

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. X. No 1 2025

Special issue: Cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and affective sciences

CHINESE BAMBOO METAPHORS: A CULTURAL COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Received: 21.01.2025 **Reviewed:** 21.02.2025 and 24.03.2025

Similarity Index: 0%

Bibliographic description: Wen, X. & Dong, Z. C. (2025). Chinese bamboo metaphors: A cultural cognitive perspective. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Special issue: Cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and affective sciences, X (1), p. 198-213. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.25.10.11>

Abstract: This study explores bamboo metaphors in Chinese culture from a cultural cognitive linguistic perspective, focusing on qualities like resilience, integrity, and humility. Employing the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, it examines how bamboo serves as a vehicle for expressing abstract qualities such as resilience, integrity, and humility. It analyzes the cognitive processes behind these metaphors, shedding light on the relationship between language, culture, and cognition and highlighting cultural specificity in metaphorical conceptualization.

Keywords: bamboo metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory, cultural cognition, cognitive linguistics, Chinese culture.

1. Introduction

Bamboo (竹, *zhú*) is one of the most iconic symbols in Chinese culture, embodying both a versatile natural resource and a profound cultural metaphor. With its elegant appearance and unique physical properties, bamboo has played a vital role in Chinese culture for thousands of years. Beyond its



practical applications, bamboo occupies a special place in the cultural imagination, serving as a rich source of metaphorical meaning in Chinese literature, art, and philosophy.

From early Confucian texts to modern literature, bamboo is frequently associated with virtues such as humility, resilience, and inner strength in Chinese culture (Wang 2014). Classical Chinese poets employed bamboo imagery to articulate personal ideals and address social concerns, while painters incorporated bamboo into their artworks to symbolize harmony between humanity and nature. These enduring symbolic meanings underscore bamboo's profound cultural significance and its inseparable connection to Chinese cultural identity, serving as a timeless representation of traditional Chinese values.

We use a cultural cognitive linguistic approach to investigate how bamboo metaphors are conceptualized and employed in Chinese language and thought. By systematically analyzing Chinese bamboo metaphors, the research seeks to uncover underlying cognitive processes and illuminate how these metaphors embody, reinforce, and reflect core Chinese cultural values, offering insights into the interplay between language, cognition, and culture.

2. The theoretical framework

This study adopts two primary theoretical frameworks: conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) and the theory of cultural cognition. CMT provides a cognitive linguistic foundation for analyzing the structure and function of Chinese bamboo metaphors, while cultural cognition emphasizes the role of culture in shaping metaphorical meanings. Together, these approaches enable a comprehensive exploration of bamboo metaphors in Chinese language and thought.

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

CMT, first introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980a), posits that metaphors are not mere decorative aspects of language but are essential to human cognition. CMT shows abstract concepts are often understood and reasoned through concrete, sensory experiences. Metaphors act as cognitive mappings, linking the more abstract "target domain" to a more familiar and concrete "source domain" (Kövecses 2015). For example, complex or intangible ideas are made more comprehensible by

relating them to everyday experiences, allowing individuals to navigate and communicate intricate thoughts. This process shapes individual cognition and social communication, highlighting how metaphors are deeply embedded in how people think, speak, and interpret the world around them.

Analyzing metaphors provides valuable insights into the cognitive processes underlying language and thought. CMT has profoundly impacted cultural cognitive linguistics, offering a robust framework for analyzing the cognitive mechanisms behind metaphorical expressions (Wen & Yang 2023). It reveals how metaphors reflect universal and culturally specific conceptual structures, emphasizing how metaphors shape and reflect different societies' values, beliefs, and worldviews. The theory highlights metaphors' significant role in forming individual cognition and collective cultural identities. Although metaphors may be shared across cultures, their elaboration often varies depending on particular historical, social, and environmental contexts, reflecting each culture's unique perspective on the world (Kövecses 2005).

By applying CMT to the study of Chinese cultural metaphors, such as those involving bamboo, this research provides a deeper understanding of how metaphorical expressions mirror universal cognitive patterns while also reflecting culture-specific systems. The combination of cultural cognition and CMT facilitates a more comprehensive exploration of how cognitive mechanisms and cultural influences interact, enriching our understanding of language and culture.

2.2 Cultural cognition and metaphor

Cultural cognition refers to how cultural factors shape our cognitive processes, such as perception, categorization, and reasoning (Palmer 1996). In the context of metaphors, cultural cognition plays a pivotal role in shaping the metaphors that emerge within a specific culture. These metaphors are deeply rooted in a community's shared history, environment, and social practices, reflecting individual experiences and collective values (Wen 2024). Different cultures, with their distinct historical and social contexts, may develop unique metaphorical systems that influence how abstract concepts are understood. Therefore, metaphors are a powerful tool for exploring the intricate relationship between language, thought, and culture.

As Sharifian (2011) stated, cultural cognition is the foundation of metaphorical conceptualization, with metaphors reflecting a culture's values, beliefs, and worldview. For instance, in Chinese culture, the prominence of bamboo has led to metaphors symbolizing qualities such as resilience, integrity, and other esteemed values in Chinese philosophy and daily life. These culturally grounded metaphors convey abstract ideas and reinforce and perpetuate the values that shape collective cognition. Analyzing metaphors gives us crucial insights into the intricate relationship between culture, cognition, and language (Sharifian 2017). In cultural cognition theory, metaphors are vital as they are not just linguistic expressions but cognitive structures that reflect and shape how people perceive and understand their world. Metaphors encapsulate the underlying cognitive patterns deeply influenced by cultural contexts, offering a window into how abstract concepts are processed and conceptualized (Wen & Chen 2024).

This study is based on cultural cognition theory because it offers a valuable framework for examining how metaphors, such as those involving bamboo in Chinese culture, reflect and reinforce the cultural values, beliefs, and practices that shape collective cognition. Through this approach, we can better understand how metaphors function as cognitive mappings that bridge individual thought with broader cultural knowledge, shedding light on the profound interplay between culture, cognition, and language in shaping the Chinese worldview.

3. Bamboo metaphors in Chinese culture

This section examines a broad range of bamboo metaphors in Chinese texts, outlining their main textual manifestations. Data were collected from classical poems, modern prose, and dictionaries, ensuring inclusive representation. Four distinct types of bamboo metaphors are identified on this basis.

3.1 BAMBOO FOR RESILIENCE

In Chinese culture, bamboo is often used as a metaphor for resilience, symbolizing strength, flexibility, and the ability to endure adversity. Known for its unique physical property of bending without breaking, bamboo is a powerful representation of perseverance in facing challenges. This metaphorical connection is deeply ingrained in traditional Chinese thought, where resilience is viewed as the ability to endure hardship and the capacity to adapt and emerge stronger from difficulty.

The prominent Chinese idiom, 勢如破竹 (*shì rú pò zhú*, like bamboo breaking through an obstacle), uses the source domain of bamboo to illustrate the target domain of resilience. In this metaphor, bamboo's ability to break through an obstacle without resistance symbolizes the dynamic force of resilience. The metaphor suggests that resilience is not a passive state but an active and unstoppable momentum that overcomes any barriers in its path. Bamboos effortless penetration through an obstacle emphasizes that true resilience involves breaking through challenges with strength and determination rather than merely enduring them. This metaphor presents resilience as a force that actively dismantles adversity, moving forward with relentless ease and power.

In contrast, the idiom 破竹建瓴 (*pò zhú jiàn líng*, breaking bamboo to build a pitcher) expands the concept of resilience by connecting the source domain of bamboo to the target domain of transformation and creation. Bamboo, in this idiom, is a symbol of breaking through barriers and constructing something meaningful from that very act of overcoming. The image of using broken bamboo to create a pitcher illustrates that resilience is not just about surviving or resisting adversity; it involves the ability to transform challenges into new possibilities (Wang 2014). This metaphor reflects the idea that through resilience, one can harness the power of adversity to foster growth and renewal, turning obstacles into opportunities for creation. Thus, bamboo in this expression signifies the strength to break through and the creative potential that arises from overcoming difficulties.

These metaphors highlight bamboo's association with flexible and powerful resilience. This form of resilience is not about rigidity but about bending with nature's forces, adapting, and emerging stronger. It reflects the core values of perseverance and adaptability in Chinese philosophy, where gracefully enduring hardship is a highly esteemed virtue.

3.2 BAMBOO FOR INTEGRITY

Bamboo has long been revered in Chinese culture as a powerful symbol of integrity, a quality deeply embedded in Confucian philosophy and Chinese moral thought. The distinctive characteristics of bamboo, including its straight and resilient stalk and hollow interior, have inspired profound interpretations of moral uprightness and inner strength. In Chinese tradition, bamboo's unyielding

exterior represents steadfastness, while its hollow core symbolizes humility, suggesting that true integrity comes from within, not from external appearances.

The famous Chinese poet Su Shi (苏轼), in his reflection on bamboo, wrote, 竹有节而无心 (*zhú yǒujié ér wúxīn*, the bamboo has no content, yet it stands tall and straight). In this metaphor, the source domain of bamboo's physical characteristics, its segmented structure is applied to the target domain of moral integrity. The 节 (*jié*, joints of bamboo) symbolize integrity in Chinese thought, representing the idea that true virtue does not require ostentation or external display. The metaphor suggests that integrity, like bamboo's unadorned form, is rooted in inner strength and moral steadfastness, not superficial show (Su 2000). The expression 无心 (*wú xīn*, no content) emphasizes the absence of selfishness or personal desire, aligning with Confucian ideals where righteousness and virtue are inherent, unpretentious qualities (Confucius et al. 2015). Bamboo, as a source domain, thus serves as a model for personal conduct, urging individuals to embody moral strength and humility while remaining upright in the face of external pressures.

Another sentence in Su Shi's work, 宁可食无肉, 不可居无竹 (*nìngkě shí wú ròu, bùkě jū wú zhú*, It is better to go without meat than to live without bamboo), uses bamboo to highlight the target domain of moral resilience. In this expression, bamboo symbolizes practicality and is an unwavering integrity and endurance emblem. The metaphor reflects the idea that, even in times of hardship, one should maintain their principles and values, represented by the presence of bamboo over material comforts like meat. The proverb suggests that moral integrity, symbolized by bamboo, holds more significance than fleeting pleasures or necessities (He 2007). The bamboo here moves beyond its role as a physical object; it becomes a spiritual symbol, emphasizing qualities such as fortitude, resilience, and purity. By equating bamboo with moral strength, this saying reinforces its position in Chinese culture as a symbol of physical survival, enduring virtue, and moral rectitude.

In these cultural references, bamboo consistently functions as a symbol of integrity within Chinese philosophy. Its straight, resilient form epitomizes moral uprightness, reminding us of the importance of adhering to our principles in the face of external pressures. Bamboo thus conveys that true integrity

is not contingent upon external circumstances or appearances but is rooted in an individual's internal commitment to ethical values and personal convictions.

3.3 BAMBOO FOR HUMILITY

Another important metaphorical dimension of bamboo is its association with humility. Bamboo grows tall but remains flexible and grounded, interpreted as a metaphor for modesty and self-restraint. In Chinese culture, humility is highly valued, and bamboo is often used to represent the ideal of an accomplished and humble person.

The phrase 空谷幽兰, 竹林深处 (*kōng gǔ yōu lán, zhú lín shēn chù*, a hidden orchid in a quiet valley, deep within the bamboo forest), draws on the source domain of bamboo and its environment to convey a specific conception of humility and contentment. In this metaphor, the bamboo forest serves as the backdrop, with the 幽兰 representing an individual who remains modest and unassuming (He 2007). The target domain here is the person's character, particularly their inclination towards simplicity and self-restraint. The quiet, secluded bamboo forest symbolizes a setting free from external distractions or societal pressures, highlighting the individual's choice to stay out of the limelight, content in their own presence and without the desire for recognition or fame. Thus, the metaphor conveys the peace of solitude and the virtue of humility, with bamboo's deep connection to nature underscoring the idea of living authentically, without seeking attention.

The expression that embodies bamboo's connection to humility is the Chinese idiom 高风亮节 (*gāo fēng liàng jié*, high character and noble integrity). This idiom is often used to describe individuals who uphold moral principles with steadfastness, unyielding to external pressures, and whose actions reflect exemplary conduct. The word 节 (*jié*) in this idiom can be directly associated with the segments or joints of bamboo, which are regarded as symbols of integrity and uprightness (He 2007). With its distinct segmented structure, bamboo is a metaphor for moral "segments" that remain firm and unbroken, signifying a person's unyielding adherence to virtuous principles.

In this context, the part of bamboo embodies the notion of self-restraint and moral clarity, essential aspects of humility. The bamboo's ability to grow tall while maintaining its rootedness in the ground

mirrors the individual who, while accomplished or high-ranking, does not let pride or ego sway their character. Just as bamboo's segments are unbroken and steady, a person with 高风亮节 maintains their principles, unaffected by external recognition or fame, illustrating the deep connection between bamboo and humility.

3.4 BAMBOO FOR HARMONY

In Chinese tradition, bamboo is also a profound metaphor for social harmony and communal well-being. The image of a bamboo forest, dense and interwoven stalks, evokes a vision of unity and mutual dependence (Lin 2016). Each bamboo stalk relies on others for support, illustrating the importance of cooperation and solidarity in fostering a harmonious society. This metaphor has been deeply embedded in the Chinese cultural psyche, emphasizing collective prosperity and interdependence as foundational values.

One of the most significant expressions of bamboo's symbolic meaning is the idiom 竹报平安 (*zhú bào píng ān*, bamboo brings peace), which is commonly used as a New Year's greeting. Bamboo serves as the source domain in this expression, while peace and safety represent the target domain. The image of bamboo, a resilient and vibrant plant despite harsh conditions, conveys the idea of enduring peace and stability. This metaphor suggests that, just as bamboo thrives in difficult environments, the hope is that peace will prevail despite societal challenges. By invoking bamboo in this way, the idiom conveys a personal wish for individual well-being and expresses a broader aspiration for harmony and prosperity within the community. It highlights the role of stability and resilience in maintaining peace and safety at both the personal and societal levels.

Similarly, the idiom 竹苞松茂 (*zhú bāo sōng mào*, bamboo flourishing, pine thriving) connects the source domains of bamboo and pine to the target domain of societal flourishing. Bamboo represents individuals, while the pine tree symbolizes steadfastness and resilience. The flourishing bamboo signifies personal growth and prosperity, while the pine complements it by emphasizing enduring strength and stability. The synergy between bamboo and pine in this metaphor reflects a vision of a flourishing society where the success of individuals (bamboo) is supported by collective strength (pine) (Lun & Zhang 2022). This metaphor underscores the idea that a prosperous society is not only

built on individual achievements but also on mutual support and resilience, where the growth of each member contributes to the stability and success of the whole. Thus, bamboo and pine symbolize the balance between dynamic growth and steady endurance, which is essential for a thriving community. Through these metaphors, bamboo transcends its role as a natural element to become a symbol of harmony, mutual respect, and societal cohesion. In Chinese thought, its interwoven stalks and enduring growth remind us that social harmony is not achieved through isolation but through collective effort and mutual reliance (Wen 2024). This interconnectedness reflects core Chinese values, emphasizing social cohesion, the importance of family, and the collective good.

4. Implications for cultural cognitive linguistics

As Foolen (2023) noted, embedding linguistic theory in a more general social theory on norms and habits is helpful for understanding the phenomenon of linguistic feeling. This study illuminates the dynamic interplay between linguistic expressions, cultural values, and cognitive processes. This study contributes to the development of cultural cognitive linguistics by analyzing bamboo metaphors. This field bridges the gap between language, thought, and cultural context, emphasizing how metaphorical language reveals underlying cognitive structures shaped by culture (Sinha 2021).

4.1 Metaphor in Cultural Conceptualization

Metaphors are instrumental in shaping abstract cultural concepts and guiding human thought (Lakoff & Johnson 1980b). In Chinese culture, bamboo plays a significant role as a metaphor, helping to conceptualize core values such as foresight, simplicity, and futility. Through its unique physical attributes, the metaphors associated with bamboo offer a rich framework for understanding these abstract concepts and making them more accessible within cultural conceptualization.

- (1) 胸有成竹 (*xiōng yǒu chéng zhú*, having a well-thought-out plan)
- (2) 竹篱茅舍 (*zhú lí máo shè*, bamboo fence and thatched cottage)
- (3) 竹篮打水一场空 (*zhúlán dǎshuǐ yīchǎng kōng*, drawing water with a bamboo basket)

In Example (1), the metaphor draws on bamboo's characteristic of growing straight and unwavering once it has matured. It reflects Chinese cultural values of foresight and preparation, suggesting that, like a painter envisioning a bamboo before painting, a person with a clear plan demonstrates certainty and clarity in their actions. Bamboo's mature, well-formed growth symbolizes how careful planning

leads to success and stability. This metaphor conceptualizes foresight as a mental quality and an embodied characteristic that ensures effective execution. By linking bamboo's growth to a well-thought-out plan, the metaphor illustrates how foresight is integral to achieving tangible outcomes, encapsulating the cultural belief that clear vision and preparation are essential for overcoming challenges and achieving lasting success.

Example (2) uses the image of bamboo to symbolize simplicity and humility. The imagery of a humble bamboo fence and a thatched cottage represents a way of life that is unpretentious, modest, and harmonious with nature. This metaphor encapsulates a broader cultural ideal that values modest living and simplicity, suggesting that true contentment and peace can be found in living close to nature and avoiding the complexities of material wealth and urban life. In contrast, Example (3) serves as a metaphor for futility. This expression illustrates the inherent limitations of bamboo as a material, highlighting how its hollow nature makes it unsuitable for holding water. It is used to describe efforts that lead to no tangible result and draws attention to the gap between intention and outcome and the futility of actions that are inherently doomed to fail. While bamboo is strong and flexible, its practical limitations are emphasized here to underscore that even the most well-intentioned efforts can sometimes prove fruitless. This metaphor provides a vivid way to conceptualize failure. It emphasizes the cultural understanding that some tasks, no matter how well planned, may not always yield success due to intrinsic limitations.

The process of cultural conceptualization highlights how metaphorical language reflects and actively constructs cultural cognition, providing a framework through which these ideals are passed down and embodied in daily life (Baranyiné Kóczy 2023). These bamboo metaphors demonstrate bamboo's central role in shaping Chinese cultural values by transforming its physical characteristics into symbols for a wide range of abstract concepts. Through such metaphors, bamboo becomes a cognitive structure that helps individuals understand and internalize complex cultural ideas, such as resilience, humility, and foresight. Each metaphor draws upon bamboo as a source domain, shaping how Chinese society perceives and values these abstract concepts.

4.2 Cultural context and metaphorical thinking

The analysis of bamboo metaphors underscores the crucial role that cultural context plays in shaping metaphorical thinking. In Chinese culture, bamboo is prominent, symbolizing virtues such as resilience, integrity, and humility. This cultural significance has led to a rich and diverse set of metaphors reflecting the unique Chinese worldview. Bamboo is an important cultural symbol and an essential vehicle for expressing complex social values, emotions, and philosophical ideas. These metaphors encapsulate the interconnectedness of nature, society, and individual character, providing insights into how the Chinese perceive the world and their place in it.

(4) 松竹繁茂 (*sōng zhú fán mào*, the pine and bamboo flourish together)

(5) 青梅竹马 (*qīng méi zhú mǎ*, childhood sweethearts)

(6) 千磨万击还坚劲，任尔东西南北风 (*qiānmó wànjī hái jiānjìng, rèn ěr dōng xī nán běi fēng*, It endures thousands of strikes, and remains strong against any wind from all directions)

One notable example is the idiom in Example (4), which often highlights the cultural value of harmony, balance, and complementarity in Chinese thought. The pine, known for its resilience and steadfastness in adverse conditions, pairs with bamboo, which symbolizes flexibility and vitality. Together, they represent an ideal of harmonious coexistence, where strength and adaptability are equally valued. In Chinese philosophy, this balance is crucial for both personal and societal well-being. Just as the pine and bamboo flourish in a symbiotic relationship, society is believed to prosper when individuals with different strengths work together in balance. This metaphor underscores the cultural belief that stability is achieved not through uniformity but through the respectful integration of diverse natural or societal forces, creating a harmonious whole.

In the idiom 青梅竹马 (*qīng méi zhú mǎ*, green plums and bamboo horses), bamboo serves as a metaphor for relationships, particularly childhood love and friendships. The phrase evokes the image of two children growing up together, sharing an innocent, pure bond. Bamboo, with its slender, flexible stalks, mirrors the adaptability and resilience of these early relationships. It suggests that, like bamboo, such bonds are malleable and can grow stronger over time, weathering life's challenges. This metaphor reflects a key aspect of Chinese culture: the importance of loyalty, fidelity, and relationships nurtured over time. Bamboo's role in this idiom underscores the idea that familial or romantic

relationships are most valued when they are long-lasting, resilient, and rooted in mutual trust. These qualities are highly esteemed in Chinese society, where the cultivation of deep, enduring connections is seen as essential for personal and collective harmony.

Furthermore, the line of poetry in Example (6) is written by the Chinese Song Dynasty poet Wen Tianxiang, which draws on bamboo's physical property of bending without breaking, symbolizing the strength and perseverance of individuals or communities facing challenges. In Chinese culture, this metaphor aligns with the belief that true strength lies in the ability to endure hardship with dignity and resolve. The image of bamboo enduring fierce winds without breaking speaks to the ideal of resilience, not merely surviving but maintaining strength despite external pressures. This metaphor reflects the deep cultural value placed on perseverance, suggesting that those who can adapt to and overcome adversity emerge stronger and more determined.

These examples demonstrate how bamboo, as a metaphor, is deeply embedded in Chinese culture, reflecting values like balance, resilience, and enduring relationships. Bamboo's symbolic significance is shaped by the Chinese worldview, which emphasizes harmony between nature, society, and the individual. The cultural context is crucial in shaping metaphorical thinking, as metaphors are not universal but rooted in specific cultural experiences and values (Foolen 2021). Understanding the cultural background enhances our appreciation of the deeper meanings conveyed through such metaphors.

4.3 Bamboo metaphors and cognitive processes

The study of bamboo metaphors provides valuable insights into the cognitive processes that underlie metaphorical thought, particularly in embodied cognition, metonymy, and conceptual blending. These processes are fundamental to understanding how humans use metaphors to make sense of the world, and bamboo, as a rich cultural symbol in Chinese tradition, offers a powerful lens through which these processes can be examined.

(7) 竹报平安 (*zhú bào píng ān*, bamboo brings peace)

(8) 竹林七贤 (*zhú lín qī xián*, seven sages of the bamboo grove)

(9) 竹苞松茂 (*zhú bāo sōng mào*, bamboo flourishing, pine thriving)

One of the key cognitive processes involved in metaphorical thought is embodied cognition, which suggests that human cognition is deeply rooted in bodily experiences and interactions with the environment (Gibbs 2008). Bamboo metaphors often draw on the physical properties of bamboo, such as its flexibility, resilience, and uprightness, to convey abstract ideas. For example, the idiom 竹报平安 in Example (7) uses bamboo's enduring strength and upright form to symbolize stability and peace. The metaphor here reflects a bodily understanding of peace and security, where the stability of the bamboo in the face of wind and storms embodies the resilience required to maintain social harmony. This conceptual link between the physical world of bamboo and the abstract concept of peace is a prime example of how embodied cognition shapes metaphorical thinking, making abstract concepts more tangible and accessible.

In addition to embodied cognition, conceptual metonymy plays a crucial role in bamboo metaphors, as it allows one thing to stand for another based on a relationship of contiguity. The idiom in Example (8) 竹林七贤 is a classic example of metonymy, where bamboo is used to represent a group of intellectuals. The term refers to seven scholars from the Wei-Jin period who withdrew from the world to live in a bamboo grove, emphasizing their rejection of social norms in favor of a life of intellectual and moral purity. Bamboo here does not just symbolize the physical environment in which the sages lived and the moral and intellectual refinement they represented. This metonymic association reflects bamboo's role as a symbol of scholarly integrity and self-cultivation, and it highlights how metonymy allows a single cultural symbol, bamboo, to convey a deeper set of meanings related to morality, intellect, and lifestyle.

Finally, conceptual blending is the cognitive process of combining two or more mental spaces to form new meanings that can also be seen in bamboo metaphors. This blending process allows us to integrate different concepts to form a unified, often more complex, idea (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). In Example (9), 竹苞松茂 blends the characteristics of bamboo and pine to create a metaphor for flourishing and prosperity. While bamboo is known for its rapid growth and flexibility, the pine is celebrated for its strength and longevity. By blending these two symbols, this expression conveys the

ideal of balanced growth, where the qualities of both plants work together to symbolize a harmonious and prosperous existence. Blending the flexible bamboo with the enduring pine allows for the conceptualization of a society or individual that thrives through a combination of adaptability and resilience, which are qualities essential for success in both personal and communal life.

Studying bamboo metaphors provides valuable insights into the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphorical thought, such as embodied cognition, metonymy, and conceptual blending. Bamboo is a rich cultural symbol encapsulating various cognitive processes, offering a clear example of how metaphorical language shapes our understanding of the world. Through bamboo metaphors, abstract concepts like peace, intellect, and prosperity are brought to life, demonstrating the power of metaphor to connect the tangible and the intangible in human cognition.

5. Conclusion

Bamboo metaphors are integral to Chinese culture, serving as a powerful linguistic tool for expressing core values and abstract concepts. This paper has examined bamboo metaphors' linguistic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions through the lens of cognitive linguistics, revealing how they encapsulate Chinese perspectives on resilience, integrity, humility, and social harmony. The study underscores the pivotal role of metaphor in shaping cultural cognition and offers deeper insights into the interconnections between language, culture, and thought. As China increasingly engages with the global community, exploring bamboo metaphors provides a valuable avenue for bridging cultural differences and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Notes

1. The linguistic expressions of the Chinese character "竹" are collected from the online Chinese dictionary <http://www.hydc.com/>, the online classical Chinese poems <https://www.gushiwen.cn/>.
2. The translation from Chinese into English was done by the authors.

Abbreviations

CMT – Conceptual metaphor theory


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