# Multimodal Manifestation of Conceptual Metaphors in Multimedia Communication

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In the light of conceptual metaphor theory of cognitive linguistics, this paper discusses the multimodal manifestation of conceptual metaphors in TV advertising. It makes an in-depth analysis of an educational advertisement on "Chinese Virtues" screened on China Central Television Channel 4 (CCTV-4). It shows that this TV commercial is a "conceptual blend" constructed with visual and aural, as well as verbal, components, but at its core is a conceptual metaphor: Virtue is water. This metaphor finds its roots in the Laozi, from which one line of the verbal message is quoted: "True goodness is like water" (上善若水). Thus, the whole commercial unfolds on the images of water: the snow-capped mountains, drops of water dripping from the tips of icicles, streams of water running down the mountain, terraced and flat rice fields submerged in water, dashing water of a river rushing down a waterfall, two branches of rivers merging into one main river course, and sea waves surging and rolling. It is argued that these visual images metaphorically reinforce the verbal message: Virtue originates in "drips" and "drops," "flows" from the "heart-field," harmonizes in communication ("cross-flowing"), and prospers in eternity (of the ocean and sea).

During the past two decades, cognitive linguistic studies have shown that human minds are embodied in the cultural world, and thinking and reasoning are largely metaphorical and imaginative, shaped by bodily and cultural experiences (e.g., Gibbs, 1994, 2006; Johnson, 1987; Kövecses, 2002, 2005; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). According to the conceptual metaphor theory of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is not merely a figure of speech, but also a figure of thought, giving rise to understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. The rise of the cognitive linguistic theory of conceptual metaphor has seen an increasing interest in and necessity for the study of nonverbal and multimodal metaphors (e.g., Forceville, 1996, 2002, 2005, 2006; Yu, 2007c). If metaphor fundamentally characterizes thinking, and is only secondarily manifested in verbal form, it should be able to produce nonverbal manifestations as well as the purely verbal ones (Forceville, 2006).

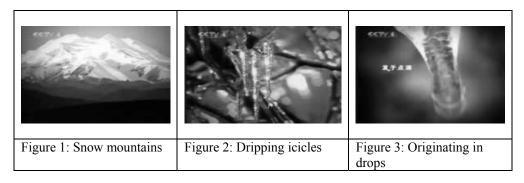
In the light of conceptual metaphor theory of cognitive linguistics, this paper discusses the multimodal manifestation of conceptual metaphors in TV advertising. It makes an indepth analysis of an educational advertisement on "Chinese Virtues" screened on China Central Television Channel 4 (CCTV-4). It shows that this TV advertisement is constructed with visual and aural, as well as verbal, components, but at its core is a conceptual metaphor: Virtue is water. This metaphor finds its roots in the Laozi, from which one line of the verbal message is quoted: "True goodness is like water" (上善若水). Thus, the whole advertisement unfolds on the moving images of water, accompanied by special musical effects: the snow-capped mountain, drops of water dripping from the tips of icicles, streams of water running down the mountain, terraced and flat rice fields submerged in water, dashing water of a river rushing down a waterfall, two branches of rivers merging into one main river course, and sea

waves surging and rolling. These moving images, which show a long process of natural change from "drips and drops" to "seas and oceans," interact with and reinforce the verbal messages that speak of Chinese virtues in terms of a river with "a remote source" and "a long course" that "flows forever" into eternity.

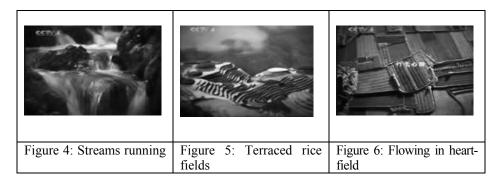
In the remainder of this paper, I will first present a synopsis of the TV commercial in section 2. I will then analyze the manifestation of the conceptual metaphor *virtue is water* in the interaction between the three modes in section 3. I will reach a brief conclusion in section 4.

## **Synopsis**

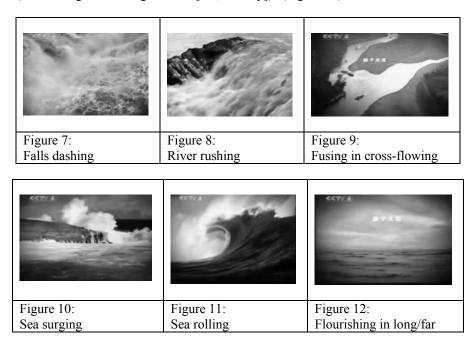
The TV advertisement begins with a long shot of snow-capped mountains that look lofty and towering (Figure 1), when the audio track plays a symphonic music that starts light and slow, giving rise to a sense of "peace in solemnity" before the sunrise in the early morning. The long shot shifts into a close-up of a part of a tree coated in ice but the focus is on a few glittering icicles hanging from the twigs of the tree (Figure 2). The glistening of the hanging icicles and the ice coat against the black color of the tree branches and twigs over the blue background seems to suggest that the sun is emerging from the horizon. The shot now focuses on the very tip of one icicle as a drop of water is dripping from it and the music imitates the clear sound of the dripping drop hitting the water surface below. At the same time, the verbal message shows on the screen: "发于点滴 (Originating in drips and drops)" (Figure 3).



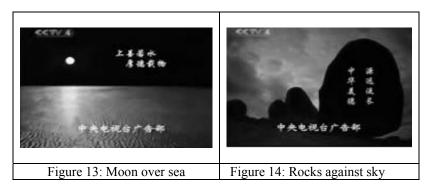
The next shot is a close-up showing a brook or stream running its course down the mountain, the descending water being separated by rocks and boulders here and there along the course (Figure 4). At this point the audio track also imitates the sound of running water. The screen then changes into a long shot from a high angle showing terraced fields, submerged under water, over green hills while white clouds are floating past (Figure 5). It is already broad day. The next scene is that of a bird's-eye view of rice fields over an expanse of flat land, as the verbal message shows in the middle of the screen: "行于心田 (Moving/flowing in the 'heart-fields' [i.e., the heart])" (Figure 6).



The rice fields then fade into dashing water (Figure 7), which then turns into water rushing by a huge rock (Figure 8). As the music of strings gives way to a peaceful melody of a flute, the close-up of rushing water fades into a long shot of a bird's-eye view of a river where two branches merge into the main course and the verbal message is shown: "融于交流 (Fusing [i.e., harmonizing] in 'cross-flowing' [i.e., communication])" (Figure 9). The scene then changes into that of the blue sea where a surging wave strikes the coastal rocks, sending gigantic white splashes high into the air (Figure 10). It then changes into a close-up of a high rolling wave (Figure 11). When the high wave fades into a vast expanse of sea water below the clouded sky, which seems to be getting dim and dark, the verbal message appears: "盛于久远 (Flourishing in the 'long and far' [i.e., eternity])" (Figure 12).



The sky then becomes darkened with a full silver moon hanging against the black backdrop above the shining, silvery water of a calm and peaceful ocean. Also against the dark sky appears the verbal message: "上善若水,厚德载物 (True goodness is like water, with profound [lit. thick] virtues carrying [i.e., nurturing] all things)" (Figure 13). The final scene, shot from a low camera angle, shows some huge, dark rocks against the light, gray sky across which clouds are flying. The scene is suggestive of the dawn of another day. On the biggest rock to the right side is the verbal message: "中华美德,源远流长 (Chinese virtues have a remote source [i.e., a long history] and a long flow [i.e., it flows forever])" (Figure 14). As the verbal messages on Figures 13 and 14 are displayed on the screen, a male voice speaks them out, slowly and firmly, accompanied by the music. That is, the final verbal messages are presented both visually and aurally.



Analysis

In this section I analyze the multimodal manifestation of the central metaphor around which the TV commercial revolves and unfolds. This central metaphor is: *Virtue is water*, or, more specifically: *Chinese virtue is water*, which is rooted deeply in traditional Chinese culture. In this Chinese TV advertisement for public good, the metaphor is manifested in both visual and aural modes, as well as verbal modes.

Visually, the commercial displays a natural process of change as follows:

Snow/ice 
$$\rightarrow$$
 Drop  $\rightarrow$  Stream  $\rightarrow$  River  $\rightarrow$  Ocean

That is, initially, it is a process of transformation from solid to liquid, and then it is a process of accumulation from drips and drops of water to the vast multitude of the sea and ocean. Along this process of accumulation are the following two processes of change:

1. Temporal: Daybreak → Day → Night → Dawn 2. Geographic: Mountain → Hill → Plain → Sea

The first process of change suggests the temporal cycle of day and night, which however can be interpreted metonymically (i.e., part for whole) as standing for the larger cycle in time; for instance, the four seasons of a year, and for the more abstract concept of eternity. For the second process of change, the geographic features characterize China, which, generally speaking, has higher altitudes in its west, with plateaus and mountain ranges (including the world's highest mountain system, the Himalaya, and highest peak, Mount Everest), and lower altitudes in its east, with vast plains. That is why its two main rivers, the Yangtze River and the Yellow River, flow from west to east before they pour into the Pacific Ocean. In the audio track, the musical melody that imitates or accompanies the sounds of dripping water from icicles, a descending brook, dashing falls and torrents, calm merging of river courses, and surging and rolling sea, helps intensify the visual effect of a variety of water movements created by the moving images.

It is, however, the verbal messages shown on the screen that, step by step, surfaces the underlying conceptual metaphor of *virtue is water*, by which the abstract concept of virtue is talked about, as well as visually presented, in terms of physical mass of water. The verbal messages, consisting of eight lines, are divided into two groups: the target concept of the metaphor 'virtue' is implicit in the first group of four lines, but explicitly expressed in the second group of four lines. Here are the four lines that compose the first group:

## 1. Group One: Virtue

- a 发于点滴 "Originating in drips and drops" (Figure 3)
- b. 行于心田 "Functioning in the heart" (Figure 6)
- c. 融于交流 "Fusing in communication" (Figure 9)
- d. 盛于久远 "Flourishing in eternity" (Figure 12)

These four lines, all without subject, are composed of an intransitive verb and a prepositional phrase indicating manner or location. Table 1 explicates the manifestation of the conceptual metaphor, *virtue is water*, in both verbal and visual modes.

As shown in the table, the visual images and at least the first line of the verbal message seem to dictate *water* as the subject here. However, water is but the source concept of virtue, the target concept, as will become clear in the second group of verbal messages. Thanks to the help of visual images, the manifestation of this metaphor is then shown below:

#### 2. Virtue is Water

- a. which originates in drips and drops
- b. which flows in the (rice) fields
- c. which merges in cross-flowing
- d. which abounds in the sea and ocean

That is to say, virtue originates in small amounts, functions in the heart (lit. the heart-field), fuses in communication or exchanges of ideas, and flourishes in eternity.

Metaphor		Verbal		Visual	
Target	Source	Verb	Prepositional phrase	Images on the screen	
VIRTUE	WATER	发 (fa) start originate	于点滴 (yu dian- di) in drips and drops	a drop of water dripping from the tip of an icicle	
VIRTUE	WATER	行 (xing) go flow function	于心田 (yu xin- tian) (lit. in the heart-field) in the heart	an expanse of rice fields	
VIRTUE	WATER	融 (rong) merge fuse harmonize	于交流 (yu jiao- liu) (lit. in cross- flowing) in communication	two branches of a river merging into one main course	
VIRTUE	WATER	盛 ( <i>sheng</i> ) abound flourish	于久远 (yu jiu- yuan) (lit. in long- far)	a vast expanse of ocean	

Table 1 Explication of the Metaphor in Verbal and Visual Modes

As shown in Table 1, the Chinese heart, which is culturally conceived of as the locus of moral sense and character in particular and the central faculty of cognition in general (Yu, 2007a, b), is sometimes called "heart-field", i.e., heart is a field. It is a soil metaphor that often appears in combination with, for instance, the plant and water metaphors, which together fall in the source domain of agriculture. According to HYDCD (2000, p. 1128), 心田 (xin-tian, or, "heart-field") is originally a term in Buddhism referring to the heart. Buddhism maintains that the heart stores the seeds of good and evil that would grow under suitable circumstances, just like a field in which both crops and weeds would grow. It is said that the Buddha taught the disciples that the heart is a piece of land where you will get fruits in return for whatever seeds you have sowed. Here are some sentential examples:

in eternity

#### 3. Heart is a Field

a. 我把环保种子播撒在他的心田里。

Wo ba huan-bao zhongzi bosa zai tadexin-tian li. I PRT environment-protection seeds sowed at his heart-field in "I sowed the environment-protection seeds in his heart (lit. heart-field)."

有时她那短暂的微笑,真会令我的心田开出温暖的花朵呢! weixiao, zhen Youshi duanzan de ta na hui ling sometimes she that transient MOD smile really would make wode xin-tian kai-chu wennuan de huaduo ne! heart-field bloom-with warm MOD flowers PRT "Sometimes that transient smile of hers would really make my heart (lit. heart-field) bloom with warm flowers!"

## c. 她那无助的感觉一波又一波地涌进我的心田。

Ta na wu-zhu de ganjue yi bo de you yi bo she that feeling one wave no-help MOD again one wave MOD jin wode xin-tian. yong into my heart-field surge

"That hopeless feeling of hers surged wave after wave into my heart (lit. heart-field)."

## d. 如同泉涌的泪潮,畅快地洗涤着我的心田。

de lei-chao, changkuai de xidi-zhe Rutong quan yong like spring gushing MOD tear-flood free-happy MOD cleanse-DUR wode xin-tian. heart-field my

"The flood of tears, like gushing spring water, is cleansing my heart (lit. heart-field) free from any inhibitions."

# e. 他的话似四月的惊雷,响彻了我封闭幽暗的心田。

le Tade siyue de xiang che sudden-thunder reverberate across PER his words like April MOD wo fengbi vou'an de xin-tian. my closed dark MOD heart-field

"His words, like a sudden clap of thunder in April, reverberated over that closed dark heart (lit. heart-field) of mine."

As in 3-a, ideas or thoughts are "seeds", and to communicate ideas or thoughts to other people, or to educate them, is to "sow the seeds" into their "heart-field". The seeds sowed into the "heart-field" will grow, blossom, and bear fruits (of earlier education). Thus, example 3-a involves some metaphorical mappings from the source to the target: Sower → Educator; Seeds → Ideas/Thoughts; Sowing → Communicating/Educating; Field → Heart of the educated; Expected harvest  $\rightarrow$  Expected result. In example 3-b, the heart is the seat of feelings or emotions. Happy and warm feelings are "flowers" growing out of the "heart-field". In Chinese, the idiom 心花怒放 (xinhua nufang ["heart-flowers wildly-blossom"]) is a common metaphorical expression of happiness (see Yu, 1998). In this case, the cause for the instant bloom of the "flowers", i.e., the "transient smile of hers," is the much-needed "nourishment" for the plants. Example 3-c describes the state of empathy, i.e., the sharing of one's feeling by another. Here, one person's feeling of helplessness is water that "surges" into the "heart-field" of another person. It shows that true understanding and sympathy are established upon the connection of the two hearts through which feelings and thoughts in one person's heart can "flow" into that of another. The example involves various metaphorical mappings: Field → Heart; Water → Feeling; Way of water moving → Way of feeling experienced; Force of water → Strength of feeling; Water flowing from one field into another → Empathy. The metaphor here is structured by multiple image schemas such as *containers*, link, force, and source-path-goal. In 3-d, the narrator is crying, and the tears, like gushing

spring water, are "purifying" his or her "heart-field." It can be expected that, in both 3-c and 3-d, something positive will grow out of the "heart-field" being "irrigated." These examples may have deep roots in ancient Chinese thought, reminiscent of Mencius' similar metaphors for moral sense and character (see Yu, 2007a, 2007b). In 3-e, it is clear that the "closed" container that is "dark" inside refers to the whole heart while the "heart-field" is but the "bottom" of that container. In this example, the narrator seems to have both heaven and earth in the heart, which is conceived of as microcosmic of the whole world (Yu, 2007a; 2007b).

Now, let us turn to the second group of verbal messages, which is also vocalized and which makes explicit the metaphor *virtue is water* or *Chinese virtue is water*. The four lines are displayed on Figures 13 and 14, with two lines on each figure:

- 4. a. 上善若水, 厚德载物 (on Figure 13)
  - "True (lit. upper) goodness is like water, with profound (lit. thick) virtues carrying (i.e. nurturing) all things."
  - b. 中华美德,源远流长 (on Figure 14)
    "Chinese virtues have a long history (lit. a remote source) and will flow forever (lit. for long)."

As in 4-a, 善 (shan) and 德 (de) are synonymous in this case. While de is a noun meaning "virtue," shan is primarily an adjective meaning "good" and "virtuous." In this case it means "being good" or "being virtuous." Both shan and de are qualified in terms of a spatial metaphor. Being good is being "up," namely, "Good is up.". The dimensional adjective hou "thick" here indicates a great amount of virtue. At the same time, however, hou "thick" can means "kind," "magnanimous," "generous," etc., which are apt modifiers of de ("virtue") too. Although "True goodness is like water," strictly speaking, is a case of simile, this simile is embedded in the larger context of multimodal (primarily visual and verbal, and to some extent aural) manifestation of metaphorical mappings. These mappings are combined into a "complex metaphor" (Grady, 1997a; 1997b; 2005).

5. History of Chinese Virtue is River of Water

River of water → History of Chinese virtue

a. River → History

b. Water → Chinese virtue

c. Source of river being far away → History beginning long ago

d. Long course of river → Long course of history

At a more abstract level the complex metaphor, history of Chinese virtue is river of water, involves two "primary metaphors" (Grady, 1997a; 1997b; 2005): (a) Passing time is moving object, and (b) Abstract quality is physical substance, with the mappings shown below:

6. a. Moving object → Passing time b. Physical substance → Abstract quality

These two primary metaphors are widespread or even universal in nature. The image schema that structures the metaphor *history of Chinese virtue is river of water* is *source-path-goal*.

Chinese virtues grow stronger and last forever, just like a river, which originates in drips and drops from melting ice and snow but, after a long process of merging and accumulating, would flow into the sea and ocean, which represent, metonymically and metaphorically, such abstract concepts of profundity and eternity. That is, Chinese virtues, with a long history of growth, will last forever in profundity and eternity.

As mentioned earlier, the metaphor *Chinese virtue is water* is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. In fact, the verbal message 上善若水 ("True goodness is like water.") is cited from Chapter Eight of the *Laozi* or *Daode Jing* written by Laozi about two thousand and five hundred years ago. There, it goes:

#### 7. 上善若水。水善利万物而不争,处众人之所恶,故几于道。

"True goodness is like water. Water is good in that it benefits the ten thousand things but never vies for profits, and that it stays in the low places that all others find loathsome, and therefore it is close to the Way."

In other words, water is good and virtuous in that it nurtures all living things but never fights for its own profits. It stays humble in the "low" places that others dislike and do not care to be in. Because it is helpful, modest, and humble, water is close to the Way, which is, according to Daoism, the Law of Nature for the heaven and earth or the universe.

The metaphor Chinese virtue is water, I argue, reflects the fundamental idea that has dominated Chinese thought from the dawn of its history, namely, "the unity of man and Heaven." Ancient Chinese philosophy advocated the ideas that man and nature are a unified one (天人合一[tian ren heyi]) and man and the universe correspond to each other (天人对应 [tian ren duiying]). The words nature and universe, both used to translate the Chinese word tian (天) that primarily refers to the sky or heaven, should be interpreted as to mean "the external world" (see, e.g., Zhang & Rose, 2001, Ch. 4). Thus, for instance, the Daoists conceived of the human body as "a microcosm of the universe" (p. 86). They "always tried to understand what was happening inside the body by comparing and contrasting it with what was happening outside in nature" (Chia & Chia, 1990, p. 14). To them, "The microcosm is a mirror image of the macrocosm," and "The universe within is the same as the universe without" (p. 15). Therefore, one can understand the entire universe by understanding one's own body and vice versa. In the metaphor *Chinese virtue is water* under discussion, a quality of humans, virtue, is expressed visually and verbally in terms of water, one of the five elements (the remaining four being wood, fire, earth, and metal) of which the universe is composed according to ancient Chinese philosophy. The metaphor thus conceptually links the human as the microcosm on the one hand and the universe as the macrocosm on the other, and suggests the unity and correspondence between the two.

#### Conclusion

In this paper I have analyzed a specific example of multimodal manifestation of a conceptual metaphor, *Virtue is water*, in TV advertising. As I have shown, the metaphor is manifested through the interaction between visual, aural, and verbal (including vocal) discourse. The visual and aural modes initially interact with each other to present a long

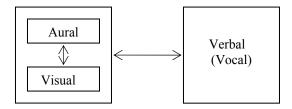


Figure 15. The interaction between and combination of the three modes

natural process in which drips and drops of water accumulate into vast multitude of seas and oceans. Their combination then interacts with the verbal mode to realize the multimodal manifestation of the conceptual metaphor *Virtue is water*. The interaction between and combination of the three modes are summarized by Figure 15.

The visual discourse consists of a series of moving images involving water: drops of water dripping from icicles, a brook flowing descending the mountain, terraced and flat rice fields soaked in water, dashing water of falls and torrents, branches of rivers merging into one main river course, sea waves surging and rolling, and so on. However, the visual discourse, combined with aural discourse of music, which is either imitative or suggestive of various sound effects of water movements, only presents the source domain concept of water. Its mapping onto the target domain concept of *virtue* is realized through the interaction between the visual and aural discourse on the one hand and the verbal (and vocal) discourse on the other. As in Figure 6, when the verbal message that literally means "Going/flowing in the heart-field" appears on top of the image of patches of rice fields, sensitive viewers should begin to realize that the subject-less verbal phrase refers to something more than just water because in Chinese, "heart-field" (心田[xintian]) really refers to the heart or, more abstractly, the central faculty of cognition. As in Figure 9, when the verbal message that literally means "Merging in cross-flowing" appears on the scene where two branches of river merge into one main course, the viewer can tell that the subject of the verbal phrase is not water despite the images of the river because in Chinese, "cross-flowing" (交流[jiaoliu]), while a water metaphor, really means "communication," in which people's words, and the thoughts and feelings they represent, "cross-flow" between them. However, what is actually the subject that is being talked about is not made clear until the end of the TV commercial (Figures 13 and 14). It is then and there that the target concept of the metaphor, Chinese virtue, is made explicit and the metaphorical mapping is completed. It is also at this point that the critical piece of the puzzle is in place, and the whole TV commercial begins to make a lot of sense as a metaphor realized in three modes: visual, aural, and verbal (including vocal). That is a case of multimodal manifestation of a conceptual metaphor.

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