



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

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**Theme:**

Metaphor and Emotion

**Question:**

How are cultural differences actualized in metaphorical expressions of emotion?

**Keywords:**

Cognitive sociolinguistics

Metaphor

Happiness in Chinese

Cultural models

Identity

**Background:**

Dominated by the global Anglo-international discourse of happiness, the semantics of “happiness” in local culture has been greatly ignored or misinterpreted (Carsten 2014; Wierzbicka 2014).

**Framework:**

From a cognitive sociolinguistics approach, this research not only presents a systematic study on the metaphorical cultural models of happiness in local Chinese culture but also investigates its social-cultural impact.

**Methodology:**

- (1) A corpus-based analysis is performed based on data from two Chinese corpora: PKU(CCL), 477 million characters from both ancient Chinese and modern Chinese; Leiden Weibo Corpus (Esch 2012), 101.4 million words from China’s most popular microblogging service
- (2) Analysis of 167 four-character idioms of happiness from *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (2016)
- (3) *Xingfu* survey among Chinese subjects.

樂 happiness 幸福 家



Metonymy-based metaphorical use of *hexie* (和谐, harmony of music) as a feature of *Yue* (樂, music) to understand the abstract subjective experience of *Le* (樂, happiness).

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**Findings:** The study shows that the core elements of the semantics of *xingfu* (幸福, happiness) markedly differ from the Anglo-international discourse of happiness in that:

- (1) cultural metaphors are guiding Chinese conception of happiness such as *happiness is harmony of music*. (metonymy-based metaphor)
- (2) 家 (jia, family) is a core/essential element in Chinese conception of individual’s *xingfu*. (harmonious family relationship, filial piety)
- (3) the local semantics of *xingfu* prescribes a sociocultural norm of various prototypical events culturally considered as happiness.
- (4) the entrenched metaphorical cultural models of *xingfu* constructing the cultural identity of the Chinese are posing challenges towards *xingfu* of both the young and the middle-aged generations in the new social-economical context.

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