The Conceptual Motivation of Animals
Proverbs in English and Chinese

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Introduction** ................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Aim ............................................................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Material .......................................................................................................................... 1
   1.3 Method ............................................................................................................................ 2

2. **Theoretical background** ................................................................................................. 3
   2.1 Metaphor and proverb cognition .................................................................................... 3
      2.1.1 The nature of metaphor ......................................................................................... 4
   2.2 The Great Chain of Being metaphor and the conceptual motivation of proverbs ........... 5
      2.2.1 Personification ........................................................................................................ 7
   2.3 Metonymy and proverb cognition ................................................................................... 9
   2.4 Comparison of proverb in English and Chinese ............................................................ 11
      2.4.1 The Universality of Conceptual metaphors ......................................................... 11
      2.4.2 Cross-cultural Variation in Metaphor and Metonymy ........................................... 12

3. **Analysis and discussion** ................................................................................................. 14
   3.1 The cognitive similarities in English and Chinese proverbs ........................................ 14
      3.1.1 Same expression ..................................................................................................... 14
      3.1.2 Different expression ............................................................................................... 16
   3.2 The cross-cultural differences in English and Chinese proverbs .................................... 19
      3.2.1 Religion .................................................................................................................. 19
      3.2.2 Customs ................................................................................................................. 22
      3.2.3 History .................................................................................................................... 25

4. **Conclusion** ..................................................................................................................... 28

References .................................................................................................................................. 29
1. Introduction

A proverb is a simple and concrete saying, which expresses a truth, based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. They are often borrowed from similar languages and cultures, and sometimes come down to the present through more than one language and almost every culture has examples of its own. The study of proverbs has been approached from many different points of view: personal, formal, religious, cultural, cognitive and so on.

There are a large number of animal proverbs both in Chinese and English. Some of their cultural connotations and the range of usage are the same or similar, and some are different. On the one hand, they are the same or similar, because human beings have similar capabilities of thought, similar laws of cognition, and some animals have the same important role in people’s lives in these two cultures, and have the same attributes and features. On the other hand, because of the long course of history between these two social groups, they are discrepant in religion, customs and history. These discrepancies make animal proverbs different in their cultural connotations in these two languages. Because of these discrepancies, we should consider the differences and similarities of the cultural beliefs carried by the animal proverbs.

1.1 Aim

In this study, a cognitive and cultural view about the animal proverbs in English and Chinese is adapted. The conceptual motivation of the proverbs related to animals on their specific and universal nature in English and Chinese will be analyzed. Proverbs reflect conceptual structure with high communicative and cross-cultural value. The contrastive cognitive analysis between English and Chinese proverbs are conducted to show how they share a common underlying conceptualization, while they reflect different cultural beliefs.

1.2 Material

The data has been extracted from a number of proverbs both in English and in Chinese. The English proverbs used as examples in this paper are mainly drawn from the book——— English
Proverbs Explained (Ridout, Ronald & Clifford Witting, 1969). Meanwhile, the Chinese proverbs are mostly from internet. In English proverbs explained, there are nine hundred English proverbs. The proverbs are given a generic explanation, which provide important information for the study on the animal proverbs. There are many animal proverbs with dogs, fishes, cats, birds, wolfs and so on both in English and Chinese. Out of all these, my scope of research is delimited in order to provide more detailed description. Thus, only a limited set of animal proverbs related to the research are selected for the analysis. Those animal proverbs where horses, dragons, dogs, birds and tigers are selected to my research. At the same time, in order to provide this piece of research easier for more people to understand, the Chinese proverbs in this essay are translated into English with the purpose to break the language restriction for the readers from the other languaes.

1.3 Method

The cognitive view permits us to access the universal cognitive principles that underlie proverbs. At the same time, the cultural view allows us to reach amount of background knowledge and cultural beliefs that they portray. Through comparison and contrast, a detailed account of similarities and differences between English and Chinese animal proverbs will be analyzed to show to what extent the proverbs share a common underlying conceptualization, and to what extent they reflect different cultural beliefs. In the essay, the cognitive similarities of the animal proverbs in English and Chinese will be described. And the language of the characters also gives the source and target domains for the comprehension of the abstract proverbs. Furthermore, the cross-cultural differences in the animal proverbs in both languages will be illustrated to show their different cultural beliefs.
2. Theoretical background

In this section the previous research that is correlated to the English and Chinese proverbs will be presented.

2.1 Metaphor and proverb cognition

In the theory of metaphor presented by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), “a metaphor is the expression of an understanding of one concept in terms of another concept, where there is some similarity or correlation between the two”. From the cognitive linguistic point of view, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. Lakoff and Johnson argue that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). A conceptual metaphor consists of a source domain and a target domain. The former is a more concrete or physical concept, while the latter is a more abstract concept. For instance:

(1) Experience is a good school, but the fees are high.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school</td>
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</tbody>
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In this case, the primary subject of experience is understood in terms of the secondary subject of school.

Arguments, ideas, relationships, careers and economic systems are more abstract concepts than the human body, plants, buildings, war, and food. If we want to better understand a concept, we often use another more concrete or physical concept than the former for this purpose. According to Kövecses (2002:6), “[o]ur experiences with the physical world serves as a natural and logical foundation for the comprehension of more abstract domains.” The
target domain is the domain we try to understand through the use of the source domain. There is a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target domain, which are often referred to as mappings. Constituent elements of conceptual domain A are in systematic correspondence with constituent elements of conceptual domain B. For example, the concept ARGUMENT and the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. The latter is the application of the war domain to understand the argument domain that provided the concept particular structure or set of elements. Although arguments and wars are different things, ARGUMENT is understood in terms of WAR. Many aspects of an argument are partially structured by the concept of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We plan and use strategies. We defend our own positions and attack others’ and the person we are arguing can be seen as an opponent. Though there is no actually physical battle, there is a verbal battle. This is an example of what is meant by a metaphorical concept (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:5).

Proverbs are simple and concrete sayings, which express a truth, based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. They are often metaphorical. Thus, proverbs are metaphorical descriptions of certain situations, which are generalized implications. Metaphorical proverbs not only convey a message, but also do that vividly. Metaphorical proverbs can come to mean much more than the sum of words from which they are comprised. Lakoff and Turner note that "proverbs are always understood relative to a background of assumptions and values, and with different backgrounds the same metaphor can lead to very different interpretations" (1989:187). For example, in the case of the proverb *Even a worm will turn*. Here people are understood as animals. A worm is a small thin animal with a soft body and no bones or legs. To turn means to revolt or to fight back. Metaphorically, *worm* refers to an insignificant or contemptible person. The literal meaning is that even a worm, the simplest of animals, will defend itself. The proverb means that everybody will revolt if driven too far, that is, even the lowest of people, or animals, will revolt and hit back at some stage.

### 2.1.1 The nature of metaphor

Metaphors can make our thoughts more vivid and also structure our understanding. According to Kövecses (2002:36), metaphor may be based on both knowledge and image. Most
metaphors are based on our basic knowledge of concepts, which are rich in knowledge structure and provide a rich set of mappings between source and target. There are also an image-schema metaphors, in which it is not conceptual elements of knowledge that get mapped from a source to a target, but conceptual elements of image-schemas (Kövecses 2002:36). This means that these metaphors map relatively little from source to target. An image schema is a mental pattern that recurrently provides structured understanding of various experiences, and is available for use in metaphor as a source domain to provide an understanding of yet other experiences (Johnson 1987:2). In order to get a sense of what this means, consider the following example from Lakoff:

Imagine a herd of cows up closed—close enough to pick out the individual cows. Now imagine yourself moving back until you can no longer pick out individual cows. What you perceive is a mass. There is a point at which you cease making out individuals and start perceiving a mass (Lakoff 1987: 428).

Metaphors of this kind have source domains that have skeletal image-schemas. They can serve as the basic of other concepts. For instance, the motion schema underlies the concept of a journey. The motion schema has the parts, initial point, movement, and the end point, which correspond in journeys to the point of departure, the travel, and the destination. But there are other kinds of image-based metaphors that are richer in imagistic detail. These conceptual metaphors do not employ image-schemas but rich images. We call them image metaphor (Kövecses 2002:38). The mappings of the kind are generated by images that are brought into correspondence by the superimposition of one image onto the other.

2.2 The Great Chain of Being metaphor and the conceptual motivation of proverbs

Conceptual metaphors can be generic-level or specific-level ones. Most conceptual metaphors are at a specific level, where they employ concepts that are at a specific level of generality. For example, the following metaphors are all specific-level ones: LOVE IS A JOURNEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR, IDEAS ARE FOOD, etc. Love, journey, argument, war, ideas, food
are specific-level concepts. Specific-level concepts are filled with specific details. For example, in the case of the concept of a journey: we may have a traveler, a point of departure, a means of travel, a travel schedule, difficulties along the way, a destination, a guide, and so on. Some conceptual metaphors are generic-level, such as the metaphors EVENTS ARE ACTIONS, GENERIC IS SPECIFIC. Events, actions, generic, specific are all generic-level concepts, which are characterized by extremely skeletal structures. For example, in the case of events, there are many kinds of events: dying, burning, loving, freezing and so on.

Proverbs often consist of specific-level concepts, which help to interpret proverbs. In the proverb *The early bird catches the worm*, the bird, catch, and worm are specific-level concepts. It says, the early bird is anyone who does something first, catching is obtaining something, and the worm is anything obtained before others. The interpretation is facilitated by the metaphor GENERIC IS SPECIFIC. The generic meaning of the proverb is that if you do something first, you will get what you want before others. Given this generic-level interpretation, the proverb can apply to a wide range of cases that have this generic structure. The GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor can give us a generic-level interpretation of specific-level proverbs and also allows us to apply the generic interpretation to a specific case that has the appropriate underlying generic structure (Kövecses 2002:39).

All of proverbs can make use of the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor to give a generic-level interpretation of specific-level proverbs. Take another English animal proverb *Fine feathers make fine birds*. The generic meaning is that other people do judge us by our appearance, so we are much more likely to make a success of our lives if we dress well than if we are shabby and down-at-heel. *Fine feathers* and *fine birds* are specific-level concepts. It says, fine feathers are the smart clothing, fine birds is a person look more impressive. We know that the chaffinch is much more colorful and attractive than the house sparrow, yet they are of the same family; they are both finches, and without their feathers they would be identical in appearance. Just as bright plumage gives a bird splendor. So does smart clothing make a person look more impressive than he really is.
The Great Chain metaphor system describes how objects or things in the world are conceptualized metaphorically, which captures the metaphorical conceptualization of “things”, which appear in language as nouns (Kövecses 2002:123). It explains why and how a number of seemingly unrelated conceptual metaphors fit together in a coherent fashion. The Great Chain of Being metaphor system maps attributes and behavior between different categories of the chain in order to better understand one domain in terms of another. This system leads to two kinds of metaphors: the Basic Great Chain metaphor and the Extended Great Chain metaphor. The former is concerned with the relation of human beings to “lower” forms of existence, where human beings occupied the highest position within the system, followed by animals and inanimate things, such as plants, complex objects and natural physical thing. So humans are comprehended as animals and objects, such as PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS. The chain is defined by typical attributes and behavior. For example, humans are defined by rational thought, animals by instinct, plant by certain biological properties, and so on. On the other hand, the Extended Great Chain metaphor is concerned with the relation of human beings to cosmos, the universe, the society and the gods. It is a complex systems metaphor, that is, the targets referred to are characterized as typically abstract complex configurations of entities, where the nature and the relationships of the entities vary from case to case. The major properties of these complex systems include the functions, stability, development, and condition of the system. They are primarily featured by four source domains: MACHINE, BUILDING, PLANT, and HUMAN BODY, respectively, such as the metaphor of THE MIND IS A MACHINE, CAREERS ARE BUILDINGS.

2.2.1 Personification

Personification is a metaphorical device. In personification, a non-human is identified with a human or given human characteristics. Personification is giving human traits (qualities, feelings, action, or characteristics) to non-living objects (things, colors, qualities, or ideas). Personification represents non-human beings and objects as human. The good examples are as below.

(1) The lion is the king of all the jungle.
(2) The window winked at me

As shown in (1), the lion is understood in terms of human property. Although the lion doesn’t tell the other animals what to do; he doesn’t collect his wealth from them, there is a sense in which a simple idea is vividly expressed – the lion is perceived as the strongest, most feared animal in the jungle. It is enough that we understand the perception that this is how it is. As shown in (2), the verb *wink* is a human action, while *window* is a non-living object. Personification permits us to use knowledge about ourselves to comprehend other aspects of the world, such as time, death, natural forces, inanimate objects, etc (Kövecses 2002:50). Another example of personification is the following:

(3) Art is a jealous mistress.

Personification can also be used with animals, as in the following example:

(4) The chicken clucked at me.

The words *hate* and *love* can also be applied to inanimate objects:

(5) My computer hates me.

(6) The camera loves me.

The human is the focal link in all metaphoric and other linguistic transitions between the areas and levels of the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING METAPHOR, through which properties of things lower on the chain are understood in terms of human properties.”


“One of the most elaborate domains in which we understand the nonhuman in terms of the human is the domain of animal life. We have well-elaborated schemas characterizing what animals are like, and we usually understand their characteristics metaphorically in terms of the characteristics of human beings.
Here are some common propositions that occur in schemas for animals:
--- Pigs are dirty, messy, and rude.
--- Lions are courageous and noble.
--- Dogs are loyal, dependable and dependent.
---- Cats are fickle and independent.
---- Wolves are cruel and murderous.
---- Gorillas are aggressive and violent.”

2.3 Metonymy and proverb cognition

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated (such as "crown" for "royalty"). Metonymy is also the rhetorical strategy of describing something indirectly by referring to things around it, such as describing someone's clothing to characterize the individual. Metonymy occurs when the topic is referred to by another concept with which it is associated. In metonymy, we use one entity, or thing to provide mental access to another entity, that is, one entity stands for another associated entity. A vehicle entity can provide mental access to a target entity when the two entities belong to the same domain, that is, the same idealized cognitive model (ICM) (Kövecses 2002:145). For example, an author and his or her works belong to the ICM, because they are conceptually “close” to each other, the author is the one who makes the works. They are tightly linked. Examples include the following:

(1) THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION

The White House did not want to comment on the situation.
(The White House is a substitute for the President and his staff)

(2) THE PRODUCER FOR THE PRODUCT

She likes to read Poe.
(Poe means the works of Edgar Allan Poe)

The differences between metaphor and metonymy are very clear. Metaphor involves two conceptual domains and they stand in the relationship of similarity, while metonymy has one conceptual domain and they are based on the relationship of contiguity. Metaphor is based on
apparent unrelatedness, while metonymy involves using one to stand for another which is
directly related to it or closely associated with it in some way. Many of these forms notably
make an abstract referent more concrete. Given this way of looking at ICM, metonymies may
emerge in two ways: (1) either a whole stands for a part or a part stands for a whole; (2) a part
stands for another part (Kövecses 2002:150). Their differences are showed by the following
figures.

(1) Metaphorical schema for proverb:

ICM 1  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
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<th>---</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>similarity</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ICM 2  

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>---</th>
<th>---</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>similarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Metonymic schema for proverb:

ICM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1</th>
<th>-----contiguity-----</th>
<th>Part 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Metonymy is essential for the interpretation of proverbs, when the proverbs involve the same
domain. Metonymy includes the substitution of:

---effect for cause ('Don't get hot under the collar!' for 'Don't get angry');
---object for user (or associated institution) ('the Crown' for the monarchy,
'the stage' for the theatre and 'the press' for journalists);
---substance for form ('plastic' for 'credit card', 'lead' for 'bullet');
---place for event ('Chernobyl' changed attitudes to nuclear power');
---place for person ('No. 10' for the British prime minister);
---place for institution ('Whitehall' isn't saying anything);
2.4 Comparison of proverbs in English and Chinese

Different nations have different views to different objective things, but all human beings have some similar capabilities of thought, some laws of cognition are the same, and the animals have the same attributes. In different languages, some of the same animals will be endowed with the same or similar images. These images will make different nations have a same or similar association of some ideas. Their usages and meanings both in Chinese and English are based on correspondence or similarity.

The English culture connotations of some animal words are the same or similar to the Chinese cultural connotations of other Chinese animal words. Their implied meanings are the same, but their names are different. Because of the differences between the two cultures and image thoughts of the two nations, it is natural that the two nations have different emotional reactions to the same kind of animal. In different cultures and civilizations, the same kind of animal might be given different cultural connotations, which will lead to the vacancy of cultural connotation in the other language, and lead to obstacles for cross-exchanges. For example, a peacock represents arrogance in English, but it stands for beauty in Chinese. The Chinese think *owl* means “ill-omened”, while in English culture, it is viewed as “wisdom”. There are also many different cultural scripts in proverbs in one or another language, so the proverb would be culturally specific. According to Lakoff and Turner (1989:193), different metaphorical schemas show how we conceive of animals, and how we apply this folk knowledge to the construction of metaphorical schemas.

2.4.1 The Universality of Conceptual metaphors

The same conceptual metaphor occurs in several unrelated languages. There might be a universal motivation for the metaphors to emerge in the cultures or one language may have borrowed the metaphors from another, or it might have happened by accident. Whatever the
reason is, the phenomenon does exist. Some conceptual metaphors may be universal and the
universality of this metaphor can be found at the generic level. For example, a metaphor that
has received considerable attention in cross-cultural studies is ANGER IS A HOT FLUIT IN A
CONTAINER, which exists in a variety of unrelated languages. For instance:

(1) English:

INTENSE ANGER PRODUCES STEAM
He is just blowing off steam.

WHEN ANGER BECOMES TOO INTENSE, THE PERSON EXPLODES
When I told him, he just exploded.

(2) Chinese:

ANGER IS EXCESS QI IN THE BODY (“excess qi” metaphor for anger)
To hold back a stomach full of qi.
To keep in one’s spleen qi.

2.4.2 Cross-cultural Variation in Metaphor and Metonymy
Most cultural variation in conceptual metaphor occurs at the specific level. Moreover, given
the cultural context and its influence on conceptualization, we can see why the changes take
place in the cultural models and the conceptual metaphors. There are two large categories of
causes that bring about cultural variation in metaphor and metonymy. One is the broader
cultural context, and the other is the natural and physical environment (Kövecses 2002:186).
Take the near-universal PRESSURIZED CONTAINER metaphor for anger in a variety of
culture as example. In Euro-American tradition, it is the classical-medieval notion for anger
and also the application of the humoral doctrine. The humoral view maintains that four fluids,
which are phlegm, black bile, yellow bile, and blood, regulate the vital processes of the human
body. They were also believed to determine personality types and account for a number of
medical problems, together with cures for them. On the other hand, the Chinese concept of anger is bound up with the notion of qi, which is the energy flows through the body. Qi is embedded not only in the psychological but also the philosophical and medical discourse of the Chinese culture and civilization. When qi rises in the body, there is anger, and when it subsides and there is balance again, there is harmony and emotional calm (Kövecses 2002:187). According to Kövecses (2002:183), the possibilities for cultural variation are the following:

1) Variation in the range of conceptual metaphors and metonymies for a given target;
2) Variation in the particular elaborations of conceptual metaphors and metonymies for a given target;
3) Variation in the emphasis on the metaphor versus metonymy associated with a given target, or the other way around.
3. **Analysis and discussion**

Proverbs are the cream of a language. They reflect the relationship between language and culture. Human beings’ common social activities are in many aspects similar, so English and Chinese proverbs have cognitive similarities. They both originate from folk life, mythology, literary works and from other languages. They also have similar linguistic characters. For instance, it is widely used the conceptual metaphor PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS in animal proverbs in both languages.

Because of the different culture, differences between English and Chinese animal proverbs also exist. Generally speaking, the major differences lie in religions, customs, and history. As a result, English and Chinese proverbs are different in the detailed contents. With the development of the long course of history between these two nations, different animals have their different cultural connotations in these two languages. So there are many animal proverbs that show the differences of the cultural beliefs between English and Chinese.

3.1 **The cognitive similarities in English and Chinese proverbs**

With the communication of world, nation’s boundary is being broken. More and more languages contacted with each other. Many proverbs have absorbed a great number of expressions of other nation’s culture. Some proverbs in English can find the same expressions in Chinese. Other proverbs in English can find their equivalents in Chinese. The reverse is also true. Although their equivalents are different in expression and show different perspectives, they are similar in meaning. No matter that they have the same expression or the equivalent expression, the proverbs share a common underlying schema of cognition, which demonstrates the way we think and structure it in our minds.

3.1.1 **Same expression**

In Chinese, there are some proverbs sharing the same expression with the English ones. From these similarities, we can see that English and Chinese people have similar social activities and emotional reflection and observation of the world. For example, there is a
same proverb in Chinese with the English, that is:

(1) You may lead a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink.

In Chinese, it also uses the same animal of “horse”. The proverb says, you may be acting in the best interests of the horse by taking him to the trough, but if he doesn’t want to drink he is not going to. So it means that you can do your utmost to make a person share your views, yet there is a point beyond which he will not go. In this proverb, “a person who doesn’t want to accept others’ opinion” is understood in terms of “a horse that doesn’t want to drink”. The proverb applies to the conceptual metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

| METAPHOR |
|------------------|-------------------|
| SOURCE           | TARGET            |
| a horse          | a person          |

The other example is as below:

(2) A bird in the hand is worth than two in the bush.

If a hunter has shot one bird, he should be satisfied with that and not go off looking for the ones that flew away. We use the proverb to mean that it is better to accept something small than to reject it and hope to get more later on. In other words, it is better to keep what you have than to give it up and try to get something better and risk losing everything. The proverb is a metonymic expression, that is, A PART STANDS FOR THE WHOLE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METONYMY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PART 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a bird in the hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two in the bush</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1.2 Different expression

Some animal proverbs in English and Chinese share the same root idea but differ in figurative ways of expression. That is, they are close in meaning but different in expression. They contain the same advice, counsel, wisdom or warning, and they can perform the same functions in life. So there are many animal proverbs in English or Chinese, when we turn to their corresponding proverbs in the other language, animal words disappear or replaced with other animal words. That is, they apply to different animals or images or words and so on. These proverbs convey almost the same connotative meaning although their ways of expression seem to be unrelated. For instance, the English proverb *The fox preys farthest from home* has the equivalent expression in Chinese proverb, that is, *Rabbits do not eat the grass around their burrows*. Both proverbs mean that it is believed that a villain usually does not harm his neighbors, though they apply to different animals. There are also many animal proverbs in English or Chinese apply to different words to convey the same meaning in the other language. The examples are listed below.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{English proverb:} & \quad \text{It is the bridle and spur that makes a good horse.} \\
\text{Chinese proverb:} & \quad \text{Good pupils are to be brought up by strict teachers.}
\end{align*}
\]

In this case, the English proverb *It is the bridle and spur that makes a good horse* has an equivalent one in Chinese, that is *Good pupils are to be brought up by strict teachers*. Although they show different cultural scripts, their generic meaning are the same, which mean that just like training a horse with bridle, bit and spur, a person’s natural behavior must be controlled and be directed onto the path of righteousness.

\[(3) \quad \text{It is the bridle and spur that makes a good horse.}\]

This proverb has the conceptual metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS. The human beings character is understood in terms of animal.
a good horse ---------------- a person with good behavior and righteousness

(4) *Good pupils are to be brought up by strict teachers.*

The proverb is a metonymic expression that is characterized by a particular relationship between one kind of entity and another kind of entity.

**METONYMY**

PART 1 ----------------------------- PART 2

good pupils----------------------- persons with good behavior and righteousness

The following examples show the same characteristics. The proverbs in English or Chinese can find the equivalent one in Chinese or English.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{English proverb: } & \textit{The donkey means one thing, and the driver another.} \\
\text{Chinese proverb: } & \textit{The benevolent see benevolence and the wise see wisdom.}
\end{align*}
\]

In this sense, both proverbs mean that different people see from different standpoints, their own interest in every case directing their judgment. In other words, different people have different point of views. In the English proverb, *the donkey* is in opposition to *the driver*, where the donkey is controlled by the driver. That is, the donkey and the driver have their own standpoints. While in the Chinese one, *the benevolent and the wise* refer to two kinds of people, they judge the same thing from two different positions.

(5) *The donkey means one thing, and the driver another.*

**METAPHOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>------------------------</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the donkey</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>the oppressed person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the driver -------------- person in a dominant position

(6) The benevolent see benevolence and the wise see wisdom.

METONYMY

PART 1 ---------------------------------- PART 2
the benevolent ------------------------ the kind person
the wise ----------------------------- the intelligent person

Let us look at the other examples:

Chinese proverb: A slow sparrow should make an early start.

English proverb: A lame traveler should get out betimes.

The literal meaning of the Chinese proverb is that a slow sparrow should fly ahead of time. While the English one is that the lame traveler should proceed ahead of schedule. Both proverbs mean that diligence can make up for lack of intelligence. A slow sparrow is used to depict the human behavior which is understood in terms of animal behavior. While a lame traveler stands for a slow learner.

(7) A slow sparrow should make an early start.

METAPHOR

SOURCE ------------------------- TARGET
a slow sparrow ------------------ people who lack of intelligence

(8) A lame traveler should get out betimes.

METONYMY
a lame traveler  people who lack of intelligence

3.2 The cross-cultural differences in English and Chinese proverbs
In human communication, a plenty of animal words are widely used to enrich the language and culture. The vivid images of animals enhance expressive ability of language by associating with their features showed from outside appearances or individual temperaments. Meanwhile, there are a variety of animals in our life. Different nationalities have their own different "totem" animal, that is, each nation has its own favorite animals. Specific cultures and regional discrepancies exert a strong influence on language. And animal words as association vehicles are the products under the specific cultural backgrounds. Then these animal association vehicles have their respective cultural connotations which are known to different nations or which are completely strange to people. The culture of a nation is formed by many factors, and the development of a society influences the formation, the development and the disappearance of the culture. Cultural connotations of some animal words in English and Chinese are closely related to the religion, customs and the history of the nation.

3.2.1 Religion
There is a big difference between the Chinese religion and the English religion. The Chinese people believe in Buddhism, while most English people believe in Christianity. That is why some animal words about religion are quite different in Chinese and English. For instance, the dragon has different cultural connotations in Chinese and English. The dragon enjoys a very high reputation in Chinese culture. It is a positive force, and represents power, excellence, and striving for goals, as well as being a benevolent force, which radiates goodwill, good luck, and blessings. So the dragon has been a symbol of “power, being sacred” from ancient times to now. In the feudal society, emperors were addressed with “dragon”. To some extent, “dragon” is a symbol of China in the world, which stands for the source of the Chinese culture of about five thousand years. It is a special product of the Chinese culture. The Chinese take proud of being “the descendants of dragon”. For instance, the Chinese proverb like Even a dragon
(from the outside) finds it hard to control a snake in its old haunt is well known to the Chinese. The similar expression is A mighty dragon cannot subdue a local snake, which means “powerful outsiders can hardly afford to neglect local bullies.” That is to say, an able person in an adverse environment cannot bring his talent into full play. Instead, he or she may become an underdog of a less able person who has been in that environment for a long time with a lot of connections. The proverb applies the metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, where a powerful person is understood in terms of a subject of dragon. It also uses the personification. The dragon is given human characteristics, where “control” is a human action.

(9) Even a dragon (from the outside) finds it hard to control a snake in its old haunt.

METAPHOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a dragon</td>
<td>a powerful person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a snake in its old haunt</td>
<td>a local bully</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other example is as follows:

(10) Hidden dragons, crouching tigers.

When we say some place has "hidden dragons and crouching tigers", it means that the place has able people who are kept willingly or unwillingly in a low profile. The proverb is usually used to advise people not to take a place like that lightly. It applies the metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

METAPHOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dragon</td>
<td>powerful person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiger</td>
<td>able person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because of the influence of the Bible, the dragon in westerners’ minds is a kind of evil monster, which can vomit fire and sometimes possess three to nine heads. Therefore, there are few proverbs about dragons in English. Generally speaking, in English the word dragon has a derogatory sense when it is used to refer to somebody. Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1986) explains: If you call a woman a dragon, you mean that she is fierce and unpleasant.

In Western culture, what impresses people most may be goat, for “goat” is generally thought to be related with evils and the devil. The legend has that the devil created the goat, which is described as the phantom of the devil and the goat typically stands for those who are fond of women and loose in morals. In the Bible, Matthew tells us Christ is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep (John 10:11, 14). We can see the original passage from the Bible, Matthew (25:31-33): “When the son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand the goats at the left.” The sheep are then given eternal life, but the goats are cast into the Lake of Fire. “A sheep follows its Shepherd, peacefully moving forward with the flock. He is content to be led because he has faith in Him. A sheep responds to his Shepherd's voice and goes where He directs. While a goat follows only its own lead, which creating disunity when he comes in contact with others in the flock. Because of his independent nature, he often finds himself in contention with the Shepherd for leadership of the flock, leading some astray. A goat often eats things sheep would avoid because they have no value and cause sickness” (Mike Ford 1994). These are serious spiritual characteristics. God uses the goat to symbolize evil in numerous instances in the Bible. But to Chinese people, the goat is only a common animal. While there is no any cultural connotation of goat in Chinese. Let us look at the English proverbs related to goat as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
(11) & \quad \text{Put silk on a goat and it is still a goat.} \\
(12) & \quad \text{When the goat goes to church, he does not stop till he gets to the altar.}
\end{align*}
\]
METAPHOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a / the goat</td>
<td>the evil person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both proverbs refers to the evil person. In example (11), the generic meaning of the proverb is that a bad person’s nature is difficult to change.

In (12), the proverb means that until all is over, a bad guy’s bad behaviour can stop.

### 3.2.2 Customs

The proverbs about dogs reflect the cultural difference between English customs and Chinese customs. No matter in the East or the West, the dog is familiar to everyone. Both English-speaking people and Chinese people like raising dogs, but their aims and attitudes towards dogs are quite different. In the Western culture, the dog is treated as their favorite pet, and it is referred to as man's best friend. It is not uncommon for an Englishman to kiss his dog, and to take it to see a doctor when it is ill. They can also enjoy a “vacation” when their hosts spend their holidays. For them, dog is loyal and dependable, so they love it and praise it. Although dog is an animal, it is usually used to refer to human beings. The following proverbs are good examples.

\[
\begin{align*}
(13) & \quad \text{Every dog has its day.} \\
(14) & \quad \text{Old dog will not learn mew tricks.}
\end{align*}
\]

As shown in (13), the generic meaning is that every person's moment of glory is inevitable. This proverb is the conceptual metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

METAPHOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>every dog</td>
<td>everyone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In example (14), the proverb means that as people got older they grow more set in their ways and do not welcome any innovation. It is the conceptual metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{METAPHOR} \\
\text{SOURCE} & \text{---------} & \text{TARGET} \\
\text{old dog} & \text{---------} & \text{old people} \\
\end{array}
\]

While in Chinese the case is totally different. Chinese people keep dogs to protect themselves from thieves, and the dog is known as a watchdog. Chinese people in general dislike the behavior of dogs, so *dog* is used to describe the bad guys, those who are cruel and unscrupulous. In Chinese culture, the word "dog" often has a derogatory connotation, symbolizing a lackey, flunky, stooge, or a servile follower. And dogs impress the Chinese people as a nuisance and filthy thing, especially when they are used to refer to a person, such as the Chinese proverb *Better to be a dog in times of peace than a human being in times of trouble*, and *To be followed home by a stray dog is a sign of impending wealth*. Examples of this are as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
(15) & \quad \text{From the lowly perspective of a dog’s eyes, everyone looks short.} \\
(16) & \quad \text{Out of a dog’s mouth will never come ivory tusks.}
\end{align*}
\]

In these cases, *dog* is a negative image. These proverbs apply to the conceptual metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

As shown in (15), the proverb is used to describe a person judging people by their appearances, and look down upon the poor. So *dog* refers to a person acts like a snob.

In (16), literally, it says, a filthy mouth can’t utter decent language. The proverb is used to ridicule the person whose mouth does not clean enough and cannot say a good word. The connotation is you can not expect people of evil intent to utter anything good. In this case *dog* is used to describe the bad guys who can not say a decent word.

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{METAPHOR} \\
\end{array}
\]
Similarly, the connotation of “lion” in English is usually substituted with the “tiger” in Chinese. Chinese people regard tiger as the king of the beasts. Tiger is the symbol of valor and courage. The equal animal in English is “lion”. In Western countries, lion is seen as the king of the jungle, which often symbolizes “courage, dignity, royalty”. However, lion has less rich cultural connotation in Chinese than in English. In Chinese concept, the tiger has both the positive image as the western lion and the negative image as cruelty. The examples of lion proverbs in English are as follows:

(17)  *Wake not a sleeping lion.*

**METONYMY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART 1</th>
<th>----------------------------------</th>
<th>PART 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a sleeping lion</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>no any aggression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literally, it says, let the lion sleep on. Once the lion wake up, it will cause much trouble. The generic meaning is that it is sensible not to do anything that will stir up unnecessary trouble. “A sleeping lion” stands for a powerless animal, which belongs to the same ICM, that is, A PART STANDS FOR WHOLE.

(18)  *March comes in like a lion, and goes out like a lamb.*

**METONYMY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART 1</th>
<th>----------------------------------</th>
<th>PART 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a lion</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>wild character trait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lamb</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>tame character trait</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The proverb means that the weather during the first of March is typically wild and windy, but by the end of March, all is calm. It is a metonymic expression, where A PART STANDS FOR WHOLE, that is, PROPERTY FOR CATEGORY.

The animal proverb in Chinese related to tiger is *Newborn calves are not afraid of tigers*, which means that a young person is full of rigour and courage and is not afraid to challenge anything, that is, young people are fearless. In other words, it means that the more wit, the less courage. It applies to the metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS. There is a similar proverb in English, that is, *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread*, which is used where people who are inexperienced or lack knowledge do something that more informed people would avoid.

(19) *Newborn calves are not afraid of tigers.*

**METAPHOR**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>newborn calves</td>
<td>young people / inexperienced people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiger</td>
<td>the most ferocious challenge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(20) *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.*

**METONYMY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART 1</th>
<th>PART 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fools</td>
<td>inexperienced people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angels</td>
<td>informed people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2.3 History

Each nation has its own unique history, which affects the culture of theirs. Meanwhile the history is an important part and factor of each nation’s culture. In Chinese, *ox* has the same meaning as the *horse* in English. That’s caused by their different histories. The earliest cultivation mainly depended on ox in China, while the heavy farm work was done by horse in
the early stage of Britain. While ox is always a kind of food in Britain, and horse is mainly ridden in China. Horse as a means of transport for ancient people in China, it is an important vehicle. For instance, the following Chinese proverb is a good example:

(21) *Good people get cheated, just as good horses get ridden.*

**METAPHOR**

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<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good horse</td>
<td>cowardly people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a literal sense, “good horse” is a docile horse. The proverb means that the coward is easily bullied, just like an obedient horse is easily to ride.

*Ox* of Chinese and *horse* of English are both the same laborious livestock, and they have the same cultural connotations. Today, their functions have more or less changed in these two nations, but their cultural connotations given by history have been carried on as before by their people. For instance, the English proverb related to *horse* as follow convey the similar meaning in Chinese with the animal *ox.*

(22) *Every horse thinks its own pack heaviest.*

The generic meaning is that we all imagine that we have a greater load to carry than anybody else, and nobody works harder than we do, or has to put up with more difficulties. It uses personification. The horse is described as having human traits. The verb “think” is human feelings. This proverb is the conceptual metaphor of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

**METAPHOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>every horse</td>
<td>everyone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following Chinese proverb related to \( \alpha r \) conveys the similar meaning with the animal \textit{horse} in English proverb.

(23) \textit{Ox has to plow field, while man is subject to suffer torture.}

The generic meaning is that ox pull tractors to plow, though it is a hard work, which is part of its job. Just like a man tortured to grow up, he has to go through the process and make progress in life. The proverb is used to comfort and encourage the suffering people to put up with torture, and do not discourage. It is a metonymic expression, which belongs to PROPERTY FOR CATEGORY.

\begin{center}
\textbf{METONYMY}
\end{center}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textbf{PART 1} & \textbf{PART 2} \\
ox & tortured people \\
\end{tabular}
4. Conclusion

In this essay, some insights have been shown as regards the role of generic cognitive mechanisms in animal proverbs use. Although there are many different animal proverbs in Chinese and English, some animals share the universal cognition, while others have totally different cognition in English and Chinese. So the same conceptual metaphor occurs in animal proverbs both in English and Chinese. There is a universal motivation for the metaphors to emerge in English and Chinese, though they are totally unrelated languages. Some conceptual metaphors are universal and the universality of this metaphor can be found at the generic level.

However, different cultures in Chinese and English nations entrust cultural connotations to animals, which cause discrepancies in the application of animal association vehicles. These discrepancies bring obstruction of intercultural communication. If we do not know the cultural information and only understand the information according to our national cultural backgrounds, we would cause the deviation from information transmission and misunderstanding in intercultural communication to lead to the failure of communication. Therefore, we should pay attention to the figurative meanings of animal words to make cross-cultural communication successful. This paper analyzes the cultural connotations between the English and Chinese animal proverbs, and compares the animal images and their cultural connotations. Animals have their own features and cultural connotations in their own languages. Some of their cultural connotations are the same in English and Chinese, but most of them are different, and some even exist only in their own language. It is clear to conclude that animal words are not only the sighs of real animal but also gifted with special cultural connotations of different cultures. Therefore, if people want to have a good grasp of animal proverbs, they must understand the connotations of these words especially the cultural connotations. Only deeply acquaint with the cultural convention and living customs can they understand the cultural differences in animal proverbs between these two languages.
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Primary material:

Secondary material:
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