

A Study on Conceptual Metaphors in the Commentary of the English Promotional Film *Encountering Love At West Lake* from an Intercultural Perspective

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Abstract

In the context of globalization, promotional films are a key tool for cultural diplomacy and soft power projection. This study examines how conceptual metaphors (CMs) in the English promotional film *Encountering Love at West Lake* facilitate the cross-cultural communication of Chinese cultural narratives. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this research employs textual analysis to identify and classify CMs (e.g., LOVE IS A JOURNEY, WEST LAKE IS A MIRROR) within the film's commentary. It investigates how these metaphors encode traditional Chinese values such as harmony and perseverance, and how they function from an intercultural perspective to bridge—or occasionally complicate—cultural understanding. The findings reveal that CMs serve as effective cognitive bridges, enhancing emotional resonance and making abstract cultural concepts accessible to international audiences. The study concludes that the strategic use of metaphor is crucial for effective cultural promotion, offering practical implications for the translation and localization of cultural content and contributing to methodologies in intercultural discourse analysis.

Keywords: conceptual Metaphor, cross-cultural communication, English Promotional Film, *Encountering Love at West Lake*

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In today's globalized landscape, promotional discourse has emerged as a pivotal medium for cultural communication and tourism promotion. Through strategically crafted narratives, promotional materials not only showcase regional attractions but also convey deeper cultural values and identities. Within such discourse, metaphor serves as a fundamental cognitive and linguistic mechanism that shapes how audiences perceive and interpret cultural messages. By linking abstract concepts to concrete experiences, metaphors enhance relatability and emotional engagement, making them especially significant in cross-cultural contexts where shared references may be limited. Furthermore, in an era dominated by digital media, audiovisual materials—such as promotional films—play an increasingly vital role in transcending linguistic and cultural barriers, offering rich multimodal resources for intercultural communication.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), provides the theoretical foundation for this study. CMT posits that metaphors are not merely rhetorical embellishments but essential structures of human thought, enabling individuals to comprehend abstract ideas through more tangible, experiential domains. Metaphors facilitate cognitive mapping between source domains (e.g., journeys, containers, or natural elements) and target domains (e.g., love, time, or cultural identity), thereby organizing conceptual systems and influencing worldview. In cross-cultural communication, metaphors can act as powerful bridges when they tap into universal human experiences, yet they may also become barriers if they rely too heavily on culture-specific knowledge. Thus, analyzing metaphorical patterns offers valuable insights into how cultural values are communicated and received across linguistic boundaries.

The English promotional film *Encountering Love at West Lake* serves as an insightful case study within this framework. Produced under the auspices of the Hangzhou Municipal Tourism Commission, the film blends scenic visuals of West Lake—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—with narratives of timeless romance, aiming to engage international audiences emotionally and culturally. Despite the growing body of research on conceptual metaphors, limited attention has been paid to their use in English translations of Chinese promotional materials, particularly in audiovisual contexts where verbal and visual modes interact. This gap is noteworthy given China’s ongoing “Cultural Going Global” strategy and the increased production of English-language media for international consumption. By examining this film, the study addresses the need for more nuanced analyses of metaphor in intercultural, multimodal discourse.

Scholars have increasingly emphasized the role of metaphor in shaping cross-cultural understanding, yet several key areas remain underexplored. This study focuses specifically on identifying the conceptual metaphors utilized in the English commentary of *Encountering Love at West Lake*, examining how these metaphors reflect distinct Chinese cultural values—such as harmony, perseverance, and spiritual transformation—and analyzing the ways in which they either facilitate or complicate intercultural communication. These research priorities align with the broader need to investigate how culturally embedded metaphors are negotiated within translated promotional texts.

In light of Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal work, this study aims to conduct a systematic metaphorical analysis of the film’s English commentary, identifying and categorizing prevalent conceptual metaphors and evaluating their effectiveness in bridging cultural meanings. The research seeks to contribute not only to the theoretical understanding of metaphor in cognitive and intercultural studies but also to practical applications in the design of translated promotional materials. By revealing how metaphors function in audiovisual narratives, the study offers insights for cultural policymakers, media producers, and translators engaged in crafting cross-cultural messages.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 introduces the research background, and its purpose and significance; Section 2 reviews relevant literature on conceptual metaphor theory and its application in promotional discourse; Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework and methodology adopted; Section 4 presents a detailed analysis of conceptual metaphors identified in the film’s commentary; Section 5 discusses the implications of these metaphors for cross-cultural communication and cultural promotion; and Section 6 concludes with reflections on the findings and suggestions for future research.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of Research

This research transcends academic inquiry, bearing practical implications for cultural diplomacy and international communication strategies. In an era marked by geopolitical tensions and cultural misunderstandings, the ability to articulate cultural values through communicatively effective means is paramount. Conceptual metaphors serve as invaluable tools in this endeavor. By examining metaphors in *Encountering Love at West Lake*, this study contributes to metaphor studies while offering actionable insights for policymakers, cultural practitioners, and media producers.

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

This research advances conceptual metaphor theory by applying Lakoff and Johnson’s framework to a novel context: English-language promotional films targeting global audiences. While prior studies have explored metaphors in political discourse, advertising, and literature, their role in cross-cultural cinematic narratives remains underexplored. This gap is addressed by demonstrating how metaphors mediate between cultural specificities and universal appeal. Interdisciplinary in scope, it integrates cognitive linguistics, media studies, and cultural diplomacy, transcending disciplinary silos.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

The findings inform the creation of cultural promotional content. Identifying effective metaphors—such as those centered on love or nature—can guide scriptwriting for future films, while strategies for framing cultural allusions (e.g., *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*) through metaphor enhance cross-cultural comprehension. These insights are particularly valuable for Chinese cities and institutions leveraging cultural tourism to boost economic growth and foster international goodwill.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies on Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), introduced by Lakoff and Johnson in their groundbreaking work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), fundamentally redefined metaphor not merely as a rhetorical device but as a pervasive cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are understood and experienced. Lakoff and Johnson argued that human

thought processes are largely metaphorical, structuring intangible ideas—such as time, emotion, and relationships—in terms of more concrete, sensorimotor experiences like journeys, containers, or spatial orientations. This process, known as cross-domain mapping, involves systematically projecting structure from a source domain onto a target domain, thereby shaping reasoning, judgment, and communication.

CMT classifies metaphors into three central types: structural metaphors, which provide rich, organized frameworks for conceptualization (e.g., “LIFE IS A JOURNEY”); orientational metaphors, which draw on spatial relationships to convey abstract qualities (e.g., “HAPPY IS UP,” “SAD IS DOWN”); and ontological metaphors, which treat abstract phenomena as entities or substances that can be quantified, categorized, and manipulated (e.g., “THE MIND IS A CONTAINER”). Underpinning these forms is the notion that metaphors are not arbitrary linguistic flourishes but are deeply embedded in cultural and bodily experience, making them powerful yet often culture-specific cognitive tools.

The influence of CMT rapidly expanded across disciplines, reflecting its utility in analyzing diverse forms of reasoning and communication. Kövecses (2005) explored how metaphors vary significantly across languages and cultures, highlighting that while many source domains are universal, their specific applications and elaborations reflect distinct cultural models and values. Sharifian (2011) further developed this perspective through his theory of cultural conceptualizations, which treats metaphors as distributed, emergent features of cultural cognition. Meanwhile, Deignan (2005) applied corpus linguistic methods to identify and analyze metaphor use in real-world discourse, offering empirical validation for theoretical claims while revealing subtle pragmatic and cultural variations.

These studies collectively underscore that metaphors function as cultural models: they can facilitate intercultural understanding when grounded in shared embodied experiences, but may also lead to misinterpretation or reinforce cultural distance when they rely on culture-specific knowledge. This tension is especially salient in translated and multimodal texts, where metaphors become critical sites for negotiation between cultures.

Research into metaphor use in specific discursive contexts has further illuminated its persuasive and narrative functions. Musolff (2006) examined the role of metaphor in political and media discourse, illustrating how metaphorical framings influence public perception and policy debates. In the realm of promotional communication, scholars such as Pan & Zhang (2015) and Doran (2016) have explored metaphor’s strategic use in tourism promotion and intercultural advertising. Their work demonstrates how metaphors are deployed to evoke emotion, construct identity narratives, and communicate cultural heritage across genres including advertising, tourism brochures, and documentary commentary. Such metaphors often blend culturally distinctive motifs with universal appeals to shape perceptions of places and traditions.

Audiovisual translation adds further complexity to the intercultural functioning of metaphor. Scholars including Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) have highlighted the challenges of translating culturally embedded metaphors in subtitling and voice-over, where spatial, temporal, and multimodal constraints come into play. House (2009), working within intercultural pragmatics, offers a framework for assessing how communicative intention is adapted across cultural contexts, including through the use of a “cultural filter” in translation. Focusing on Chinese contexts, Zhang & Pan (2020) have begun to investigate metaphor in translated tourism discourse, noting difficulties in rendering culturally specific metaphors and analyzing the strategic adoption of domestication (adapting to target-culture norms) or foreignization (preserving source-culture features). Their research also acknowledges the role of visual and auditory channels in supporting—or complicating—metaphor interpretation.

Within the Chinese academic context, conceptual metaphor research has developed through integrating Western theoretical frameworks with analyses of Chinese linguistic and cultural specificity. Significant scholarship has examined metaphors rooted in classical Chinese poetry, philosophy, and aesthetic traditions, exploring how natural imagery—such as “竹” (bamboo) representing integrity or “梅” (plum blossom) symbolizing resilience—encodes cultural values and epistemic orientations tied to Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thought.

Related research has increasingly addressed contemporary discourses of cultural promotion. Studies of Chinese tourism branding frequently analyze the use of traditional imagery (e.g., lotuses, moonlight) and literary allusions to construct poetic depictions of cultural sites. West Lake has received particular attention as both a UNESCO World Heritage site and cultural icon. Existing research highlights how its associated legends—particularly the stories of Lady White Snake and Liang Zhu—are mobilized to symbolize romantic ideals, while its physical landscape is presented through classical aesthetic concepts like “山水” (mountain-water) harmony. These strategies form part of China’s broader soft power and cultural branding initiatives. Although limited research exists specifically on *Encountering Love at West Lake*, the film clearly participates in this tradition by employing multimodal metaphors to interpret Hangzhou’s cultural heritage for international audiences.

2.2 Studies on Conceptual Metaphors in Promotional Films

Research on conceptual metaphors in promotional films—an interdisciplinary field integrating cognitive linguistics and media studies—explores how metaphors convey complex ideas and evoke emotions in persuasive contexts. These metaphors act as branding tools, distilling a product, service, or city’s essence into tangible, relatable constructs. Promotional films, in particular, leverage metaphor’s cross-cultural potential; Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual grammar (colors, camera angles, framing) is employed to craft metaphorical narratives. In *Encountering Love at West Lake*, soft-focus shots of the Broken Bridge, paired with allusions to the White Snake legend, frame love as “elusive yet enduring,” merging visual and narrative metaphors (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Such studies highlight metaphors’ role in shaping identity and values. Xi’an’s promotional video *Eternal City* uses structural metaphors to juxtapose historical relics with modern skylines, framing the city as “a dialogue between past and future,” appealing to both heritage enthusiasts and tech-oriented audiences (Cao & Yao, 2018). Ontological metaphors, such as personifying a city as a “wise elder” or “vibrant youth,” further tailor messaging to target demographics.

Culturally specific metaphors, however, pose challenges. Guangzhou’s slogan “广州是条汉子” (“Guangzhou is a man”) elicited divergent responses: some praised its “vitality,” others critiqued gendered stereotypes (Chen, 2019). This underscores the need for cultural calibration—blending local symbols with universal concepts to broaden appeal.

Ultimately, metaphor research in promotional films reveals their capacity to shape perceptions and emotions. While culture-specific metaphors enhance local relevance, they require careful deployment to avoid alienating global audiences. Future studies should develop strategies for creating “culturally congruent” metaphors that bridge differences and enhance international communication.

2.3 Summary

This literature review has established the theoretical foundations of Conceptual Metaphor Theory while demonstrating its applications across intercultural and promotional contexts. The review shows how metaphors function as culturally embedded cognitive tools that shape thought, communication, and perception in media discourses. However, a significant research gap remains: limited attention has been paid to metaphor use in translated English commentary of Chinese promotional films, particularly how culturally specific metaphors are adapted for international audiences through audiovisual means.

This study addresses this gap by examining conceptual metaphors in *Encountering Love at West Lake*. The film represents a valuable case study due to its sophisticated integration of Chinese cultural specificities with universal themes, its status as an official tourism promotion product, and its multimodal approach to cross-cultural communication. By analyzing how this film employs metaphors to negotiate between cultural specificity and global intelligibility, this research contributes to understanding metaphor’s role in cultural diplomacy and international communication strategies.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded primarily in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and extends into intercultural communication studies to analyze how metaphors function in cross-cultural promotional discourse. The integrated framework offers a multi-dimensional lens for examining both the conceptual structure and cultural pragmatics of metaphors used in *Encountering Love at West Lake*.

3.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Core Ideas

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and further developed by scholars like Kövecses (2002, 2005), provides the foundational framework for this study. Its core premise is that metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but fundamental cognitive tools that structure human thought and reasoning.

The theory operates through several key notions:

- (1) Source and Target Domains: Metaphorical understanding involves mapping knowledge from a concrete, familiar source domain (e.g., JOURNEY, CONTAINER, BUILDING) onto an abstract, complex target domain (e.g., LOVE, TIME, THEORY). This cross-domain mapping allows us to comprehend abstract concepts through more tangible experiences.
- (2) Metaphorical Mappings: These are systematic correspondences between elements of the source and target

domains that enable reasoning and inference. For instance, in the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, difficulties in the relationship are understood as “obstacles” on the journey.

(3) Primary and Complex Metaphors: Primary metaphors are basic mappings grounded in universal bodily experiences (e.g., AFFECTION IS WARMTH), while complex metaphors combine multiple primary metaphors into more elaborate conceptual structures.

The relevance of CMT to this study is twofold: First, it provides an analytical toolkit for identifying and categorizing metaphorical patterns in the film's English commentary. Second, it supports the examination of how these metaphors frame emotional, cultural, and symbolic meanings associated with West Lake, love stories, and Chinese cultural values.

3.2 Structural Mapping of Conceptual Metaphor

The structural mapping between source and target domains is not merely a cognitive process but also a culturally situated practice. As Kövecses (2005) and Sharifian (2011) emphasize, metaphors are profoundly influenced by cultural cognition, collective experiences, and worldview. While some metaphors exhibit universality based on shared bodily experiences (e.g., TIME IS MONEY), many show significant cultural variation in their selection, frequency, elaboration, and interpretation.

This cultural dimension of metaphor is crucial for assessing whether the metaphors in the film's commentary maintain distinctive Chinese cultural frames or adapt to global (particularly Western) interpretive schemas. The framework thus conceptualizes metaphor as a negotiated space between source and target cultures, where cultural meanings are constantly mediated and reconstructed.

Application of this perspective enables the study to evaluate how culturally entrenched concepts—such as “缘” (predestined relationship) or “山水” (mountain-water harmony)—are metaphorically rendered for international audiences, and whether these renditions preserve, simplify, or transform their original cultural connotations.

3.3 Classification of Conceptual Metaphors

To complement CMT's cognitive focus, this study incorporates insights from intercultural communication and pragmatics (House, 2009; Wierzbicka, 1997), which focus on how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and potentially lost across cultural boundaries. This perspective emphasizes pragmatic strategies, cultural scripts, and narrative framing in cross-cultural mediation.

For the analysis of *Encountering Love at West Lake*, this means examining how metaphors are strategically adapted in the English-language commentary to navigate cultural differences. It draws attention to translation strategies (e.g., domestication vs. foreignization), the use of cultural glosses, and the interplay between verbal metaphors and visual elements in facilitating—or hindering—intercultural understanding.

This integrated theoretical framework allows for a comprehensive analysis that moves beyond identifying metaphors to understanding their role in intercultural mediation. It provides the tools to assess whether metaphors serve as effective bridges for conveying Chinese cultural values or become sites of cultural friction in the film's cross-cultural communication strategy.

4. Conceptual Metaphors in the Script of *Encountering Love at West Lake*

Encountering Love at West Lake employs a sophisticated system of conceptual metaphors to convey West Lake's cultural and emotional depth, mitigating cross-cultural barriers and fostering emotional resonance. By linking tangible landscapes to abstract cultural ideals, these metaphors render West Lake's heritage accessible to global audiences while preserving its unique essence.

4.1 Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphors dominate the film, mapping familiar domains onto abstract concepts like love and cultural heritage, providing a coherent framework for understanding.

Nicolas describes West Lake as “a poetic lake, full of the taste of love” (Appendix, Line 2), framing the lake through the source domain of poetry—with its connotations of beauty, depth, and emotional resonance. This metaphor WEST LAKE IS A POEM transcends cultural boundaries: whether viewers associate poetry with Shakespearean sonnets or Arabic ghazals, it evokes universal appreciation for aesthetic and emotional depth, rendering West Lake's allure intelligible.

The film centers on two bridges—the Broken Bridge and Long Bridge—as metaphors for love's persistence. The Broken Bridge, “not broken but poetical” (Appendix, Line 19), is tied to the White Snake legend: a snake spirit, after

millennia of cultivation, transforms into a human to reunite with her savior, enduring imprisonment under Leifeng Pagoda before achieving familial reunion. Here, the bridge maps love as “a connection transcending obstacles,” with its “brokenness” symbolizing trials overcome (Appendix, Lines 21–29). Similarly, the Long Bridge, associated with Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai’s tragic romance (Note 1), frames love as “a path of reluctance to part”—their repeated traversal of the bridge metaphorically extends its length, embodying enduring devotion. By paralleling this story to *Romeo and Juliet*, the film universalizes the metaphor “ENDURING LOVE IS A BRIDGE”, emphasizing love’s transcendence of cultural boundaries.

The narrative of the White Snake legend (Note 2) transformation from spirit to human, her trials, and eventual reunion frame love as a journey with “origins, challenges, and destinations” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), through structural metaphor LOVE IS A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY conveying that love is an unfolding process beginning, middle, and end much like a journey. This mirrors the Confucian ideal of “perseverance” and Taoist “transformation,” blending cultural specificities with the universal experience of growth through adversity.

4.2 Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors—substance metaphors and personification—endow abstract concepts with visible reflection—something tangible and knowable. This metaphor resonates cross-culturally: mirrors symbolize self-discovery in Western mythology (Narcissus) and spiritual purity in Shintoism (kagami), allowing diverse audiences to project their cultural associations onto the image while grasping its core: West Lake as tangible qualities, deepening emotional engagement.

Substance metaphors feature prominently in the film’s descriptions of West Lake and Hangzhou, framing intangible cultural essence as physical, perceivable entities. West Lake’s waters are “like a mirror reflecting the soul of Hangzhou” (Appendix, Line 9), treating the city’s cultural essence as a window into Hangzhou’s identity. Here, the lake’s water (a concrete substance) is metaphorically a “mirror”—a physical object that reflects images—while “the soul of Hangzhou” (an abstract concept representing the city’s cultural identity) becomes something visible, tangible, and knowable through that reflection.

Another substance metaphor is “LOVE IS FOOD,” implicit in Nicolas’ description of West Lake as “full of the taste of love” (Appendix, Line 2). By attributing a “taste” to love, the film frames emotion as a sensory experience—something that can be savored, like a delicious meal. Food, a universal human need, evokes shared associations of pleasure, nourishment, and intimacy; viewers across cultures understand that a “taste” of something implies a tangible, memorable experience. This metaphor bridges cultural differences in expressing emotion: while Western cultures may emphasize verbal declarations of love, and Chinese cultures may favor implicit acts, both recognize taste as a primal, unspoken way to convey richness and satisfaction.

Personification, meanwhile, animates non-human entities to foster emotional connection. The lake is personified as a “beauty” (Appendix, Line 8), echoing Su Shi’s poem “欲把西湖比西子” (“comparing West Lake to Xi Shi, the ancient beauty”). This metaphor attributes human allure to the landscape, fostering emotional connection—viewers, regardless of culture, understand attraction to beauty. By personifying the lake as a beautiful lady, the film invites viewers to respond to it with the same admiration they would feel for a person—making its cultural significance feel personal, not merely abstract.

Additionally, the Gushan Hill is personified through its association with “fenggu” (vigorous styles in art) (Appendix, Line 60)—a term describing human artistic vitality. The hill, “not high, just 35 meters above sea level” (Appendix, Line 58), gains significance not from its physical height, but from its metaphorical “spirit” as a hub of seal arts and literary ideals. This personification shifts focus from the hill’s geography to its cultural role, framing it as a custodian of Chinese artistic heritage—much like a human guardian of tradition.

4.3 Optional Application

Optional Application: Multimodal Extension of the Analysis

The analysis of these ontological metaphors can be further enhanced by considering the film’s multimodal discourse (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). A multimodal approach would address the audiovisual synergy in meaning-making by examining how the verbal metaphors identified above are reinforced, nuanced, or expanded through visual elements. For instance, the substance metaphor “WEST LAKE IS A MIRROR” is likely paired with cinematic shots of the lake’s perfectly reflective surface. Similarly, the personification of the lake as a “beauty” may be complemented by visual compositions that emulate classical Chinese paintings, using soft focus and elegant framing to evoke a sense of grace and allure. This optional analytical lens focuses on how language interacts with visuals, music, and pacing to create and deepen metaphorical meaning, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the film’s persuasive strategies.

4.4 Summary

Table 1 summarizes the film's metaphors, revealing a deliberate balance of structural and ontological metaphors to enhance cross-cultural communication.

Table 1: Distribution of Conceptual Metaphors in the Film Script

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Structural Metaphors | 6 |
| Substance Metaphors | 3 |
| Ontological Metaphors | 5 |
| Personification | 5 |
| Container Metaphors | 0 |
| Oriental Metaphors | 0 |

These metaphors collectively frame West Lake as a “holy land of love” (Appendix, Line 81), merging structural (WEST LAKE IS A HOLY LAND) and ontological (LOVE IS ITS INHABITANT) metaphors to crystallize its cultural significance. By integrating universal domains (poetry, journeys) with Chinese cultural specificities (legends, Confucian virtues), the film achieves a “cultural hybridity” that appeals to global audiences while preserving authenticity.

5. Implications of Conceptual Metaphors for Cross-Cultural Communication in Promotional Media

Encountering Love at West Lake functions as a masterclass in cultural diplomacy, employing conceptual metaphors to balance Hangzhou's cultural authenticity with global intelligibility. These metaphors act as cognitive and emotional bridges, enhancing cultural appeal, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and shaping Hangzhou's global image.

5.1 Enhancing Cultural Attraction and Emotional Infectivity

Metaphors transform West Lake from a geographical location to an emotional and cultural entity, amplifying its allure. The “mirror” metaphor—“waters of West Lake are like a mirror reflecting the soul of Hangzhou” (Appendix, Line 9)—invites diverse interpretations: Western viewers may associate mirrors with self-discovery, while Japanese audiences recall Shinto “kagami” (sacred mirrors). This polysemy ensures resonance across cultures, making the lake's beauty accessible while preserving Hangzhou's unique essence.

Similarly, framing love as a “journey” or “bridge” evokes universal experiences of connection and perseverance, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers. By anchoring abstract emotions in tangible imagery, the film elicits empathy, rendering Chinese cultural narratives emotionally salient to global audiences.

5.2 Promoting Shared Identity and Cultural Understanding

The film's metaphors serve as vectors of cultural transmission, linking universal experiences to Chinese values. The “WEST LAKE IS A POEM” metaphor, for instance, leverages global familiarity with poetry to introduce Chinese literary aesthetics, enabling audiences to engage with West Lake's legends through a familiar cognitive framework.

Juxtapositional metaphors further facilitate understanding: paralleling Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai to *Romeo and Juliet* highlights both shared themes (illicit love) and cultural nuances (Confucian filial piety vs. Western individualism). This comparison fosters appreciation for cultural diversity while emphasizing shared humanity, promoting a “dialogic” cross-cultural understanding.

The White Snake's “transformative journey” metaphor encapsulates this balance: her perseverance reflects Confucian “self-cultivation” and Taoist “fluidity,” yet her quest for love resonates universally. This duality encourages audiences to engage with Chinese philosophy through a familiar emotional lens.

5.3 Shaping Hangzhou's Global Image and Tourism Economy

Metaphors position Hangzhou as a “cultural and romantic destination,” driving tourism and soft power. Framing West Lake as a “holy land of love” (Appendix, Line 81) or a “mirror of Hangzhou's soul” constructs an image of the city as both culturally rich and emotionally resonant—appealing to heritage tourists and romantic travelers alike.

The film's emphasis on “love as a transformative journey” further positions Hangzhou as a place of personal growth, attracting visitors seeking meaningful cultural experiences. By blending local legends with universal themes, it distinguishes Hangzhou from generic tourist destinations, fostering a unique brand identity that enhances its global competitiveness.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the use of conceptual metaphors in the English commentary of the promotional film *Encountering Love at West Lake*, exploring how these metaphors facilitate intercultural meaning-making and frame Hangzhou's cultural identity for global audiences. The analysis reveals that the film employs a sophisticated system of metaphors—including dominant patterns such as LOVE IS A JOURNEY, WEST LAKE IS A POEM, and CULTURE IS A MIRROR—to translate culturally specific Chinese concepts into universally accessible experiences. These metaphors function not merely as decorative language but as cognitive-emotional tools that promote emotional connection and aesthetic appreciation among international viewers while retaining distinctive cultural values.

The findings underscore metaphor's role as a powerful rhetorical tool for cultural transmission, capable of bridging differences through shared experiential frames. Theoretically, this study expands the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to multimodal, audiovisual promotional texts, demonstrating how metaphorical mappings operate in cross-cultural media discourse. Practically, it offers valuable insights for translators and cultural practitioners involved in crafting international promotional materials, providing a framework for leveraging metaphor to support soft power initiatives and cultural branding while balancing authenticity with intelligibility.

Notably, this study has several limitations. Its focus on a single film limits broad generalization, and the exclusive analysis of the English version precludes comparative multilingual analysis. Additionally, the interpretive approach is qualitative and does not empirically measure audience reception. These limitations suggest productive avenues for future research, including comparative studies of different language versions, empirical audience reception studies, and applications of the methodology to other genres of cultural promotion such as museum guides or heritage documentation. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how metaphorical language can serve as a bridge in intercultural communication, supporting more effective cultural diplomacy through mediated narratives.

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Notes

Note 1 Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai

A classic Chinese folk tale dating back to the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Zhu Yingtai, a young woman disguised as a man to pursue education, falls in love with her classmate Liang Shanbo. Their love is thwarted by a forced marriage arrangement for Zhu, and Liang dies of heartbreak. On the day of her wedding, Zhu visits Liang's tomb, which splits open, and she leaps in to join him. The pair are said to transform into a pair of butterflies, symbolizing eternal union. Known as the "Chinese Romeo and Juliet," the story embodies themes of devotion and defiance against societal constraints.

Note 2 The White Snake Lady

A legendary tale originating in the Song Dynasty. Bai Suzhen, a thousand-year-old snake spirit who gains human form through cultivation, falls in love with Xu Xian, a mortal scholar who once saved her life. Their marriage is opposed by Fahai, a Buddhist monk who deems their union (between a spirit and a human) unnatural. Fahai imprisons Bai under Leifeng Pagoda, but their son eventually rescues her, and the family is reunited. The story explores love's transcendence of boundaries between the spiritual and mortal worlds, as well as resilience in the face of persecution.

Appendix

Transcript of *Encountering Love at West Lake* Commentary

Nicolas: I am Nicolas from France. A few years ago, a Chinese lady told me about the West Lake. Later on, I married her. She said it is a poetic lake, full of the taste of love.

Naty: I am Natty, from the United States. Seven years ago, I saw his picture on the wall, and I thought he was so cute. And we met on that very same day. He didn't speak English, and I didn't speak Chinese. However, love could not be stopped. So, we still got married later on. The charm of the West Lake attracted us to come and feel the beauty of Hangzhou. The waters of West Lake are like a mirror reflecting the soul of Hangzhou.

Nicolas: In June 2011, the West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Naty: During the G20 Summit in 2016, world leaders were wowed by The Most Memorable is Hangzhou at the West Lake.

Nicolas: Who would have thought that three enchanting love stories attract us.

Naty: As a foreigner, I am really curious about the love stories that took place at the West Lake.

Nicolas: The Broken Bridge is not broken, but it's very poetical in Chinese. The bridge is famous because of the well-known Chinese folk love story The Legend of the White Snake Lady.

Nicolas: The story goes that once a little white snake was captured and almost killed by a snake catcher. Fortunately, she was saved by a little shepherd boy. After more than 1,000 years of cultivation, the snake finally turned into human form and came to the West Lake in Hangzhou to look for her past-life savior. In an early spring of the Song dynasty, on the misty Broken Bridge of the West Lake, the White Snake Lady found her past-life savior. She asked him to marry her, and then the two became husband and wife.

Nicolas: But the love between an immortal snake and a human being is surreal, and destined to be not easy.

Nicolas: Later on, the White Snake Lady was imprisoned under Leifeng Pagoda. Their clever son tried every means to get his mother out from under the pagoda, and the three eventually lived happily together ever since. Because of this story, “Leifeng Xizhao” (Sunset Glow at Leifeng Pagoda) has become one of the top ten sights of the West Lake.

Nicolas: I would say that people are always brave in pursuing love, no matter where, when and with whom.

Naty: This is the Long Bridge, though it is by no means long. So why do we call it this way? People say that someone walked back and forth many times, thus, feeling that the bridge was longer. Who did so, and why? People say it was because of love.

Naty: Over 1,000 years ago, it was difficult for Chinese women to learn to read and write. But there was one girl named Zhu Yingtai who insisted on learning, so her family dressed her up as a boy and sent her to the academy. Here, she met a boy named Liang Shanbo. Studying together every day, the two soon became good friends. However, Liang Shanbo didn’t know that Zhu Yingtai was a girl. One day, after the school term was over, Zhu was ready to go home. Liang offered to walk her home, and so they walked on the bridge back and forth many times, both reluctant to say good-bye. Zhu kept hinting and asked Liang that if she were a girl, would he love her?

Naty: Later on, their love story didn’t go well, yet they decided to stay together in the most desperate way. If they couldn’t be together, they would die together. Isn’t that a little like the story of Romeo and Juliet? In the end, this love story was kept alive by the Chinese people in the most beautiful way. It is said that when the two lovers died, they transformed into a pair of butterflies and their love story continued.

Nicolas: As one of the unique sights in the West Lake Scenic Area, the Gushan Hill is not high, just 35 meters above sea level. This hill is famous, not just because of the seal arts society there that represents the Chinese “fenggu” (vigorous styles) in arts, but (also) because of the ideology of Chinese literature that this hill epitomizes.

Naty: Lin Bu, the hermit poet in the Song dynasty. In his 40’s, he began to live in reclusion on the Gushan Hill, staying away from officialdom and marriage throughout his life. He looked upon the plum blossom as his life companion and raised cranes as though they were his sons. This lifestyle is what many Chinese literati yearn for. Plum blossoms were his true love. His many poems written for them have been handed down to this very day, and often recited by later generations.

Naty: Many people thought that he was abstinent from many worldly pleasures. However, people sensed the richest and the most profound feelings in his poetry.

Nicolas: “Green mountains face each other across the stream. Who knows the parting grief, who? Rolling, rolling are tears in our eyes. Love knot is yet to be made, ere you leave on the rising tide.”

Nicolas: It seems to me that this poem is disclosing the poet’s personal experience. It attracts foreigners like me to understand and have a taste of the unique traditional Chinese culture.

Naty: West Lake is one of the best name cards to introduce the beauty in China to the rest of the world.

Nicolas: West Lake in Hangzhou is called the holy land of love. Here, my better half and I have encountered love,

Naty: continued the love stories, and created our new life.

Nicolas: Because of the West Lake and its legend,

Naty: we got to know the city more, and decided to live here

Nicolas: and share our stories to the rest of the world.

Nicolas & Natty: We love the West Lake and we love Hangzhou.