

The Body in Chinese Characters and Philosophy --The Experiential Nature of Chinese Philosophy

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This paper argues that the Chinese character system is a matter of conceptual metaphors and the metaphors emerge from bodily experience. The paper follows the updated cognitive approach and makes an etymological and philological study of the Chinese characters, which are the most fundamental philosophical and cultural concepts such as the concept 象 *xiang*, image, the concept of the Chinese self which is structurally embedded in the character, and the concept of 义 *yi*, etc. The paper relates the characters and concepts to critical interpretation of classics of Confucius and ancient classical works.

As a unique conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, the structures and forms of the Chinese characters are an important source of evidence for what a human conceptual system is. The author claims that philosophy which endeavors to explain the world and human life is largely metaphorical and it is grounded in bodily experience.

By bringing metaphorical thought into the limelight, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) show us that human conceptual system we use in thinking, experiencing, understanding, and reasoning about the world is metaphorical. The metaphorical meanings arise from conceptual metaphorical mappings, which in turn are grounded primarily in correlations to our bodily experience. This updated philosophical understanding of the embodied mind has reopened our eyes and made us rethink the fundamental philosophical and cultural traditions.

The up-to-date philosophical understanding of the embodied mind has also made us to revisit the traditional Chinese philosophical tradition and the revisit is especially significant and meaningful as we find our ancient scholars, in Pre-Qin period (770-222 B.C.) in particular regarded metaphors as the most primary and fundamental cognitive mechanism for human beings in their experiencing, understanding, and even reasoning about the world, both physical and social over 2,500 years ago.

The traditional Chinese philosophy, represented by the philosophy of Confucius, Lao Zi, and others in the Pre-Qin period in ancient China provides us with the most original and insightful ideas about the nature of our thinking, our experience, our understanding, and the nature of our everyday activities.

Analogy or metaphor has long been the way of thinking, experiencing, understanding, and reasoning about the world for the Chinese. The famous philosophers in Pre-Qin period of the Chinese history, such as Lao Zi, Confucius, Xunzi and others including philosophers of the Legalist school, all regard the use of analogy/metaphors as the important ways to perceive, understand and think about the world (Huang Zhaoyang/黄朝阳, 2006). Lao Zi uses analogy/ metaphor to describe Dao, the general law that governs the transformation of the universe. The metaphorical mapping or metaphorical projection used in Lao Zi's philosophical works reveals his view that human beings come to know the world through analogy/metaphors (Xiao & Ye, 1993). When trying to answer the question, "How can we

come to know the world?" He answered, "To see other's body in terms of one's own body, to see other's family in terms of one's own family, to see other's village in terms of one's own village, to see other's state in terms of one's own state, and to see the world in terms of the world." This reveals that Lao Zi upholds that human beings use metaphor as the method of experiencing, understanding, and conceptualizing the world. It is also through analogy/metaphor, Confucius creates the method of "Taking analogy from what is closest to us" (能近取譬).

"Using one's own heart and mind as a measure to gauge others (以己量人)," and "to project our own mind and heart onto others (以己推人)" as the general ethical principle structuring our thinking about the social and interpersonal relationship in the building of a harmonious society. Xun Zi also holds a positive view of the role played by metaphor in thinking. He proposes "To know what is far in terms of what is close, to know the myriad things in terms of the knowledge of one thing, and to use metaphor to enlighten us... A saint comes to know others in terms of himself, to understand other's feeling in terms of his own feeling, and to understand things of one domain in terms of another" ('以近知远, 以一知万, 以微知明...圣人者以己度之者也。故以人度人, 以情度情, 以类度类。') (王先谦, 1988/荀子, 非相).

What is more, in their thinking and reasoning, all of them start from human bodily experience and activities and project them to the rest of the world and in this way, their experience and conception about the world are metaphorical and the metaphors are grounded in human bodies.

This paper, following the updated cognitive approach and based on the etymological and philological study of the Chinese characters that are the most fundamental philosophical and cultural concepts such as the concept 象 *xiang*, image; the concept of the Chinese self in relation to the character, and concept of 义 *yi* and relating them to critical interpretation of classics of Confucius and ancient classical works, argues that the Chinese character system is a matter of conceptual metaphors.

And it is embodied in nature. As a unique conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, the structures and forms of the Chinese characters are an important source of evidence for what human conceptual system is. The conceptual system is a matter of metaphor and the metaphors emerge from our physical or bodily experience and activities. In this light, philosophy which endeavors to explain the world and human life is largely metaphorical and it is grounded in bodily experience.

The Establishment of Images as the Fundamental Chinese Way of Thinking, Experiencing, Understanding, and Reasoning about the World

Analogy, for which the Chinese is 譬 *pi* /类比, is the most fundamental Chinese way of perceiving and thinking and perhaps one of the most fundamental ways of perceiving and thinking for human beings in their experiencing, understanding, and even reasoning about the world. It is analogy that allows human beings to use what they already know to provide understanding of what they do not know. Analogical thinking is used in metaphorical mapping in its operation for the human mind in their interaction with the world.

Philosophically speaking, metaphor, personification, metonymy, etc. all in one way or another have to do with analogical logic and analogical mapping. Looked at in this light, metaphor is called implied analogy by some Chinese and Western scholars (Xiao & Ye, 1993; Holman, 1960). Anyway, inducing projection is believed to be the foundation and essence of both analogous and metaphorical thinking, and therefore, in the study of philosophy, we may use metaphor as a general term to describe how human beings come to experience, understand, and even reason about the world.

However, how does metaphor operate in our experiencing, thinking, and understanding about the world in everyday life, how is it structured and where is it grounded in the Chinese cultural context?

Generally, when human cognitive mechanism is used to structure our thinking, experiencing, understanding, and even reasoning about the world, our ancestors make metaphorical mapping through establishing images and grasping meaning (立象尽义), which will be referred to as the establishment of images (立象) for short in the rest of the paper. The establishment of images, as discussed later in this paper, is what the writer believes to be image schemas called by the Western scholars. It is out of xiang, image, (形象) that metaphors are born and therefore, it is the most important concept.

象 xiang, image, is one of the most important concept in traditional Chinese philosophy. It plays an important role in the formation of the Chinese way of thinking and the way of experiencing and understanding the world. In ancient time, by observing xiang, images such as the sun, the moon, and stars in heaven, our ancestors come to know the transformation and change of nature as the classic saying goes, “Grasp the great symbol (image) and all under heaven will come to you (Lao Zi/理雅各英译, 1996). And at the same time, the activities of the images in heaven are metaphorically projected to human activities in their interaction with their surroundings. It is not uncommon to say that the ancient Chinese have adopted the way of xiang in thinking (象数思维).

According to the traditional Chinese philosophy, “It is out of xiang that meaning grows” (夫象者，出意者也。) Tang Mingbang/唐明邦, 1995).

It is out of xiang grows what is meaningful and it is through xiang that we come to know the world, make inferences and structure our knowledge. In the operation of expressing meaning, xiang, image, functions as the signifier while the thing or meaning it symbolizes is the signified. However, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not arbitrary. It is symbolic and metaphorical as xiang operates as image schemas in human experiencing and understanding of the world. Stated in a different way, to the Chinese tradition, the experience and understanding about the world arise from human sensorimotor experience, that of the sight in particular. The world to be known for the Chinese should be a world that can be seen, felt, touched, tasted, and so on. Xiang, image, is the most fundamental intuitive cognitive mechanism that enables people to experience and understand the world.

However, establishing images or the operation of image schemata is an experience of “looking at things and seeking images through analogy” (‘观物取象’) and “looking at images and contemplating and grasping meaning” (‘观象取意’) (Tang Mingbang, 1995). Obviously, the character as well as concept 象 xiang plays the most important role in the cognitive process. The Chinese characters and the concept (形) 象 (thinking in terms of form) or

image as form (象也者像也) (Qian Zhongshu, 1994) and 意/想象 (thinking in terms of imagination) best capture the essence of the process of the establishment of images. The former gives rise to what is called natural image (自然之象), while the latter gives rise to what is called imagination (想象), or image in the heart/mind (心中之象). The former is concrete while the second is abstract. And the establishment of images through these processes lays the foundation for the structure and formation of our most fundamental and primary thinking.

Then, how is the metaphorical mapping actualized and where does it emerge from? Almost at the same time when our ancestors come to experience and understand about the world in terms of the establishment of images, which is a process of “looking at things and seeking images through analogy” and “looking images and contemplating and grasping meaning,” they observe the principle “taking analogy from their body that is closest to them and then taking analogy from what is far away” (近取諸身，远取諸物). And these image schemas structure how we experience, how we understand, and how we act.

“Taking analogy from their body that is closest to them and then taking analogy from what is far away” in fact distinctly separates what is close to us from what is far away from us, i.e., it provides categorization between or among human beings (human bodily experience) and non-human beings, concrete things from abstract things. This obviously provides ground for cross-domain metaphorical mappings to take place. In this metaphorical mapping, “what is close to us” gives rise to or is projected onto “what is far away from us.” The former is obviously the source of the metaphor and the latter is the target. In the metaphorical mapping process, bodily experience and activities are projected to human experiencing, understanding, and reasoning about the world.

This gives rise to the metaphorical and embodied nature of our conceptual system. Our experience and thought about the world grow out of our bodily experience and activities. Stated differently, metaphor is grounded in “what is closest to us” or to be more specific, in our body or bodily experience and activities, which interact with the physical and social world.

The Chinese Characters Are Metaphorical and Embodied in Nature

The metaphorical and embodied nature of human mind finds strong evidence in the structural and semantic formation of the Chinese characters, which are believed to be the direct characterization or a part of the Chinese mind.

The Chinese characters are of a unique conceptual system. Philosophically, the Chinese characters should be studied from the perspective of ontology as their formation reveals how human beings come to experience, understand, and conceptualize the world. The formation of the Chinese characters is a process of the conceptualizations of the world. It is a process of the development from pictorial images to pictographic characters and (imagery) concepts. Essentially, Chinese characters are the direct characterization of the Chinese mind. In their most primal form, the Chinese characters are the images of human bodies and their experience in interaction with their environment and the myriad things of the world. Stated differently, the Chinese characters grow out of images.

The Chinese concept for image is called 象 *xiang* and it is believed that the Chinese characters grow out of 象 *xiang*, images. According to the classic saying, “象 *xiang*, image is seeing” (见乃谓之象) (Tang Mingbang, 1995), which obviously demonstrates that the character and concept *xiang*, image, emerges from human visual experience. This obviously shows us how we come to experience, understand and reason about the world.

As part or the direct product of our ancestors' way of thinking, the formation of the Chinese characters experiences the process of the establishment of images, which is discussed in the above section. The formation of the pictographs, the foundation of the Chinese character system, is the direct characterization and the experience of “looking at things and seeking images through analogy,” “looking at images and contemplating and grasping meaning” (观物取象, 观象取义), and “taking analogy from their body that is closest to them and then taking analogy from what is far away” (近取诸身, 远取诸物). According to the Chinese classic saying, the invention of the Chinese characters experiences a process, which is described as: “Of old Bao Xi reigned over all under heaven; raising his head he contemplated the images (such as of the sun, moon, stars, and planets) in heaven, bending down he looked at the forms (such as of mountains, rivers, plants, trees, and so on) on earth” (Tang Mingbang, 1995). The Sages contemplated and surveyed all under heaven. They mused on all the forms and appearances and pictured what they represented and their character.

“Therefore it is said that they are symbols” (Tang Mingbang/唐明邦, 1995). The symbols are images or what are called 象 *xiang* in the Chinese culture. Looked at in this light, the formation of the Chinese characters is the direct product of Contemplating and looking at images/symbols (the sun, moon, stars, and planets in heaven and forms (the river, mountain, plants, trees, and so on) on earth and grasping meaning” (观象取义), or “establishing images and expressing thought.”

In the initial stage of the development of the Chinese characters, the monadic pictographs are called 文 *wen* and the compound characters which are made up of two or more monads are called 字 *zi*. Nowadays, however, *zi* has become the general term for characters.

Originally, 文 *wen* is a pictograph. It is an image of a human body. In the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions and Bronze Inscriptions, the character 文 *wen* looks like the frontal view of a man with a tattoo on his chest. Therefore the character 文 *wen* originally meant “a man with a tattoo,” from which have derived the meaning of decorative pattern (纹), which is also pronounced as *wen* and this bodily image of 文 *wen* in turn is used as a general term to refer to the pictographic characters as a whole in the Chinese culture (Xie Guanghui/谢光辉, 1997).

Etymologically and philosophically, 文 *wen* is made up of the elements of 亠 and 乂. The former symbol 亠 (at the top) has to do with the character 玄 *xuan*, representing the blue color of heaven, and therefore pictographically stands for the symbols or images of the sun, moon, and stars, etc., in heaven. The latter symbol 乂 (at the bottom) serves as the foundation of the mediating points between the eight trigrams in telling good and bad fortunes (谢光辉, 1997). According to The Book of Change, the association of two elements in this character shows that our ancient people tried to tell fortunes by looking at or observing the transformation and change of the sun, moon, and stars in heaven or what is called

phenomenon (现象, another name of xiang, image), as the classic saying goes, “In heaven perfecting symbols; on earth perfecting forms: change and transformation become apparent” (Tang Mingbang, 1995)

As for 字 zi, the compound characters, originally, it consists of 宀 and 子. 宀 in the character originally looks like the roof of house and thus becomes a part of house, metonymically standing for a house. While 子 originally in the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions and Bronze Inscriptions looks like a baby with a big head and small body, thus it refers to a baby or descendants. The association of 宀 and 子 therefore comes to mean “a baby in a house,” hence the meaning of “giving birth to” and the extended meaning of raising or multiplying. The implication is that the compound characters are derivatives of the monadic pictographs (Xie Guanghui/谢光辉, 1997).

In this light, the Chinese pictographic character system, the foundation of the Chinese writing system, represented by the pictograph 文 (wen), has twofold implications: 1) the whole Chinese character system is grounded in human bodily or sensorimotor experience, visual experience in particular. Stated differently, the whole system is the direct characterization of “looking at things and seeking images through analogy” and “looking at images and grasping meaning” or what is called the process of the establishment of images (立象尽义) and 2) in characterizing the world via the Chinese characters our ancestors follow the principle of “taking analogy from their body that is closest to them and then taking analogy from what is far away.” The embodied nature of the Chinese characters is therefore most obvious.

Anyhow, the most primary characters are called pictographs because they grow out of (形/现) 象 xiang, image. The Chinese pictographic script system is called 文 wen, only to demonstrate that the whole system is grounded in human bodies and bodily experience. The embodied nature of the Chinese character system as a whole forms the basis of metaphorical nature of the Chinese characters, and what is more, as part of conceptual system.

The Chinese characters are a system characterizing our ancestors’ view of the world and society. The formation of the characters shows us that our ancestors’ experiencing and knowing about the world and society starts from their own bodily experience. All they know about the world are the projection of what their body is like and how it functions: what they see through eyes, what they hear through their ears, what they touch through their hands, what they smell through their noses, and what they taste through their tongues, etc.

As the paper will argue on the basis of the analysis of the formation of the Chinese characters, there are numerous systematic correlations between our concepts, event and our y experiences and activities. They form the basis of metaphorical concepts in one way or another. And these metaphors allow us to conceptualize our thinking, experience, understanding about our world and our social lives.

One important thing that makes the Chinese characters a unique metaphorical conceptual system is the fact that the Chinese characters are originally independent of the Chinese language (spoken language), that is, there is no relationship between sound and meaning which is most characteristic of the English language. The characters, especially the pictographs and ideographs do not write sound or pronunciation. They directly write ideas and concepts. The Chinese characters are monosyllabic and each character is a unit of form, sound, and meaning. The Chinese character system is therefore a unique conceptual system:

the characters may each constitute an independent concept, and each character or etymon is therefore potentially an independent philosophical concept. What is more, each character, as the paper argues, is a metaphorical expression and a metaphorical concept. In this way, metaphorical characters, metaphorical expressions, and metaphorical concepts are all in one and therefore, the study of the Chinese characters can certainly help us to gain an insightful understanding of the nature of our cognition, thought, and our activity in our interaction with the physical and social world. Both the metaphorical expression or character and the metaphorical concept emerge from or are grounded in human bodily, especially sensorimotor experience and activities.

The Establishment of Images as Image Schemas

Our ancient scholars regard the establishment of 象 *xiang*, image (立象), as human visual experience and activities. The saying, 象 *xiang*, “image as seeing” (见乃谓之象) (Tang Mingbang, 1995) demonstrates that the most fundamental concept *xiang*, image, is grounded in human visual experience. The establishment of *xiang* allows people to metaphorically project our sensorimotor experience such as visual experience and activity onto the world so that we can take in what is meaningful and structure our experience, understanding/meaning, and even reasoning about the world. In the Chinese philosophical history, as mentioned earlier, it is believed that it is out of 象 *xiang*, image, that human experience, understanding and conceptualization about the world grow and become structured and organized. 象 *xiang* is thus regarded as the most important concept in Chinese philosophy (Tang Mingbang, 1995).

In experiencing, understanding, and conceptualizing the world, human beings primarily and fundamentally need image a schema, which is “a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motorprograms that gives coherence and structure to our experience” (Johnson, 1987). The image schemas, most primarily and fundamentally play a decisive role in taking in what is meaningful, and organizing what is meaningful and making inferences and reasoning on the basis of the meaning they have taken in. They are most primary and most fundamental and “are non-propositional and imaginative in character. They are preconceptual schematic structures that emerge from our bodily experience and that are constantly operating in our perceptual interaction, bodily movement ...” (Yu, 1998). “[They] make it possible for us to experience, understand, and reason about our world” (Johnson, 1987).

The establishment of images in the Chinese cultural context, however, serves as such primary and fundamental image schemas, which, grounded in our visual and other perceptual modalities, “operates at a level of mental organization between propositional structures and concrete images” and “serve repeatedly as identifying patterns in an indefinitely large number of experiences, perceptions, and image formation for objects or events that are similarly structured in the relevant ways” (Johnson, 1987).

The establishment of images is a process of “looking at things and seeking images through analogy” and “looking at images and contemplating meaning.” The way of establishing *xiang* or image through “taking analogy from the body that is closest to us and then taking analogy from what is far away” is the unconscious way of human cognitive

mechanism that allows human beings to provide what they know about their bodily and social experience to understand and experience the rest of the world. This is why we say that metaphor is born out of xiang, image.

What is interesting is the fact that beside the character and concept of 象 xiang, which means image, the Chinese culture has another character and concept of 相 to mean exactly what 象 xiang is all about. In fact, 象 and 相 are both pronounced as xiang and share the same meaning. 相 is mapped onto 象 when conceptualizing this important concept. Therefore, they both best characterize the process of the establishment of images or function as the image schemas. The study of the formation of these two characters can therefore show us the nature of our experience and thinking about the world. That is the process of “looking at things and seeking images through analogy” and “looking at image and contemplating/grasping meaning,” and of “taking analogy from the body that is closest to us and then taking analogy from what is far away.” Both of these two abstract concepts are grounded in bodily experience and bodily activities in human interaction with their environment and therefore both are metaphorical in nature.

象 xiang is originally an image of an elephant based on the layout of a dead elephant's bones. Our ancestors rarely saw a living elephant but obtained their bones and they just imagined the living creature on the basis of the image of the dead elephant bones. Hence whatever our ancestors imagined is called xiang (an elephant) or image. The implication is 象 xiang, the pictographic character as well as the concept is the product of imagination (想象 or 意象) and this obviously is of great importance in understanding how the Chinese think the image schemas work. Then how does it come to have to do with sensorimotor experience or how does the metaphorical concept of xiang as seeing come about?

According to the etymological rule, in defining the Chinese characters, as well as concepts, cross-domain reference on the basis of homographs and homophones is often used. That is, characters of the same or similar forms and sound often share the same or similar meaning (形近义同, 音近意通). This makes it not only possible but also necessary for the cross-domain or cross-category mapping in the conceptual system to take place.

According to this etymological rule, while defining the character or concept 象 xiang, image, it is metaphorically mapped onto the character or concept 相 on the basis of homophones as both are pronounced as xiang.

The Chinese ideographic character or the metaphorical expression 相 xiang, (image) vividly drives home how the image schemas work and it best captures the analogical or metaphorical nature of “looking at things and seeking images through analogy” and “establishing images and grasping meaning.” The ideographic character 相 is etymologically composed of the pictographs of 木 mu (a tree or a branch of a tree) which is placed on the left and 目 mu (a human eye) on the right.

木	wood/ tree
相	image
目	eye

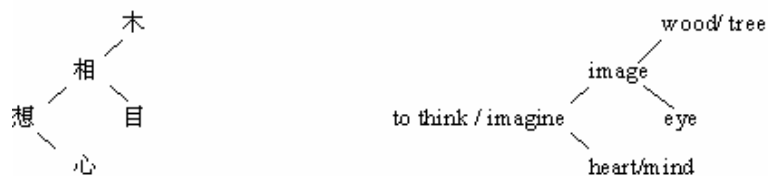
Semantically, the association of these two pictographs or the image is suggestive of a person looking carefully at a tree with the purpose of judging what the tree or its wood can be used to make for (Xie Guanghui/谢光辉, 1997). Literally, this is an image of “(a person metonymically attributed by an human eye) looking at a tree and seeking image through analogy” (观木取相) and metonymically, it is borrowed to mean “looking at things and seeking image through analogy” (观物取相). In this way, everyday visual experience and activity give rise to the formation of the Chinese character 相 (image), and enable it to become a metaphorical expression, and therefore, the metaphorical concept. What is more, in this conceptual metaphor, the role of sensorimotor experience, that of the sense of sight in particular, in human fundamental experiencing, understanding, and conceptualizing about the world and in the formation of the Chinese characters as well is obviously most important. In this way, the metaphorical concept 相 *xiang* and therefore 象 *xiang* as it is defined in terms of 相, *xiang* as seeing, are most obvious and both share the meaning of image. Obviously, “What we can experience, what it can mean to us, how we understand that experience, and how we reason about it are all integrally tied up with our bodily being” (Johnson, 1987, p. 198).

Metaphorical concepts in Chinese culture are pluralistic, that is, each character or concept can be defined in terms of a number of different kinds of characters and concepts, following the rule that characters of homographs and homophones share similar or the same meaning (以形系连, 以声会通). At least they are connected with each other in meaning. 象 *xiang* in this way means be alike or be similar (相象), i.e., they can be alike or similar in forms and they can also be similar in sound. Following these rules, the conceptual metaphorical mapping image as seeing can be involved in quite a number of complex coherences, among which we have:

Xiang as seeing (见乃谓之象).

- Xiang as image (象者, 形象也) (homo=phonically based)
- Xiang as *analogy* (相象)
- Xiang as phenomenon (象乃现象)
- Xiang as imagination (想)
- Xiang as thought (思想)

All these metaphorical mappings are, however, either homophonically based or homographically based, in the sense that the metaphorical mappings are built on the basis of either sharing the same sound or the same form. In the structure of *xiang-as-imagination* (象乃想象) and *xiang-as-thought* (象乃思想), the character 想 is obviously of great importance. 想 *xiang*, to think, (heart or mind) is metaphorically connected to 相/象 *xiang*, image on the basis of homophonic phenomenon (音近义同/通).



In the composition of the character 想 *xiang*, 心 *xin*, heart or mind is placed at the bottom and semantically, the combination of the 相 + 心 can be interpreted as image in thought or in the mind or heart (意象/心象/心中之相/象). In this way, *xin*, heart or mind can be metaphorically projected to a container and what is contained in it is sensorimotor or bodily experience pictographically and ideographically characterized by the ideograph 相 *xiang*, image. Stated differently, in the composition of the ideograph 想 *xiang*, 相 (image, symbol or form) is contained by 心 (heart/mind). Hence 相 *xiang* and 心 (heart/mind) forms V-O relationship in which image or symbol is what the mind thinks or ponders over. Or simply, the association of the image and heart/mind suggests a process thinking and reasoning imaginatively or making artistic inferences and more often than not in the process things that are thought and pondered over suddenly come to light. Imagination looked at in this way is thought in the Chinese culture, which is based on human bodily and even emotional experience in their interaction with their surroundings. In essence it is kind of visual association in the mind or we may call it visual synaesthesia.

The compound characters in the Chinese character system such as ideographic characters are created on the basis of the blendings of pictographs and semantically their meanings are seen through the association and interaction of two or more images of bodily experiences and activities. What must be done in order to understand the meanings or concepts of the blending is to work out the part-and-whole relationships between/among the pictographic components of compound or to construct a Gestalt. In fact, *xiang*-as-seeing metaphorical mapping is the most basic intuitive capacity for human beings. It is unconscious, automatic, and effortless. It is thought, experience, and an act or activity at the same time. And resemblance and analogy is the direct result of all these. Fundamentally, it is all a matter of metaphor for human beings in their interaction with the world and what is more, metaphors emerge from bodily experience.

Suffice it to say that human bodily or sensory motor experience and activities are embedded in the forms of Chinese character *xiang* (相/象), out of which grows the whole writing system. Human bodily and sensorimotor experience and activities are in human thought and mind. Or simply the body is in human thought and mind. And therefore, philosophy, of which human mind is a most fundamental subject, is embodied. Imagination looked at in this way is picture-like thought based on human bodily experience and activities in their interaction with their surroundings. In essence it is largely kind of visual association in the mind or visual synaesthesia.

The embodied nature of the Chinese characters demonstrates that it is out of our bodily, sensory motor experience, visual experience in particular grows what is meaningful to us and it is this kind of schemas that program the ways of our experiencing, understanding and even reasoning about the world. Human bodily and sensorymotor experience and activities are in human experience, understanding, and thought. Or simply the body is in human thought and

mind. And therefore, philosophy, of which human mind is a most fundamental subject, is embodied.

However, to say that our ancestors' "taking from their bodies which are closest to them and then taking what is far away" does not mean that our subjective body is separated from our objective nature or human beings are independent and isolated from the physical world. Quite on the contrary, this way of experiencing and understanding and even reasoning about the world originates from the philosophy that human bodies or human beings and their outside world constitute a harmonious unit. Human bodies are part of the physical world and they are in the physical world and the physical world is in human bodies. The Chinese believe human beings and their physical world, and even the social world, yin and yang, even animals and plants all merge into one and are all inseparable. They constitute one entity.

This harmony worldview is best illustrated in the character and concept of nature, which is characterized by the Chinese character 天 *tian*, meaning nature or heaven. The formation of the Chinese character 天 *tian* best characterizes the harmonious nature between nature and men in the Chinese philosophical tradition. In the early Oracle-Bone Inscriptions and early Bronze Inscriptions, the character 天 looks like the frontal view of a man (A man is pictographically characterized as 人) with the head especially prominent. The head was later simplified into a horizontal stroke on the top. This horizontal stroke also means the heaven above the human head, and even more generally the whole natural world (Xiao Qihong 萧启宏, 2004a). Obviously, the Chinese character 天 is a metaphorical expression and it is an important Chinese philosophical concept. What is more, it demonstrates that the Chinese way of experiencing, understanding and even reasoning about nature is embodied.

According to Qian Zhongshu/钱钟书 (1994), in our experiencing and understanding about the world, we have adopted two ways: 1) we animate the inanimate beings, and 2) we personify things in the world. He called this process as one of "taking analogies from our bodies that is close to us," as one of the projection of our bodies to the outside world. According to Qian, this is a personification process, which is one of the transfer of empathy. It is just metaphorical mapping or empathy transfer that builds up the source of knowledge about the world and in so doing the foundation of Chinese culture and philosophy, and the Chinese characters as well.

This is the most intuitive, primal, and unconscious way of experiencing, thinking and knowing about the world. This way of viewing and even feeling about the world in terms of our own bodies is also the most necessary and natural way for human beings in ancient time. This is the only way, our ancestors just cannot do otherwise in the interaction with their outside world. And all this is fully demonstrated in the way how Chinese characters are structured and formed. What they know about the world is the projection of what their bodies are like and how they function: the world is the projections of what they see through eyes, what they hear through their ears, what they touch through their hands, what they smell through their noses, what they taste through their tongues, and how they feel, etc.

The Embodied Nature of the Chinese Concept of the Self: Self as Appropriateness and Beauty

The Concept of the Self as Contextual Appropriateness

As a unique conceptual system, a large number of the Chinese characters may each be a metaphorical expression and philosophical concept. This part of the paper is focused on how the structure and composition of Chinese characters provide evidence that the Chinese concept of 人 ren, persons or human beings (to be distinct from animals) is metaphorical and embodied in nature. However, the Chinese conception of who we are is at least twofold: the concept of 人, persons or human beings in general and the concept of 我 wo, the self. The Chinese concept of persons or human beings has to do with the character or concept 仁 ren while the concept of the self (or I/me) has to do with the character or concept 義 yi. That is why the word or concept 仁義 is used to conceptualize persons and it is also used as a measure to judge if a person is morally good enough to be qualified as a human being.

This part deals with how the Chinese philosophy and culture conceptualize the self. The concept of the person or human beings in general will be discussed in a separate paper.

The Chinese concept of the self finds its best expression in the formation of the ideographic character 義 yi (simplified as 义 today) which is itself a metaphorical expression and important philosophical concept in the cultivation and accomplishment of the ideal moral personhood in the Chinese culture. In *Explanations of Chinese Characters* by 许慎, the most authoritative ancient etymologist, the explanation about the formation of the ideograph 義 provides the best philosophical and cultural explanations about how the character, as well as the concept of 我 wo, the self (I and/ or me) is related to the character, as well as the concept of 義.

The character 義 is composed of the pictograph 羊 yang, sheep, and 我 wo, the self, I or me. The pictograph 羊 yang, sheep, has a lot to do with the traditional Chinese aesthetic view and it attributes to the important concept of 美, mei, beauty, while the character 我 wo, indicates I or the self. The association and interaction of these two characters and concepts result in the character/concept of 義 yi, appropriateness which has the attribution of the Chinese concept of the self.

The Chinese character 義 yi, is defined in terms of 宜 yi, appropriateness (Xiao Qihong / 萧启宏, 2004b) The cross-domain mapping of 義 yi onto 宜 yi, appropriateness, is based on the homophonic phenomenon, that is, 義 and 宜 share the same pronunciation, so that 義 comes to mean appropriateness, or what is right to do. Thus the ideographic character 義 yi comes to mean appropriateness or what is right to do for a person in the society. Looked in this light, the concept of the self obviously has to do with others or the context, or the self is placed in the context. Obviously, it is highly contextualized with the meaning I or the self should be contextually appropriate or one is expected to be appropriate to the social expectations according to the roles ascribed to him or her in a given situation in the society. This demonstrates the social nature of the Chinese concept of the self, which runs counter to this concept in the the traditional Western (analytical) philosophy of transcendent rationality.

The Self as Beauty Emerging from Bodily Experience

What is interesting is that in the structure and formation of the ideographic character 義 yi, appropriateness, we can also find the component part 美 mei, beauty, which obviously is of great significance as the concept 美 mei, beauty, symbolizes the ideal moral quality called perfect virtue (美德).

The pictograph 羊 yang, sheep, placed at the top of the character 義 yi, appropriateness, symbolizes the traditional Chinese aesthetic view and it attributes to the important concept of 美, mei, beauty.

The concept 美 mei, beauty, together with the concepts of 善 shan, goodness and love and 真, truth, are very important concepts not only in the Chinese philosophy but also in the Western philosophy. Beauty in the Chinese philosophical and cultural tradition also symbolizes the most important quality of personhood for an individual self to attain in the establishment of the self, and therefore it has been a focus of study for scholars in many different fields.

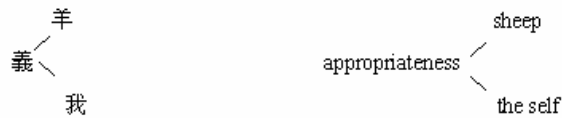
However, in the Chinese culture, the concept of beauty is symbolized by the imagery/pictographic character 羊 yang, sheep. Then how does the character sheep come to be mapped onto the concept 美 mei, beauty? Or stated differently, how is this animal mapped onto the abstract concept of beauty? What does beauty mean in human social life? How is it connected with the concept of 義? And above all, how does it come to be embodied in nature?

To answer the last question first, in the Chinese culture, many concepts arise from the source of human sensorymotor experience and activities, and social experience and activities as well. While talking about the Chinese aesthetic judgment, Zang Kehe/臧克和(1995) has the following to contribute: a) The source of our ancestors' aesthetic value and judgment are closely connected with food and drink, b) The source of their aesthetic value and judgment are closely connected with their worship of human procreation, c) The source of their aesthetic value and judgment are closely connected with their persistent purchase of abundant production, d) etymologically, the source of the original Chinese characters reflecting our ancestors' aesthetic value and judgment are closely connected with our ancestors' activities and experience of memorial service. Zang Kehe summed up these ideas into two points: Our ancestors' aesthetic value and judgment are based on a) human external experience, visual experience (of beauty), for example, and b) human internal experience, taste experience, for example.

To my understanding, these form the basis of not only our ancestors' aesthetic value and judgment but also their way of thinking, experiencing, and understanding about the world and it is out of the latter the former grows. In the eye of our ancestors, essentially, there is no clear distinction between human beings. They all share life, gender, emotion and so on. As a result, they unconsciously project their own body, their own lives, and their own emotion onto their outside world. This human identification with the outside world is the only way for our ancestors to experience and understand the world. The concept of beauty is the result of metaphorical mapping and it is embodied in the sense that it is the transfer or projection of sensory motor experience and activities.

The image or the ideographic character sheep, 羊 yang is an important radical in the composition of ideographic character 義 yi so that it plays an important role in the conceptualization of the character 義 yi.

Originally, the character 義 is an ideographic character made up of the pictograph 羊 (which is the image that looks like the head of a lamb with two horns on it), which is placed on the top and the character 我 wo, I, or me, indicating the personal self, which is placed at the bottom:



How can we further conceptualize beauty and why we say it is grounded in sensorimotor experience and activities? The answer can be found in the formations and compositions of a number of Chinese ideographs, all of which structurally and semantically contain the pictograph or the image of 羊 yang, sheep, as the basic radical or other important element and as sheep in these characters symbolizes beauty, these characters may totally or partially be used to define the concept beauty. Stated differently, these characters may in one way or another attribute to what beauty should be all about

Sheep is one of the most important animals that our ancestors farm and live on in the earliest time. The Chinese ideographic character 養/养 yang, to feed or live on, is made up of the image or radical 羊 yang, sheep, and the character 食 shi, food or eat and thus the association of these two elements comes to mean “to eat mutton.” What is more, 羊 and 養 share the same sound yang and therefore they can be used to mapped onto each other. In fact sheep is one of the farmed animals our ancestors live on in ancient time.

According to the dictionary of Oracle Bone Inscriptions by Xu Zhongshu (1981), the character 羊, sheep, is on the top in the list of all the farmed animals and after it come other animals such as pig, dog, ox, horse, and chicken, etc.

As sheep is tame, beautiful, and docile, and the meat is nice, it is borrowed to mean beauty and kindheartedness in the Chinese culture (Xu Zhongshu, 1981) In this light, it is believed that big and fat sheep is the most beautiful. (羊大为美) . In this way we have the ideograph 美 mei, (beautiful), which, structurally and semantically, is made up of 羊 (sheep) placed on the top and 大 (big or large) at the bottom:



So, a big sheep based on our sensorymotor experience and the experience of taste and sight in particular gives rise to the character and the abstract concept or 美, beauty.

First and foremost, with 美, beauty as the core, we have the semantic field based on the taste or what is earlier called the internal experience, in which all the relevant characters or concepts in one way or another share totally or partially the meaning of beauty and pleasantness.

羊/美 *Sheep/ Beauty as a Field* (on the Basis of the Experience of Taste):

美乃甘也 (Beauty as pleasant)

Beauty consists of 羊 yang, sheep and 大 da, big and fat sheep, is defined in terms of 甘 gan, pleasant, sweet (美乃甘也). According to Wang Yun/王筠 (1983), “If sheep is big, it will be naturally fat and pleasant” (羊大则肥美). According to Duan Yucai/段玉裁 (1989) pleasantness is one of the five tastes and of all the five tastes are 甘 gan (pleasant) comes to be the most important. And if sheep is big, it will be naturally fat and pleasant.

善乃美食也/善乃吉也 (Kind heartedness/ goodness as tasty food or propitiousness)

Structurally, 善 shan, kind-heartedness, goodness, pleasant, and love, is composed of sheep and mouth and it is defined as 吉 (祥) ji (xiang), lucky, propitious (善乃吉也). The combination and association of the mutton and mouth suggest the meaning of tasty food (善乃美食也). According to Zang Kehe (1995) and my own analysis, we may have the following semantic field centered around the concept beauty and kindheartedness (美/善).

膳乃美食也 (Meals as tasty food)

Structurally, 膳/善 shan, a meal is composed of 月 yue, flesh and 善 shan, tasty food and the character is defined as tasty food (膳乃美食也). Implication is beauty and kindness share the same meaning (美者善也).

甘/美乃吉也 (Pleasantness as tasty/propitiousness)

The character 甘 gan, pleasant, sweet, shares the meaning with the character 美. It is composed of mouth (口) and one (一) symbolizing the food in the mouth and the association of these two is defined as 美 mei, beauty (美乃吉也). The combination and association of the mouth and the food in the formation of this character suggest the meaning of food in the mouth and the taste is nice.

甜乃美也/ 知甘者乃甘 (The tongue knows what is Tasty)

The character 甜 tian shares the meaning with 美. It is composed of 舌 she, the tongue and 甘 gan, sweetness. The association of these elements suggests the meaning that the tongue knows sweetness of the food. (甜乃美也/ 知甘者也)

All these characters or metaphorical expressions are contained in the semantic field of beauty on the basis of the experience of taste. In this way, “the nonphysical is conceptualized in terms of the physical” or the abstract is understood in terms of the concrete entity. In doing so, the sensory motor experience or activity (taste) is projected onto the abstract concept beauty, which in turn symbolizes moral excellence or perfect virtue.

However, in semantic field centered around 美 mei, beauty and pleasant, we also find many characters / concepts in the Explanation of Chinese Characters that are grounded in human visual or what is earlier called external experience. The visual projections or mappings

are based on homophonic phenomenon, that is, most of these characters share similar or the same sound. Let us have a look at the following.

美 mei, beauty as a Field (Based on Visual Experience)

羊大则肥美(Big and fat sheep as beauty) (Duan Yucai, 1989)

The character 美, mei, beauty/pleasant is composed of 羊 sheep and 大 big. The compound character is defined in terms of big sheep as beauty. (羊大则肥美)

嫵 beauty/ pleasant in appearance, composed of 女 (female) and 美 (beauty), is defined/conceptualized in terms of a beautiful woman (The character 女 originally is an image of the outline of the figure of a female) (色好也).

媚者色好也 (Beauty as nice and pleasant appearance)

The character 媚 shares the same pronunciation with the character 美 mei, beauty, therefore it shares the same meaning of beauty. It means nice and beautiful in appearance, composed of 女 nǚ, female and 眉 mei, an eyebrow (which is composed of the pictograph of an eyebrow and the pictograph of an eye. In ancient time, it is often through the visual experience of a lady's eyebrow that beauty is judged.) and therefore the compound is defined as attractive appearance 色好也.

儀/義者威也 (Appropriateness as dignified bearing)

The character 儀 is composed of 人 and 義 which in turn is made up of 羊 (standing for beauty) and as it shared the same pronunciation with 義 and as 義 is an important component part in the form of this character, it shares the same meaning with 義. The association and interaction of 人 and 義 in the structure of this compound suggest that a person should act appropriately or should do what is right in the society. However, the appropriateness in this context, according to Confucius, means that one should have dignified bearing in appearance. As the character 儀/義 has 羊 yang, sheep and therefore 美 mei, beauty, in its formation, the character at least partially has the meaning of dignified bearing or manner as beauty.

All of the characters or concepts mentioned above are in one way or another conceptually and etymologically connected with the character and concept of 美, beauty, which in turn has to do with yang, sheep. These cross-mappings demonstrated that the characters/concepts of beauty and pleasantness are grounded in human visual experience.

Etymologically, however, 我 wo, the Chinese self which is placed at the bottom of the character 義, can serve both as the objective me and the agent I in the relationship with 美 mei, beauty (which is on the top of 義 and symbolized by the pictographical radical 羊, a sheep). We can infer from the interaction between beauty and I or the self in this context with the meaning of, on the one hand, "I should beautify myself" and on the other "I should beautify others." In this light, the concept of the self is a contextualized self: being appropriate to the self (宜我) and being appropriate to the others or the context (宜人/境).

In this light, if a person attains 儀/義 yi, he or she should first be appropriate to himself or herself and this forms the precondition for attaining one's personal identity (Hall & Ames, 2005). Interpreted in the sense of Confucius, to achieve 義 and achieve one's personal self is a process of beautifying the self and beautifying others, so as to achieve the beautification of the whole society (義者 "各美其美, 美人之美, 美美与共"), to borrow Fei Xiaotong's

words (Fei Xiaotong, 2007). In fact, being appropriate is first of all a matter of self-cultivation or self-perfection. Self-cultivation or be appropriate to oneself is considered to be the precondition for the achievement of the beautification of others or the context.

According to Confucius, appropriateness to the self and the context is both a social process. This answer can be found in what Confucius said regarding to this social nature:

A man of ren while wanting to establish him-or herself also establishes others, while wanting to be outstanding him- or herself also makes others outstanding. To be able to judge others by what to ourselves may be called the full scope of 仁 (ren). (Confucius, Analects 6)

The Concept of Beauty as Perfect Virtue (美者善/德也)

Obviously, the concept 美 mei, beauty, is a very important concept for an individual self to attain the self, therefore an important concept of Chinese philosophy. Then what is beauty conceptualized as in moral terms in the Chinese social life?

The answer lies in the formations or compositions of a number of Chinese ideographs, all of which structurally and semantically contain the pictograph 羊 yang, sheep, either as basic radicals or as other important elements and as the character 羊 yang, sheep, in these characters symbolizes beauty, these characters or concepts may totally or partially be used to define the concept of beauty. Stated differently, these characters or concepts may in one way or another contribute to the formation of a semantic field centered around the character 羊, which in one way or another shows us what the concept of beauty should be all about.

In this field we may find, among others, 善 (love or kind-heartedness), 犧 (sacrifice of the self), 群 (collectivism), 羞 (shame), etc. The fine moral quality of these characters or metaphorical expression each in its own way constitutes what a Chinese person is expected to attain in order to become a person of perfect virtue. Stated differently, to possess these fine qualities will for sure enable an individual to attain his or her (social) self. To establish oneself, one should become both the most beautiful and kind-hearted person (至善至美) as the formation of characters 善 and 美 suggest and as the metaphorical mapping goes “美者善也” (beauty as kindness and goodness).

The Chinese concept shan, 善, kind-hearted, is just as an important philosophical concept as the concept 美 mei, beauty. In defining this character, it is partially mapped onto beauty as it shares the same pictograph 羊 in form.

The character 善 is the original form of 膳 (discussed in 5.2). In the Bronze Inscriptions it consists of one mutton part (羊) and two speech parts (言), symbolizing everybody praises mutton. After 善 took on the general sense of good, another character 膳 was made to mean the original meaning. As sheep is tame and docile, the character 善 means kindhearted and loving, opposite to evil (恶). Used as a verb, it means to love, to cherish, etc. According to classic Chinese scholars, 善 shan has the meaning of 美 mei, beauty and we have the phrase “complete kind-heartedness and complete beauty” (至善至美) as an ideal moral standard for human beings to achieve in their life time.

As a pluralistic metaphorical character and concept, 義 yi, which is metaphorically used to understand the concept the self can be conceptualized in or mapped onto a number of characters or concepts on the bases of sharing the same radical 羊 yang, the sheep. And all of the metaphorical mappings suggest what beauty in the Chinese cultural context possibly contains. The following are some examples, in which the metaphorical character or metaphorical concept of 義 yi, is mapped onto the concept of self, and as yi can partially be mapped onto beauty, yi may in one way or another be mapped onto the following characters or concepts.

義者我也 (the self as yi, appropriateness)
 義者宜也 (yi as appropriateness) (homophonically based)
 義者美也 (yi partially as beauty) (based on the same root or radical)
 義者我美 (yi partially as the beautification of self)
 義者成人之美 (yi partially as the beautification of others)
 義者宜我 (yi as appropriateness to self)
 義者宜境 (yi as appropriateness to the context).
 義為美德 (yi is perfect virtue)
 美者羊也 (beauty as sheep) (based on the same root, sheep)
 美為大羊 (beauty as big and fat sheep).
 美(德)者善也 (virtue partially as love for others) (based on the same root, sheep)
 美(德)者群也 (virtue as collectivism) (based on the same root)
 美/義者犧牲 (virtue as the sacrifice of the self) (based on the same root, sheep)

The formation of the character 義/犧 suggests that one should sacrifice the self, even lay down his or her life for the achievement of 義/义(what is right, just as the saying goes, “舍生取義/义 ” or “杀身成仁.”

美(德)者羞也 (virtue as having the sense of shame for wrong doings) (based on the same root, sheep)

The sense of shame for wrong doings in the society is considered to be the origin of 義 yi, what is right to do. As the classic saying goes, “Human beings innately have the sense of shame for wrong doings” (“人皆有羞恶之心”).

(美)德者得也 (Those who acquire perfect virtue are benefited or achieve the self.) (homophonically based)

義者美德 (善+群+犧+羞.etc.) (yi as perfect virtue: love for others, harmony with the collective, sacrifice of the self, having the sense of shame for wrong doings, etc.)

義者 “各美其美，美人之美，美美与共” (yi as the beautification of the self and the beautification of others, and beautification of the whole society) (Fei Xiaotong, 2007)

義者立己立人(yi as the establishment of the self and the establishment of others)

義者意义也 (yi as being meaningful and significant) (homophonically based)

(This means those who accomplished appropriateness are meaningful and significant persons.)

我者立己立人 (The self as the establishment of the self and the establishment of others.)

Obviously, in characterizing and conceptualizing the self, *yi*, appropriateness is most important. It means the contextualization of the self, and at the same time, in doing so, the conceptualization of beauty is just as important. And related to the concept of beauty, the conceptualization of kindness, collectivism, the sacrifice of the self, and shame for wrong doings, etc. all contribute to the conceptualization of beauty. The character *yi* grows out of beauty, which emerges from sensorimotor or bodily experience. Even characters such as kind-heartedness, collectivism, sacrifice, and shame also grow out of sensorimotor or bodily experience. The characters are all metaphorical expressions and philosophical concepts. What is more, these metaphors are all grounded in bodily experience and activities in their interaction with the physical and social environment.

Conclusion

“The physical world is what it is. Cultures are what they are. People are what they are” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 181). Human concepts do not correspond only to physical reality but to the interactions between/among human bodies (including emotions, feelings, intuitions, perceptions, and personal values and self construal, and so on) and the cultural, social and the physical realities. So much so that, concepts as metaphorical in nature can be culture specific. And it can vary from person to person as Guo Jingchun (1986), a scholar in the Jin Dynasty, states, “To see the world through “I,” the world must have the color of ‘I,’” and “The things in the world may not be different themselves, they are different because we see them different.” With the orientation of harmony between man and nature, in the Chinese culture, the concept of persons and the self are looked at as contextualized: an individual is highly conceptualized as part of both the physical and the social environment. That is, the self is part of nature, part of others, or the self is simply in relationship as discussed in this paper. Looked at in this perspective, Chinese philosophy is necessarily embodied and experiential in nature.

As a unique metaphorical and embodied conceptual system, the Chinese characters show us the experiential nature of the Chinese mind. It shows us the experiential nature of the Chinese cultural philosophical tradition. Bodies and the physical and cultural environment impose a structure on the Chinese experience in their interaction with or accommodation to their outside world.

In this perspective, human understanding about the world is necessarily relative to our embodied concepts and cultural concepts. “Human concepts are metaphorical in nature and involve imaginative understanding of one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 194). “...which metaphor we have, and what they mean depend on the nature of our bodies, our interactions in the physical environment, and our social and cultural practices” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 245).

This embodied and experiential nature of the Chinese philosophy runs directly counter to the Western (analytical) philosophical tradition which is transcendent and rational in nature. The Western rational thought and reasoning separate man from the body (perception, bodily movements, sensorimotor experience, feelings, emotions, and so on) and humans are capable of knowing everything about the mind simply by self-reflection. Ideas, concepts, and formal

rules are planted in the mind of human beings and cannot be acquired via experience (Letter to Meresenne, July 23, 1641).

Both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, however, may miss something. Only through cooperation between these two, may we possibly create a prosperous future.

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