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WHAT DOES LOONG (龍) MEAN TO THE CHINESE PEOPLE?

A CULTURAL COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This present study discusses the mythology of Loong in Chinese culture, analyzes the cultural metaphors of Loong, and elaborates on the cultural values of Loong. Through the discussion, it can be seen that the Chinese cultural values of Loong have a profound influence on cultural conceptualizations of Loong, not only manifested in language but also in many other aspects.

Keywords: Loong, cultural cognition, cultural value, cultural metaphor, cultural cognitive linguistics.

1. Introduction

Loong (龍) is the totem of the Chinese people. The symbol of Loong is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and has been a symbol of power, wisdom, success, and good fortune for millennia. Loong is highly respected in Chinese culture. It is also a symbol of the Chinese nation and Chinese people refer to themselves as the descendants of Loong. These symbolic meanings of Loong, represented by the Chinese character "龍 lóng" – Eng. 'Loong', are also deeply embedded in Chinese people's cognition,



which was manifested in the Chinese language.

As we can see, there are abundant metaphorical expressions of Loong (龙) in Chinese idioms, and they are deeply influenced by Chinese culture. Regarding the previous studies of Loong in Chinese (Wen & Chen 2021), most of them simply mention or list some cultural factors that can influence the conceptualizations of Loong. In other words, the previous studies do not give a comprehensive explanation of the cultural metaphors and cultural values of Loong in Chinese. Thus, this paper aims to explore the symbol of Loong and its significance within Chinese culture from a cultural cognitive linguistic perspective.

This paper is structured as follows. The second section is a brief introduction to the mythology of Loong in Chinese culture. The third section is the theoretical background, which presents the notion of cultural cognition and cultural values from a cultural cognitive linguistic perspective. Subsequently, the fourth and fifth parts respectively discuss the cultural metaphors of Loong based on the linguistic expressions related to the Chinese character "龙 lóng" – Eng. 'Loong' and the cultural values of Loong in Chinese culture. The paper ends with a summary of the findings.

2. The mythology of Loong

In Chinese culture, there is a wealth of myths and legends about Loong. The cultural significance of the symbol of Loong can be traced back to the Chinese mythology of Loong. Unlike the Western dragon, which often evokes fear and destruction, in Chinese mythology, the Loong is a mythical creature that usually embodies power, wisdom, and auspiciousness. The Loong is believed to have control over the elements and is revered as a symbol of imperial authority and divine protection. In this section, we will talk about the mythology of Loong from the following three aspects.

2.1 The mythological origins of Loong

According to pre-Qin documents, there are at least four mythological origins of Loong. Firstly, Loong is the merging of a human and Loong, such as Fuxi (伏羲), Nuwa (女娲), Huangdi (黄帝), or Shennong (神农), who are the ancestors of the Chinese nation in mythology, and who are all loongs with human faces. Secondly, Loong evolved from human beings, such as the father of Yu (禹) who remained uncorrupted for three years after his death and was then transformed into a yellow Loong.

Thirdly, Loong has great power. For example, when Emperor Yu (禹) was combating the floods, a Loong (应龙) used its tail to mark the direction of water flow to help divert the floods, so that the people could live and work in peace and contentment (Zhao 1992). Fourthly, Loong is a tool for gods to ride. For example, Xia Qi (夏启) (the monarch of the Xia Dynasty) and Zhu Rong (祝融) (the main god of the south) rode on Loongs as recorded in the *Classic of mountains and seas* ("山海经") (Fang 2009).

Accordingly, it is clear that the Loong, as an object of worship in primitive Chinese society, was associated with man's struggle against nature. As a symbol of supernatural power, the Loong also has divine power, which is capable of carrying people to the clouds, as well as diving into the abyss and creating waves.

2.2 The mythological images of Loong

The mythological images of Loong have changed with the development of history. At present, the most typical image of Loong, which has been used by later generations, is the one recorded in "Eryayi – 尔雅翼". This book records that Loong has "the antlers of a deer, the head of a camel, the eyes of a rabbit, the neck of a snake, the belly of a clam, the scales of a fish, the claws of an eagle, the palms of a tiger, and the ears of a cow" (Luo 1991: 283). The image of the Chinese Loong is a divine creature that combines a variety of animals, as shown in Figure 1. And the process of its formation and evolution is a true reflection of the continuous development of Chinese civilization.



Figure 1. The mythological image of Loong. Source: <https://weibo.com/1618051664/NFCd744Yt>

2.3 The different mythological types of Loong

According to Chinese mythology, there are many types of Loong, each with different characteristics. Some typical types in Chinese mythology are as follows.

To begin with, the Green Dragon, known as 青龙 *qīng lóng* in Chinese, is one of the four sacred creatures in Chinese mythology symbolizing the East, and having control over the wind and rain. The Winged Dragon, or 应龙 *yīng lóng* in Chinese, is a member of the Yellow Dragon family and is considered the ancestor of flying dragons due to its wings. In Chinese folklore, the Winged Dragon is known for its exceptional combat skills. The Cloud Dragon, or 云龙 *yún lóng* in Chinese, is the rarest species among dragons and is said to be born in heaven with its body shrouded in clouds and mist. When the Cloud Dragon moves, it resembles a moving cloud. Known for their gentle personalities, Cloud Dragons are considered the easiest dragons to get along with.

Next is the Horned Dragon, known as 虬龙 *qiú lóng* in Chinese, which is a young dragon characterized by its horns. In contrast, the Hornless Dragon, or 螭龙 *chī lóng* in Chinese, may have a small and compact body but is known for its exceptional strength in combat. The Hornless Dragon is often associated with beauty. While the appearance and colour of the Hornless Dragon can vary, a red one is typically considered to be female.

The Coiling Dragon, or 蟠龙 *pán lóng* in Chinese, is a dragon that remains dormant on earth and has not yet ascended to heaven. This type of dragon is named as such because it tends to coil around pillars.

The Celestial Dragon, known as 天龙 *tiān lóng* in Chinese, is responsible for guarding heavenly palaces and protecting celestial gods. According to legend, in the Palace of the Jade Emperor, eight powerful celestial dragons coil around the eight pillars to safeguard the palace. The Fuzanglong, 伏羲藏龙, are guardians of precious treasures, while the Underworld Dragon, 地龙 *dì lóng* in Chinese, resides in rivers, lakes, and seas, controlling the waters. The Dragon King, known as 龙王 *lóng wáng* in Chinese mythology, is considered the most powerful dragon and guards the central universe.

As we can see, the different types of Loong in these mythologies also reflect the different cultural

meanings that the Chinese people attach to Loong.

Influenced by the mythology of Loong, there are so many linguistic expressions in Chinese that show the profound influence of the Loong symbol in Chinese culture. For instance, Cn. "龙争虎斗 *lóng zhēng hǔ dòu*" – Eng. 'a fierce struggle between two evenly-matched opponents' metaphorically shows the authority and power of a human being. Similarly, Cn. "龙凤呈祥 *lóng fēng chéng xiáng*" – Eng. 'the Loong and phoenix represent good luck' metaphorically symbolizes good fortune, prosperity, and aspiration. Actually, the symbolic meanings of Loong in Chinese mythologies and metaphorical meanings of Loong in Chinese are closely related to the cultural cognition of Loong for Chinese people and the cultural values of Loong in Chinese culture.

3. Cultural cognition and cultural values

This section will introduce cultural cognition based on Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian 2017) and illustrate the cultural values that we have discussed in this study.

3.1 Cultural cognition

Cultural Linguistics is a multidisciplinary area of research that investigates the interplay between language, culture, and conceptualization (Palmer 1996; Sharifian 2015; 2017). The concept of "cultural cognition" is central to the theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics, which affords an integrated understanding of the notions of 'cognition' and 'culture' as they relate to language. Sharifian (2017) argues that cultural cognition is the enactive, distributed, and dynamic cognition of a speech community. Cultural cognition can influence various aspects of language, just as linguistic practices can also reflect cultural cognition. In view of this, language can be considered to be a memory bank for storing and a fluid vehicle for communicating cultural cognition (ibid.). Furthermore, cultural cognition is rooted in cultural conceptualization, which involves how individuals within a cultural group conceptualize and negotiate their experiences through thoughts and behaviours (ibid.). Language provides a window into cultural conceptualization through analytical tools such as cultural schema, cultural category, cultural metaphor, and cultural metonymy. Thus, cultural metaphor is one of the analytical tools used to discover the relationship between language and cultural conceptualization, or broadly speaking, the relationship between language and cultural cognition.

Regarding cultural metaphor, it is essential to explore the connection between conceptual metaphor and cultural metaphor. Cultural metaphors share similarities with universal conceptual metaphors, as noted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), but they also exhibit variability as distinct phenomena. Conceptual metaphor involves mapping the structure of concepts from one domain to another, known as cross-domain mapping (Kövecses 2005; Lakoff & Johnson 1980). As stated by Sharifian (2017: 4), cultural metaphors are cross-domain conceptualizations that are rooted in cultural traditions such as folk medicine, worldviews, or spiritual belief systems. According to standard conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual metaphors are grounded in embodied human experiences and neural processes in the brain (Kövecses 2005; Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Based on Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian 2017), a cultural metaphor, by definition, must first be a conceptual metaphor. Importantly, it is the culture or subculture which influences various aspects of a cultural group's experiences that shape the understanding of its concepts (Kövecses 2005).

3.2 Cultural values

It is necessary to figure out the definition of cultural values. What do we mean by cultural values? The interpretation largely hinges on how we define the concepts of culture and value. According to Kövecses (2015), culture is intricately linked to the process of meaning-making, whereas Sharifian (2011) describes culture as a distinct worldview encompassing beliefs, concepts, and values that define a community of individuals who share a common historical and physical backdrop and interpret their experiences in a relatively uniform manner. Consequently, culture can be seen as a rough counterpart to cultural cognition (Baranyiné Kóczy 2023). As for values, in the French sociological context, as illustrated by Stoetzel (1983), values are described as models and ideals ingrained in the human mind that influence individuals' actions. Unlike mere opinions and behaviours, which are superficial manifestations, values can only be deduced through inference based on external observables.

Building on the previous discussion, cultural values can be characterized as values that are commonly shared within a specific language and culture, serving as the foundation for the beliefs, convictions, attitudes, and communication habits typically associated with that particular culture. Cultural values are primarily associated with ethical standards and interpersonal norms, such as demonstrating integrity or displaying honour/respect (Baranyiné Kóczy 2023).

Subsequently, the next two sections will discuss the cultural metaphors of Loong in Chinese and the cultural values of Loong in Chinese culture.

4. Cultural metaphors of Loong in the Chinese language

As we can see, there are many culturally rooted metaphorical expressions of Loong ("龙"). We call them cultural metaphors of Loong in Chinese. By analyzing the linguistic expressions related to the Chinese character "龙 *lóng*" – Eng. 'Loong'¹, we found that there are several types of cultural metaphors of Loong manifested in Chinese. In this section, we will explain them one by one with examples.

POWER AND AUTHORITY IS A LOONG

Metaphorically, the Loong is often used to represent power, authority, and leadership in Chinese culture. This kind of cultural metaphor of Loong is also manifested in Chinese. For example, Cn. "龙争虎斗 *lóng zhēng hǔ dòu*" – Eng. describes a loong and a tiger in combat. In Chinese, this idiom means that the two opponents involved are evenly matched, or the struggle or competition between them is quite fierce. There exists another idiom, Cn. "攀龙附凤 *pān lóng fù fèng*" – Eng. 'Climbing to the loong, and getting attached to the phoenix', which refers to someone who fawns upon the people of power and authority. "龙 *lóng*" is used to describe someone as having "the strength of a loong" which implies that they possess great power and influence. Thus, the cultural metaphor contained in this idiom is POWER AND AUTHORITY IS A LOONG.

STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE IS A LOONG

Loong is frequently used as a metaphor for strength and resilience in the face of challenges. Saying that someone has "the heart of a Loong" suggests that they are courageous and able to overcome adversity. For example, Cn. "神龙马壮 *shén lóng mǎ zhuàng*" – Eng. 'Vigorous and strong loong and horse', and Cn. "龙马精神 *lóng mǎ jīng shén*" – Eng. 'the spirit of loong and horse'. The first idiom indicates that individuals with strong bodies metaphorically map the strength of Loong to their human body. The second idiom is applied to describe people who are indomitable and unafraid of hardships in the face of difficulties and challenges. They are always thorny, unyielding, and full of the 'spirit of loong and horse'. Thus, both of them rely on the same cultural metaphor: STRENGTH AND

RESILIENCE IS A LOONG

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IS A LOONG

Metaphorically, the Loong can represent wisdom, knowledge, and insight. Referring to someone as having "the wisdom of a Loong" implies that they possess deep understanding and intelligence. For example, in Chinese, the idiom Cn. "虎略龙韬 *hǔ lüè lóng tāo*" – Eng. 'astuteness and resourcefulness of tiger and loong' is used to describe one's brilliant planning and strategy. And Cn. "龙章凤函 *lóng zhāng fèng hán*" – Eng. 'the article written by loong and the letter written by phoenix' is used to describe one's excellent literacy talent. Here, Cn. "龙韬" – Eng. 'wise strategies' and Cn. "龙章" – Eng. 'good articles' both refer to the great wisdom and abundant knowledge of people. Thus, both of them draw on the same cultural metaphor: WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IS A LOONG.

TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH IS A LOONG

The Loong is often used metaphorically to represent transformation and change. Describing a situation as "a Loong's dance of transformation" suggests that it involves significant change and evolution. For example, Cn. "金鳞岂是池中之物,一遇风云便化龙 *jīn lín qǐ shì chí zhōng zhī wù, yī yù fēng yún biàn huà lóng*" – Eng. 'The golden scaly perch will not be willing to live only in the pool. When it rains and is windy, the perch will turn into a loong soaring in the sky'. Here the wind and rain refer to the meaning of great opportunities. Cn. "化龙 *huà lóng*" – Eng. means that the situation of people has been greatly changed, and this change is often positive. There is another expression, Cn. "鱼跃龙门 *yú yuè lóng mén*" – Eng. 'a fish leaping over the dragon gate', which means success in business or a rise in status. "龙门 *lóng mén*" metaphorically refers to a great turning point for people or things, especially when it is used to describe a turning point for the better. Similarly, these expressions rely on the cultural metaphor: TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH IS A LOONG.

PROTECTION AND GUARDIANSHIP IS A LOONG

Metaphorically, the Loong can symbolize protection and guardianship. For example, Cn. "龙行一步,百草沾恩 *lóng xíng yī bù, bǎi cǎo zhān ēn*" – Eng. means that when the Loong took a step, it rained, and all the grass was nourished. Later, it was used to refer to the emperor's parade and concern for people's hardships. And Cn. "见龙在田,德施普也 *jiàn lóng zài tián, dé shī pǔ yě*" – Eng. means the Loong appears on the earth (symbolizing the arrival of people in high positions), and his favour will be extended to the whole world. In these Chinese expressions, the Loong has the ability to provide

protection and guardianship. Thus, they rely on a common cultural metaphor: PROTECTION AND GUARDIANSHIP IS A LOONG.

CREATIVITY AND INSPIRATION IS A LOONG

The Loong can be used metaphorically to represent creativity and inspiration. Describing a piece of art as "a Loong's masterpiece" suggests that it is a work of exceptional creativity and originality. For example, Cn. "龙飞凤舞 *lóng fēi fèng wǔ*" – Eng. 'Loong flying and phoenix dancing' originally describes the meandering and majestic mountains, and later also describes the powerful and flexible calligraphic strokes, symbolizing extraordinary creativity and artistic inspiration.

MYSTERY AND ENCHANTMENT IS A LOONG

Metaphorically, the Loong can evoke a sense of mystery and enchantment. Referring to a place as "the Loong's lair" suggests that it is a mysterious and captivating location. For example, Cn. "神龙见首不见尾 *shén lóng jiàn shǒu bú jiàn wěi*" – Eng. 'a Loong's head and tail do not appear together' usually refers to a person who is quite mysterious about their whereabouts, appearing at one moment and disappearing the next. And in China, there are many places named Cn. "龙潭 *lóng tán*" – Eng. 'a pond where Loong lives', which often refer to a quiet and mysterious water area like a lake or a pond based on the cultural metaphor: MYSTERY AND ENCHANTMENT IS A LOONG.

LONGEVITY AND ENDURANCE IS A LOONG

The Loong is often used metaphorically to represent longevity and endurance. Saying that something has "the endurance of a Loong" implies that it has the ability to withstand challenges and last a long time. For example, Cn. "龟龙麟凤 *guī lóng lín fèng*" – Eng. 'turtle, Loong, unicorn, phoenix' is used to symbolize longevity, honour, and good fortune in Chinese traditional culture. And Cn. "龙马精神 *lóng mǎ jīng shén*" – Eng. 'the spirit of Loong and horse' also refers to a person's endurance and high spirit.

PROSPERITY AND SUCCESS IS A LOONG

Metaphorically, the Loong can symbolize prosperity and success. Describing a business as "a Loong in the market" suggests that it is thriving and successful. For example, Cn. "虎变龙蒸 *hǔ biàn lóng zhēn*" – Eng. 'Changes that look like the stripes on a tiger and the rising cloud resembling the loong'

refers to being successful in one's official career or climbing rapidly up the social ladder. It can also describe a business or organization that has achieved great success after undergoing a transformation. Another idiom Cn. "龙凤呈祥 *lóng fèng chéng xiáng*" – Eng. 'prosperity brought by the Loong and the phoenix' also uses the Loong as a symbol of prosperity and success.

5. Cultural values of Loong in Chinese culture

Loong carries deep and abundant symbolic or metaphorical meanings, which can shape the cultural values of the Chinese people. The symbol of Loong also contributes to the construction and maintenance of Chinese cultural values, both at the individual and collective levels. The Loong symbol is integrated into various cultural practices, rituals, and celebrations. Chinese people interpret the symbol of Loong based on their cultural knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, thereby constructing its meaning within their cognitive frameworks. Chinese people may then internalize these symbolic/metaphorical meanings of Loong, incorporating them into their self-concept and cultural identity. Finally, the Loong becomes a representation of cultural values in the cultural cognition of Chinese people.

In Chinese culture, Loong holds significant symbolic value and is deeply ingrained in Chinese mythology, folklore, costumes, and traditions. Below are some cultural values associated with the cultural metaphors of Loong, which can be summarized as follows.

POWER AND STRENGTH

The Loong is often seen as a symbol of power, strength, and authority. In Chinese culture, the Loong represents the emperor and is associated with leadership, dominance, and control. The Loong's majestic presence conveys a sense of power and influence. Because of this kind of cultural cognition of Loong, there exists folklore in Chinese culture that demonstrates how Loong is related to the emperor. For example, it is written in *The Book of Han* ("汉书") (Ban 2012) that Bang's mother, once tired from working in the field, fell asleep lying by the edge of a pond of water and dreamed of the God of Heaven. At that time, there was thunder and lightning in the sky, and dark clouds covered the sun. Bang's father went to the field to take Bang's mother home, and saw from afar what seemed like a scaly Loong coiled around her. Shortly thereafter, Bang's mother became pregnant and gave birth to Bang, one of emperors of the Han dynasty. It was later believed that Bang was able to become

emperor because he was transformed by a Loong. In ancient China, the emperor had supreme power and status. This kind of folklore has a profound influence on the cultural cognition of Chinese people. Thus, in Chinese cultural values, Loong can represent power and strength.

Thus, this cultural value of Loong in Chinese culture is one of the reasons why we have these kind of linguistic expressions related to Cn. "龙 *lóng*" – Eng. 'Loong' to refer to the emperor in Chinese, like Cn. "真龙天子 *zhēn lóng tiān zǐ*" – Eng. 'the Loong is the son of heaven' refers to the emperor metaphorically. Also, in Chinese, some expressions related to the emperor contain the Chinese character "龙 *lóng*" – Eng. 'Loong', such as Cn. "龙权 *lóng quán*" – Eng. 'the power of the Loong', Cn. "龙椅 *lóng yǐ*" – Eng. 'the chair of the Loong', Cn. "龙袍 *lóng páo*" – Eng. 'the clothes of the Loong'. In these expressions, the Cn. "龙 *lóng*" – Eng. 'Loong' refers to the emperor metaphorically because the power, strength, and authority of the Loong are similar to those of the emperor in Chinese cultural value.

GOOD FORTUNE AND PROSPERITY

Loong is believed to bring good fortune, prosperity, and success. In Chinese culture, the Loong is associated with wealth, abundance, and auspiciousness. In Chinese folklore, the Loong is the deity in charge of rain, of blessing the wind and rain and of providing a good harvest. For example, the Loong King is the king of the water tribe in Chinese ancient myths and legends, and is in charge of raising clouds and sending rain. According to legends, Loong can not only make clouds and rain, but also eliminate disasters and bring good fortune. And Loong symbolizes auspiciousness, so Chinese people dancing dressed as Loong to pray for peace and a good harvest has become a custom in China. And playing dragon lanterns ("舞龙灯 *wǔ lóng dēng*") in the Yuanxiao Festival has become a traditional Chinese dance art (Ji 2020).

Additionally, there are some traditional food customs (Ji 2020; Wang & Yang 2022; Zhang et al. 1993), like "食龙须 *shí lóng xū*" "咬龙耳 *yǎo lóng ěr*" "食龙头 *shí lóng tóu*" "吃龙鳞 *chī lóng lín*" "吃龙胆 *chī lóng dǎn*" "吃龙眼 *chī lóng yǎn*" "食龙子 *shí lóng zǐ*" "吃龙豆 *chī lóng dòu*". This expression Cn. "食龙须" actually refers to the eating of noodles, so named because the noodles are long and thin. They are called "dragon beard noodles (龙须面 *lóng xū miàn*)". They are eaten on the second day of the second month of the lunar calendar in the hope that the coming year will be a good

one. This expression Cn. "咬龙耳" – Eng. 'Biting the Loong's ear' actually means eating dumplings. Because dumplings resemble the ears of Loong. Whether the dumplings are vegetarian or non-vegetarian, there is a wish for prosperity in the coming year. Cn. "食龙头" – Eng. 'eating Loong's head' refers to eating pig's head meat. In ancient China, the pig's head was a tribute during rituals. In the north of China, every household cooked pig's head. After eating it, it was time to farm, hoping for a big harvest in the coming year. Cn. "吃龙鳞" – Eng. 'Eating Loong's scales' actually refers to eating spring pancakes. It is a metaphor for spring pancakes whose shape is like the scales of Loong. Eating spring pancakes symbolizes welcoming the arrival of spring and praying for a good harvest.

Cn. "吃龙胆" – Eng. 'Eating Loong's gall bladder' refers to eating a kind of fried dough cake. Because the fried cake is made of millet and has a golden colour, it is very similar to the gall bladder of Loong. Chinese people believe that after eating Cn. "龙胆" – Eng. 'Loong's gall bladder', one can be as bold and careful as a Loong and become a useful person. Cn. "食龙子" – Eng. 'Eating the Loong's Son' means eating rice. It is so named because the grains of rice are distinct and resemble Loong's sons. It is hoped that the family will have many children and good fortune.

Furthermore, in many places in China, people built temples for the Loong King (龙王庙 *lóng wáng miào*) where they regularly worshipped the Loong King to pray for good weather (Yang 1999). These legends and customs are also deeply rooted in Chinese people's cognition. Chinese people then further form the cultural-specific conceptualizations and cultural values of Loong, also manifested in related linguistic expressions of Loong. In these expressions, the Chinese character Cn. "龙 *lóng*" – Eng. 'Loong' has culturally rooted meanings, which refer metaphorically to good fortune and prosperity.

PROTECTION AND GUARDIANSHIP

The Loong is considered a protective and benevolent creature in Chinese mythology. It is believed to guard against evil spirits, bring blessings, and offer protection to those who deserve it. The Loong's presence is seen as a symbol of security and safety. To begin with, as we previously mentioned, as a symbol of the power of nature, the Loong represents the power of the wind and rain, water currents and rivers, and lakes and seas. In ancient farming societies, the Chinese relied on water systems to irrigate their farmland, so the Loong was also seen as a protector of agriculture and waterworks, capable of providing bountiful harvests and abundance. Besides, in ancient times, the image of the

Loong was also that of a "protector" of buildings (Liu 2011). In China's ancient architecture, on the roof of the building, at both ends of the ridge, there is a Loong's head pointing up, its mouth spitting out a twisted metal tongue, stretching to the sky. The back of the Loong is connected to a thin wire, straight to the ground. Such a marvellous device, which in the event of a lightning strike, will direct the electric current from the Loong's tongue along the wire and down to the ground, playing the role of a lightning rod (Li et al. 2022). Those cultural experiences form the cultural value of Loong, which is also manifested in our cultural metaphors of Loong. For example, in the famous tourist attraction "龙门石窟 *lóng mén shí kū*" and the verse Cn. "但使龙城飞将在 *dàn shǐ lóng chéng fēi jiāng zài*" – Eng. 'if the General were still alive', the expressions Cn. "龙门" – Eng. 'the gate of Loong' and Cn. "龙城" – Eng. 'the city of Loong' are closely related to the cultural values of the Loong regarding protection and guardianship.

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

Loong is often associated with wisdom, knowledge, and enlightenment. It is revered for its wisdom and ability to bring insight and understanding. For Chinese people, Loong is considered to be a wise creature that knows the ways of heaven and earth and is able to impart valuable knowledge and wisdom to people. The wisdom of the Loong has led to a deeper understanding of the world and to a greater respect for and pursuit of the power of knowledge. One of the four masterpieces of Chinese literary works is the *Romance of the three kingdoms* ("三国演义") (Luo 1998). It is written that the Loong can be big or small, flying, or hidden. If it becomes big, it can create clouds and mist; if it becomes small, it can hide its body; if it soars, it can soar through the universe; if it hides, it can lurk beneath the waves. This demonstrates the wisdom of Loong, and this kind of wisdom is a vivid depiction of the Chinese way of life. Chinese people believe that inclusiveness lies in the wisdom of harmony in diversity, which means being harmonious but not homogeneous, different but not confrontational. Since ancient times, in the land of China, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and other schools of thought have coexisted harmoniously, reflecting each other, and together creating the unique and profound cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. Thus, the symbol of Loong profoundly interprets the cultural values of the Chinese nation, which are pluralistic, open, and inclusive.

Under the influence of the cultural values of Loong, these are some expressions that reflect the wisdom and knowledge of the Loong, which are used metaphorically to refer to people. For example,

Cn. "人中之龙 *rén zhōng zhī lóng*" – Eng. 'Loong in the midst of people' refers to outstanding and extraordinary talents. And Cn. "望子成龙 *wàng zi chéng lóng*" – Eng. 'a hope for son to become the Loong' metaphorically means that parents want their children to be successful in their studies and careers.

SPIRITUALITY AND TRANSFORMATION

Loong is seen as a spiritual being that bridges the earthly and celestial realms. It is believed to possess magical powers and the ability to transform and transcend boundaries. The Loong's association with transformation symbolizes growth, change, and renewal. The Loong's transformation is a manifestation of its wise choices in response to the time of day. The Loong is able to move clouds and rain, regulate the climate, and nourish all things by adapting to the time of day; such wisdom is also the key to the governance of the Chinese nation. Since ancient times, wise rulers and prime ministers have all been able to assess the situation and move in accordance with the times and hearts of the people. The *I Ching* ("易经") (Nan 2002) also points out acting in accordance with the times, such as Yao and Shun responding to the hearts of the people, the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty's (汉武帝) opening up of territories in accordance with the times, and Emperor Tang Taizong's rule of Zhen Guan to promote social progress. All of these are the cultural values of Loong in the successful use of Chinese governance.

For example, the Chinese idiom Cn. "鱼龙变化 *yú lóng biàn huà*" is derived from Cn. "鱼化龙 *yú huà lóng*" – Eng. 'Fish transforming into Loong', which is a decorative motif with beautiful meanings in traditional Chinese. In ancient times, it was used as an analogy for winning top marks in the imperial examinations. Through legends and folklore, this motif of Cn. "鱼化龙 *yú huà lóng*" – Eng. 'Fish transforming into Loong' has a long history, dating back to earlier fish totem worship.

BALANCE AND HARMONY

The Loong is often depicted in Chinese art and culture alongside the phoenix, representing the balance of yin and yang forces. This symbolizes harmony, unity, and the complementary nature of opposites. The Loong's presence signifies the importance of maintaining balance in all aspects of life. In "Eryayi" ("尔雅翼"), the Loong is an imaginary animal that combines different parts of many animals into a magic and powerful whole, which manifests the Chinese worldview of "harmony but

difference". This worldview plays an important role in the solidarity and unity of the multi-ethnic groups in China (Wen & Chen 2021). It embodies the pattern of unity of the Chinese nation, which was formed by the divided tribes in ancient times. After thousands of years of creation, evolution, integration, and nurturing, the Loong eventually sublimated into the Chinese nation's spiritual symbols, cultural icons, carriers of faith and emotional ties. Thus, the image of Loong represents the harmony between people and the balance between human beings and nature.

In the Chinese language, there exist expressions such as Cn. "龙飞凤舞 *lóng fēi fèng wǔ*" '– Eng. 'Loong flying and phoenix dancing'; Cn. "龙腾凤跃 *lóng téng fèng yuè*" – Eng. 'Loong galloping and phoenix leaping' and Cn. "龙凤和鸣 *lóng fèng hé míng*" '– Eng. 'Loong and phoenix singing together' to show the harmony and balance of the Loong. The appearance of the Loong and the phoenix at the same time denotes auspicious and happy events and shows a peaceful world.

LONGEVITY AND IMMORTALITY

Loong is often associated with longevity and immortality in Chinese culture. For Chinese values, longevity and immortality include two aspects, on the one hand, the wish for good health and that length of life may be prolonged, and on the other hand, the fact that one cannot be immortal, but that one's spirit and mind may remain on earth forever. In Chinese culture, Loong is believed to live for thousands of years and possess eternal life. Therefore, on the costumes of some ethnic minorities, such as Dong brocade, a folk craft inherited from the Dong people, people often embroider Loong patterns to express their wishes for the longevity of the elderly and the healthy growth of children (Li 2009). Furthermore, Loong consists of a combination of animals and possesses magical life forces, especially regenerative forces. Different parts of the Loong's body can shed, or "metamorphose", and regenerate at regular or irregular intervals, making the Loong a mystical symbol of the power of life (Lu 2000). The Chinese nation and its culture have durability and continuity. However more important is the regenerative and renewing power of the Chinese nation, and metamorphosis is a kind of renewal. The Chinese people worship the Loong and the phoenix because the phoenix can be regenerated and immortalized through "nirvana", and the Loong can be renewed and immortalized through "metamorphosis" (ibid.). Similarly, the Chinese nation relies on revolutions and reforms to achieve new life, and thus stands at the forefront of the world's ancient civilizations. That is why Loong have become an important part of cultural values in the Chinese nation.

In the Chinese language, there are expressions like Cn. "神龙 *shén lóng*" – Eng. 'the god of loong' Cn. "飞龙在天 *fēi lóng zài tiān*" – Eng. 'the flying loong is in the sky' Cn. "天龙 *tiān lóng*" – Eng. 'the loong is in the sky' Cn. "云龙 *yún lóng*" – Eng. 'the cloud and the loong' to demonstrate the divinity of Loong, and Cn. "龙马精神 *lóng mǎ jīng shén*" – Eng. 'the spirit of loong and horse' to show the vigorous energy of Loong. Thus, the longevity and immortality of Loong in Chinese culture are also manifested in language.

Overall, the cultural metaphors of Loong in Chinese culture embody a rich tapestry of values, beliefs, and symbolism that reflect the deep-rooted cultural heritage and traditions of the Chinese people. The Loong's multifaceted symbolism encompasses themes of power and strength, good fortune and prosperity, protection and guardianship, wisdom and knowledge, spirituality and transformation, balance and harmony, longevity and immortality. Thus, it can be seen that the above-discussed cultural metaphors of Loong in linguistic expressions related to Cn. "龙 *lóng*" – Eng. 'Loong' were influenced by the deep-rooted cultural values of Loong formed in Chinese cultural cognition. These cultural values of the Loong are also reflected in the myths, literature, costumes, folklore, food habits, and arts of the Chinese people.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we discuss "what does Loong mean to the Chinese people" from a cultural cognitive linguistic perspective. Some of our findings are as follows. Firstly, we talk about the mythology of Loong in Chinese culture, which has a great influence on Chinese cultural cognition towards the image of Loong. Secondly, in Chinese linguistic expressions of Loong, there are many cultural metaphors of Loong, which are POWER AND AUTHORITY IS A LOONG, STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE IS A LOONG, WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IS A LOONG, TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH IS A LOONG, PROTECTION AND GUARDIANSHIP IS A LOONG, CREATIVITY AND INSPIRATION IS A LOONG, MYSTERY AND ENCHANTMENT IS A LOONG, LONGEVITY AND ENDURANCE IS A LOONG, and PROSPERTIY AND SUCCESS IS A LOONG. These cultural conceptualizations of Loong manifested in Chinese linguistic expressions are influenced by the culturally rooted values of Loong in Chinese people's cultural cognition. Thirdly, based on the cultural metaphors of Loong in the Chinese language, we found there are some cultural values of Loong in Chinese culture, which are

power and strength, good fortune and prosperity, protection and guardianship, wisdom and knowledge, spirituality and transformation, balance and harmony, longevity and immortality. These cultural values of the Loong are also reflected in the myths, literature, costumes, folklore, food habits, and arts of the Chinese people. Meanwhile, the cultural metaphors of Loong manifested in different forms play an important role in reinforcing the cultural values of Loong in Chinese people's cognition.

Therefore, through this study, we can see that the Loong has an important value in Chinese culture. On the one hand, people's cultural value of the Loong is reflected in every aspect of their lives, and on the other hand, all of these in turn act on shaping the cultural values of Chinese people, cultivating Chinese attitudes toward life, and characterizing a Chinese worldview on life.

Notes and abbreviations

1. These linguistic expressions of Chinese character "龍" are collected from online Chinese dictionary <http://www.hydc.com/>, online classical Chinese poems <https://www.gushiwen.cn/>, and other previous literatures.
2. Translation from Chinese into English was done by the authors.

Cn. – Chinese expression

Eng. – English literary translation

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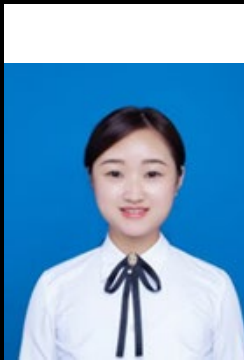
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