, the hieroglyph as the earliest letter is similar in appearance to the signified and belongs to the ideogram. Not without reason, in the hieroglyph «柳» (willow), especially in the ancient styles of Jiaguwen and Jinwen, we can even clearly see the shape of the trunk, branches and leaves of willow.

In process of time willow ceased to be an ordinary plant in nature, our ancestors gave it soul of culture, a special «willow culture» was gradually formed, which became an integral part of our Chinese culture. According to the statistics of Shi Jinyao in his article «The study of the theme and image of Willow in ancient Chinese literature», in the collection «Poems of the Tang Dynasty» there are 2703 poems, in which willow is found; in the Song Dynasty, willow appeared 2864 times in Song Tsy (a genre of rhythmic prose) [19. P. 28].

As in Russian, willow in Chinese has linguocultural connotations of “spring” and “life”, which depends on its natural properties. About the strong vitality of willow in the annals «Documents of the Warring States Era» it is written: «...今夫杨，横树之则生，倒树之则生，折而树之又生...» [... jin fu yang, heng shu zhi ze sheng, dao shu zhi ze sheng, zhe er shu zhi you sheng...] ‘Horizontally inserting a willow branch into the soil, or turning it upside down, and even breaking it, then planting, willow will still be able to survive’ [20. P. 267]. Willow will grow quickly within a year and can be used forever. Chinese proverb says, «家有百株柳» [Jia you bai zhu liu] ‘If there are a hundred willows at home’, «吃穿不用愁» [chi chuan bu yong chou] ‘don’t worry about the food and clothes’; «养花不如栽柳» [yang hua bu ru zai liu] ‘it is better to plant a willow than to sow flowers’.

Willow is regarded as the herald of spring. This is evidenced by phraseological units and proverbs, such as 宠柳娇花 [chong liu jiao hua] ‘pleasant willow and lovely flowers; trans. meaning: landscape of spring’, 花红柳绿 [hua hong liu lv] ‘red flowers and green willow; trans. meaning: beautiful scenery of spring’, 五九和六九 [wu jiu he liu jiu], 河边看杨柳 [he bian kan yang liu] ‘in the weather ‘fifth and sixth nine days you can come to the river to see willow; trans. meaning: on the 45th — 54th day after the winter solstice, spring comes’.

Willow as a messenger of spring is embodied in many poems. Among them the most famous is the poem from the Tang Dynasty «咏柳» [yong liu] ‘Praise of the Willow’ by the poet He Zhizhang, which was included in the Chinese elementary school textbook:

碧玉妆成一树高 [bi yu zhuang cheng yi shu gao],
 万条垂下绿丝绦 [wan tiao chui xia lv si tao].
 不知细叶谁裁出 [bu zhi xi e shui cai chu],
 二月春风似剪刀 [er yue chun feng si jian dao]. [21].

Interlinear translation: ‘Tall willow trees are covered with new green leaves. Weeping tender willow branches are like green ribbons. Who cut these thin leaves? It turned out that the warm spring breeze of February is like skillful scissors’.

The poet describes the image of willow in general, vividly depicting its beauty and elegance. Then, drawing attention from the rods to the leaves, the author compares the spring breeze with scissors, which shows its magical power. Since the spring breeze, as the creator of beauty, cuts not only willow leaves, but also spring, He Zhizhang sings of spring through the willow, expressing his joy for its coming. This poem can be called a masterpiece in the history of poetic creativity.

It is no coincidence that Chinese “Buddha of Poetry” Wang Wei from the Tang Dynasty also associates willow with spring in his poem «田园乐» [tian yuan le] ‘fun in the countryside’:

桃红复含宿雨 [tao hong fu han su yu],
柳绿更带春烟 [liu lv geng dai chun yan]... [22].

Interlinear translation: ‘On the petals of pink peach flowers are still drops of night rain, fresh green willows are shrouded in spring morning fog...’.

After resigning his official duties and moving away from the imperial court to the rural forest, Wang Wei became a hermit in the last years of his life and found great pleasure in nature. In this poem, the poet depicts us a calm picture of an idyllic rural life: pink peach flowers, raindrops, fresh willow branches and morning mist — light coloring brings the breath of spring. This is where the idiom 桃红柳绿 [tao hong liu lu] ‘peach red willow green’ comes from, which is used to describe a vibrant spring landscape of flourishing flowers and lush trees.

Due to its flexible graceful figure, weeping willow is often associated with a graceful woman. For example, the idiom 柳腰 [liu yao] ‘waist like willow’ is characterized by a woman’s thin, flexible waist, and the idiom 柳腰莲脸 [liu yao lian lian] ‘waist like willow, face like a lotus’ is straight means beauty. 柳腰 [liu yao] ‘waist like willow’ became especially popular during the Tang Dynasty, when a woman wears tight clothing combined with a belt to show off the beauty of her body lines. At the same time, the Tang Dynasty is an era of unprecedented prosperity of dancing to music. Charmingly dancing geishas are very similar to the branches of a weeping willow swaying in the wind, which arouses the admiration of writers. The great poet Bai Juyi has this line:

樱桃樊素口 [ying tao fan su kou],
杨柳小蛮腰 [yang liu xiao man yao] [23. P. 87].

Interlinear translation: ‘Fansu has a mouth like a cherry; Xiaoman’s waist is like a willow’.

Fansu and Xiaoman are the favorite concubines of Bai Juyi. Comparing the mouth with a cherry and the waist with a willow, the poet praises their beauty.

In addition, Bai Juyi uses long, narrow willow leaves to describe the well-defined eyebrows of one of the four beauties in ancient China — Yang Yuhuan: «芙蓉如面柳如眉 [Fu rong ru mian liu ru mei]» ‘Blooming hibiscus are like her face, willow leaves are like her eyebrows’ [24]. Today, 柳叶眉 [liu ye mei] ‘eyebrows look like willow leaves in shape’ is considered one of the generally

accepted criteria for evaluating a beauty. No wonder the saying «樱桃小嘴柳叶眉 [ying tao xiao zui liu ye mei], 貌美如花赛西施 [mao mei ru hua sai xi shi] ‘lips are like cherries and eyebrows are like willow leaves, the girl is beautiful such as Xishi’ is popular.

In addition to the beauty of a woman, willow also symbolizes her love and longing. The famous writer Liu Yuxi from the Tang Dynasty depicts a young girl in her first love with the help of a willow tree:

杨柳青青江水平 [yang liu qing qing jiang shui ping],
闻郎江上唱歌声 [wen lang jiang shang chang ge sheng]... [25].

Interlinear translation: «Willows are green, river is quiet. Suddenly from a boat on the river came the singing of a beloved...».

This is a poem about the love of a boy and a girl. It describes the mental activity of a young girl with her first love when she hears her lover’s song: he is sailing in a boat to the river bank, singing. Does he like me too? The girl doesn’t know. Spring willows on the banks of a calm river, most likely, evoke a tender feeling in the girl, they carry her desire for wonderful love.

The most talented poet of ancient China, Li Qingzhao from the Song Dynasty, also uses willow to express her deep longing for her husband:

柳眼梅腮 [liu yan mei sai],
已觉春心动 [yi jue chun xin dong].
酒意诗情谁与共 [jiu yi shi qing shui yu gong]?
泪融残粉花钿重 [lei rong can fen hua dian zhong]... [26].

Interlinear translation: ‘The willow sprouts, the mume apricot flowers bloom, it gives a feeling of the approach of spring. At such a moment, with whom can you drink and discuss poetry? Tears mix the remaining powder on the face, even the head jewelry seems too heavy...’.

These lines were written by the lonely poetess when her husband Zhao Mingcheng returned to the position in another city. Enjoying the beautiful spring willow, Li Qingzhao involuntarily recalls those happy days with Zhao: they together admired gold and stones, brewed tea, heated wine, discussed and appreciated poetry. And now only she sits alone with an extremely bitter heavy mood. the poetess misses her husband greatly, dreaming of happiness.

However, willow as symbol of woman also has a negative connotation: ‘fallen’ and ‘frivolous’. For example, in one of the four Chinese classics — «Dream in a Red Chamber» it is written: «大凡女人都是水性杨花» [da fan nv ren dou shi shui xing yang hua] ‘Most women are changeable like flowing water, frivolous like willow flakes’ [27. P. 97]. This comparison with an obvious pejorative connotation implies an unfaithful woman of easy virtue. In addition, idiom 败柳残花 [bai liu can hua] ‘withered willow and withered flowers’ directly refers to a fallen woman and a prostitute. At the same time, idiom 柳巷花街 [liu xiang hua jie] ‘willow lane and flower street’ is often used to refer to a brothel or street where brothels gather. Idiom 寻花问柳 [xun hua wen liu] ‘visit flowers and willow’ means to have fun with women.

The hieroglyph «柳» [liu] ‘willow’ in Chinese is a homonym of the word «留» [liu] ‘stay’, so willow carries the symbolic meaning of ‘hold’, ‘part’, ‘mourn at separation’. In ancient times, it was customary to break off a branch from willow and give it to the departing person as a keepsake at parting, thus the mourner expresses the longing of unwillingness to part, hoping to keep the loved one; at the same time, the mourner sends him a blessing through a willow branch, hoping that he will be able to make a brilliant career wherever he is, and that he will return as soon as possible. It is not for nothing that the farewell text of Chinese literature is always greeted with the image of willow.

For example, the poet Wang Wei wrote farewell lines with the image of willow:

渭城朝雨浥轻尘 [wei cheng zhao yu yi qing chen],
客舍青青柳色新 [ke she qing qing liu se xin],
劝君更尽一杯酒 [quan jun geng jin yi bei jiu],
西出阳关无故人 [xi chu yang guan wu gu ren] [28].

Interlinear translation: ‘In the morning of Weicheng, the spring rain wetted the dust around the courtyard, the willow leaves were young and fresh. I ask you to drink another glass of wine. When you leave Yangguan to the west, it will be difficult for you to meet old friends’.

This poem is about the poet’s farewell to his friend Yuan Er, who sets off on a long journey to the west to guard the border. The author Wang Wei lived in an era when inter-ethnic conflicts escalated, and the Tang kingdom was constantly invaded by northern Turks and Tufan, one of the ancient tribes of Tibet. Yangguan in the text is an important military territory of China against the aggression of the Huns since the Han Dynasty, located in the Hexi corridor of Gansu province [29. P. 132]. An old friend of the poet leaves for a remote western region, they do not know when they will see each other again. Light-leaved willow branches hint at parting in poetry, reflecting Wang’s deep affection for Yuan, while the poet expresses boundless blessing to his friend, wishing him a happy journey and a bright future. At the end of the poem, all these emotions dissolve into their last glass of wine: drink up and hit the road! This poem is included in the philological textbook for schoolchildren and is regarded as a classic in the Chinese poetic circle.

Due to the fact that willow plays an important role in separation, whenever people mention willow, they are unable to restrain themselves, mourning for distant relatives and friends. As a result, willow in Chinese has the linguocultural connotation of «longing for someone absent or for the homeland».

In the era of Western Zhou the famous politician, thinker, writer and military figure Zhou Gongdan compiled the classics of the Confucian teachings “Zhou Etiquette”, which provides that the common people do not have a grave, instead a willow is planted at their burial place [30. P. 56]. After the death of a commoner, the offspring expresses condolences and sadness for him only with the help of a planted willow. It can be seen that as early as 3000 years ago people put the longing for a close-dead person into the image of willow.

As for poetry, Li Bai wrote a poem about homesickness with the image of a willow tree:

此夜曲中闻折柳 [ci ye qu zhong wen zhe liu],
何人不起故园晴 [he ren bu qi gu yuan qing]? [31].

Interlinear translation: ‘Hearing the flute song ‘Break a Branch from Willow’ late at night, who doesn’t miss his hometown?’

《折柳》 [zhe liu] ‘Break a branch from willow’ here refers to the famous flute song of farewell sadness in the Han Dynasty. In fact, a branch broken off from willow is not only a custom in Chinese culture, but also a picture, as well as an emotion. On a quiet night, just such a melody was heard, living far from his homeland, Li Bai inevitably felt very sad for his family.

Since willow sprouts easily even after being damaged by toxic gas, Chinese believe that it has the functions of curing disease, chasing away devil, and protecting from evil, so willow as a sacred tree is a symbol of happiness and prosperity.

Willow holds a high status in Chinese Buddhist culture. The image of Bodhisattva Guanyin is known to everyone: she holds a vase with cleansing water in one hand, and a willow branch in the other, relieving people from suffering. In «Journey to the West», one of the four Chinese classics, a willow branch in Guanyin’s hand, like a sacred utensil, can turn into anything and resurrect the dead.

In the ancient storybook «云仙杂记» [yun xian za ji] ‘Notes of a Cloud Celestial’ edited by Fen Zhi of the Tang Dynasty, it says, «柳枝染子衣矣 [liu zhi ran zi yi yi], 科第无疑 [ke di wu yi]» ‘The dress is moistened with willow juice, you will definitely pass the imperial exam’ [32. P. 48]. This shows that in minds of the Chinese, willow always brings us good luck and happiness.

In addition, the sanctity of willow is reflected in folk custom. Since ancient times, people have put willow branches on doors on certain days in order to protect the family from evil spirits. This tradition is recorded in many famous writings, notably the one written at the end of the Northern Wei Dynasty «齐民要术» [qi min yao shu] ‘Crafts needed by the people’ — the earliest agricultural monograph in China: «正月旦取柳枝著户上 [zheng yue dan qu liu zhi zhu hu shang], 百鬼不入家 [bai gui bu ru jia]» ‘In the first month of the lunar calendar, insert willow rods on the doors, devilry will not enter the house’ [33. P. 73]. It is worth mentioning that the custom of wearing willow branches for well-being on Qingming festival is especially popular. According to the proverb, «清明不戴柳 [qing ming bu dai liu], 来生变黄狗 [lai sheng bian huang gou]» ‘If you do not wear a willow branch on your head on Qingming Festival, you will turn into a dog in the next generation’. Even until now, the custom of wearing willow during the Qingming Festival is still preserved in most regions of our country. It can be seen that the sacredness of willow and its magic to eliminate evil is clearly demonstrated in Chinese culture.

Conclusion

Linguocultural connotations of the lexeme WILLOW in Russian and Chinese have both similarities and differences. Firstly, they fully coincide in the symbolic meaning ‘strong life’ in connection with willow’s own property, moreover, willow is the personification of spring in Chinese. Secondly, willow is associated with young graceful female image in both languages, but in Chinese it also has a negative meaning — fallen or frivolous girls. Thirdly, willow occupies an important position in two linguistic cultures, especially in Chinese willow as a sacred tree is the symbol of happiness and prosperity. Finally, willow symbolizes sorrow, grief, and even funeral in Russian. Its sad connotation is also found in Chinese, but the latter comes from the linguocultural connotation of the willow ‘farewell’, it personifies longing for someone absent or the homeland.

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Сведения об авторах:

Сунь Юйно, аспирант по направлению 45.06.01 Языкознание и литературоведение кафедры общего и русского языкознания филологического факультета Российского университета дружбы народов; *сфера научных интересов*: сопоставительная лексикология, лингвокультурология; *e-mail*: 876136269@qq.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-0854-6097.

Рыбаков Михаил Анатольевич, кандидат филологических наук, доцент, доцент кафедры общего и русского языкознания филологического факультета Российского университета дружбы народов; *сфера научных интересов*: лингвистическая типология, сопоставительная семантика; *e-mail*: rybakov-ma@rudn.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-9444-3889; eLIBRARY SPIN-код 6890-700; Scopus ID:57200527717.

Лысякова Марина Витальевна, кандидат филологических наук, доцент, доцент кафедры общего и русского языкознания филологического факультета Российского университета дружбы народов; *сфера научных интересов*: лингвистическая типология, сопоставительная семантика; *e-mail*: lysyakova-mv@rudn.ru
ORCID: 0000-0002-2592-6067.

Information about the authors:

Sun Yunuo, post-graduate student in the direction of 45.06.01 Linguistics and literary studies of Department of General and Russian linguistics, Faculty of Philology, RUDN University; *Research interests*: contrastive lexicology, linguoculture; *e-mail*: 876136269@qq.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-0854-6097.

Mikhail A. Rybakov, Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of Department of General and Russian linguistics, Faculty of Philology, RUDN University; *Research interests*: linguistic typology, contrastive semantics; *e-mail*: rybakov-ma@rudn.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-9444-3889; eLIBRARY SPIN-код 6890-700; Scopus ID:57200527717.

Marina V. Lysyakova, Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of Department of General and Russian linguistics, Faculty of Philology, RUDN University; *Research interests*: linguistic typology, contrastive semantics; *e-mail*: lysyakova-mv@rudn.ru
ORCID: 0000-0002-2592-6067.