

A Study of Plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions* from Perspective of Multimodal Metaphor

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Abstract: Multimodal metaphor develops fast based on conceptual metaphor theory, and it is deeply rooted in humans' thoughts and actions. Besides, multiple modalities play great roles in representing metaphor domains, mapping between domains and constructing metaphorical meanings. *A Dream of Red Mansions* is named as a "Metaphor Kingdom" because of its abundant metaphors, providing rich materials for the study of multimodal metaphors. This paper collects 38 descriptions of plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions* as source domains, and then concludes the classifications of target domains and analyses multimodal metaphor process through deconstruction, code and recombination by using multimodal metaphor blending theory. It is found that multimodal metaphor target domains can be mainly classified in four types: personality metaphors, destiny metaphors, emotion metaphors and relationship metaphors. This study is of great significance to not only promote "Redology" and *A Dream of Red Mansions* to the world, but also create a new method to interpret plant metaphors.

1. Introduction

There were two significant milestones in metaphor development. The first change was from traditional metaphor to conceptual metaphor. Traditional metaphor was a rhetorical device mainly to analyse literature works. Then, George Lakoff and Johnson first put forward conceptual metaphor by proposing, "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action", breaking the shackles of rhetorical metaphor^[1]. The second important turn was from mono-modal metaphor to multimodal metaphor. With fast-paced development of new media, metaphor was not only represented by pure-verbal modalities, but also expressed through multiple modalities such as picture, sound, colour, etc.

Multimodal metaphor studies started from western countries. Forceville used visual modality to analyse pictorial metaphor in 1996^[2]. Then, Forceville and Urios-Aparisi proposed "Multimodal metaphor" and collected 18 papers in different genres, such as advertising^[3], brand images^[4], editorial cartoons^[5], and films^[6], having laid foundation for future studies. In China, multimodal metaphor studies started later but developed fast. Zhao Xiufeng^[7,8], Feng Dezheng^[9] and other scholars^[10-12] devoted themselves to introducing and enriching multimodal metaphor studies. Scholars has explored meaning construction, modality representations, and mappings in different genres. For example, Pan Yanyan^[11] explained the internal mechanism targeted to source domain and the influence of culture in meaning construction in political comics. Liu Man^[12] summarized multimodal metaphor classifications by using Conceptual Blending Theory, and discourse features in Covid-19 pandemic discourses. Among various genres, printed books not only present word modality, but also contain various modalities if it articulates the sensory experiences. However, there are insufficient studies discussing multimodal metaphor in printed literature works.

A Dream of Red Mansions is one of four great masterpieces in China, attracting many scholars in literature and linguistics fields. In such a masterpiece, the descriptions of plants, clothes, decorations, and etiquette are abundant and they have profound metaphorical meanings, so they can help to shape characters and push forward plot development^[13]. Some studies used conceptual

metaphor theory. For example, Zhang Guanghua^[14], and Li Wei and Gao Wencheng^[15] analysed basic conceptual metaphors in this book. In addition, Duan Rongjuan^[13] analysed four classifications of multimodal metaphor in this book. Besides, there were many studies discussing plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. However, studies on multimodal metaphor of plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions* were lacking and not systematic.

Under the circumstances, it is of great value and significance to study multimodal metaphor of plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. On the one hand, the study will enrich case studies in multimodal metaphor. On the other hand, it will reduce complexity in reading by interpreting metaphorical meanings hidden in plant images in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and promote the masterpiece to the world effectively.

This paper will sort out sources, targets and related modalities and interpret the emergent meanings combined with cultural background and plot settings.

2. Methods

2.1. Deconstruction and code

There are 242 kinds of plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions*^[16]. Most Plants in Grand View Garden were depicted in detail and some of plants appeared in descriptions of poems and dreams. Among these descriptions, plants in Grand View Garden were the most representative, especially plants in each character's court.

Through observation and collection, 38 samples were obtained with the following criteria: (a) the plants are described in detail. (b) Combined with context and cultural background, metaphorical meanings of plants can be articulated immediately.

The deconstruction and code process are divided into two steps (see Table 1): (1) at the first step, the descriptions of plants are classified into visual modality, aural modality, olfactory modality, gustatory modality, tactile modality, plant features, growth stage, growing environment, character's emotion, destiny, personality of characters and relationship among characters. (2) At the second step, classifications above are coded into modality, source domain, and target domain.

Table 1 Coding process.

Step 3	Step 2	Step 1
Modality	Visual	Word, picture, colour, line, space distribution, style, behaviour, movement, body language...
	Aural	Music, sound, spoken language...
	Olfactory	Smell, taste...
	Gustatory	Taste...
	Tactile...	Texture...
Source domain	Plant features	Thin bamboo, pear flowers, fragrance of creepers, vines and trailers...
	Growth stage	Falling flowers...
	Growing environment...	Bamboos' shadow, pace arrangements of bamboos, distribution of two plants...
Target domain	Personality	The personality and appearance of Miaoyu, Baochai's pursuit...
	Destiny	Decreasing youth, Xiangling's fate, Jia family's development...
	Emotion	Daiyu's emotion...
	Relationship	The relationship among Jia, Lin, Shi...

2.2. Measures

Mappings and meaning constructions are covert processes in brain. Conceptual Blending Theory was used to exteriorize the dynamic process^[17]. Based on the key factors of Conceptual Blending Theory and blending model proposed by Brandt and Brandt^[18], Zhao Xiufeng proposed Multimodal

Metaphor Blending Theory^[8]. This paper used the framework of Multimodal Metaphor Blending Theory to analyse the multimodal metaphor of plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions* (see Figure 1).

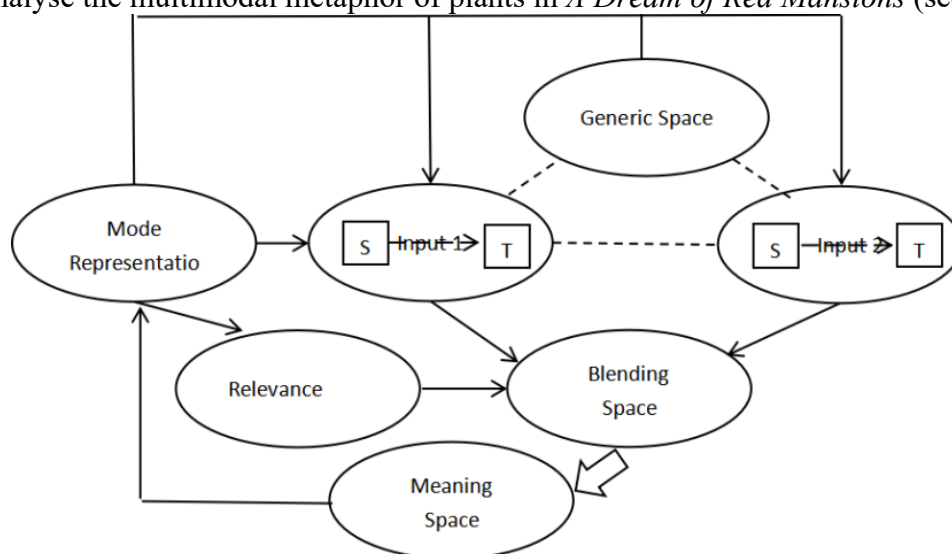


Figure 1 Framework of multimodal metaphor blending theory.

3. Results

There are four classifications of multimodal metaphor of plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. 16 samples (42.1%) are classified as personality metaphors, 16 samples (42.1%) belong to destiny metaphors, 4 (11.5%) are emotion metaphors and 2 (5.3%) are relationship metaphors.

3.1. Plants are Characters' Personality

Plants are metaphors of characters' personality. In Chapter 5 and Chapter 17 of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, different plants in each court were introduced in detail. These descriptions involved many modalities, especially visual modality including picture, colour, space distribution, etc. Because each characters in the novel selected and managed their own court, plants in each court were usually mapped to its masters. For example, paddy-stalk copings and apricot flowers are metaphors of Li Wan's personality. Rare creepers, trailers and vines indicate the personality of Xue Baochai. Plum flowers in Green Lattice Nunnery are embodiment of Miaoyu's disposition.

Take the metaphor of paddy-stalk copings and apricot flowers as a prototypical example. Paddy-Sweet Cottage was described as a place where yellow paddy-stalk copings covered the brown adobe walls, and splendid blossoms of hundreds of apricot-trees were as red and rosy as clouds. These descriptions gather colour, picture and space distribution modalities.

In the first metaphor, paddy-stalk copings are Li Wan's indifference. Paddy-stalk copings and colour stood for the secluded farming life without desire, chaos, and enthusiasm, so they indicated that Li Wan, wife of dead Jia Zhu, was indifferent to society and life. As is shown in the masterpiece, Li Wan strictly obeyed traditional doctrines and ethnic rules, kept herself away from family affairs on purpose and remained calm and indifferent.

In the second metaphor, apricot flowers are Li Wan's temperate changes in her personality. The most attracting images in description were red blossoms competing with each other. Red was warm and reflected enthusiasm and passion, showing that Li Wan also had some passions temporarily. For example, since Li Wan moved in Grand View Garden, she began to join the poem clubs with girls, sometimes told anecdotes, and even persuaded Tanchun to drink liquor on club party. Far away from feudal ethics, she can loosen her own bound and release her nature for a short period. Altogether, the great number of flowers of apricot-trees and fresh red reflect shortly released enthusiasm of Li Wan.

In the third metaphor, the contrast of paddy-stalk copings and apricot flowers forms a metaphor of Li Wan's contradiction in her personality. Paddy-stalk copings were base images out of the yard,

while apricot flowers were front images in the yard. The space distribution showed that Li Wan's indifference is main personality, and her stimulated disposition will only last for a temperate period like apricot flowers.

3.2. Plants are Destiny

First, the flourishing and fading of plants construe metaphors of characters' past, present and future destiny. There are some examples. In the seventh paragraph of Chapter 87 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Xiangyun talked about characters' moving by using "plant roots". Xiangyun's utterance used oral modality and "clap" and "laugh" were rendered as movement modality. In this metaphor, migration of plants' roots indicated changes of living environment of human beings. Specifically, Daiyu was born in southern China, but because of destiny, she came to Grand View Garden. In the Chapter 40 of the novel, a thin phoenix tree in Tanchun's court was depicted. Picture modality showed that the phoenix tree was at an early age. Tanchun was also young when moving to Grand View Garden. Based on the cultural background, a phoenix tree is excellent and noble because it can attract phoenix, king of birds with noble virtues, so the phoenix tree articulated that Tanchun would accumulate wisdom and abilities later, but she was at an early age at that moment.

In Chapter 66, there was a line in the poem describing the scene when You Sanjie committed suicide. "Peach-blossom" activated picture modality, "red" activated colour modality, "trampled" activated movement modality and the word "stains" conveyed space distribution. Red peach flower was beautiful and delicate, which indicated that You Sanjie was pretty and attractive. The trampled peach flowers and red peach flowers articulated the death of You Sanjie. Besides, red flowers covered the whole ground. Such space distribution reflected a large amount of blood. Peach flower was also regarded as a messenger of love. However, peach flowers were trampled and completely damaged, representing her fate in love.

When Baoyu recovered from an illness, he happened to see a big apricot tree whose flowers had fallen and leaves grew densely. On the tree was some fruits as big as beans. He signed under the tree because he had already known the metaphorical meaning of big apricot tree. In this description, word, picture, oral, movement and space distribution modalities interacted with each other. The growth of trees reflected Xing Xiuyan's destiny and other girls'. In this metaphor, beauty and youth were like flowers, and they both withered following the nature's rules. Leaves and fruits were children, standing for girls' future responsibility. Moreover, high trees was at a high position when people were at a low position. This space distribution meant humans had no idea how to stop both the inevitable nature process and girls' fate.

Second, plants are also metaphors of destiny of a big family. For example, there was a pomegranate tree with four or five branches gathering and a crab-apple tree with blooming flowers. Except picture modality, character's daily dialogue conveyed oral modality and the expression of "four or five branches" belonged to space distribution. Blossoms of the multi-petalled crab-apple tree and pomegranate indicated that Jia family was strong and rich and was developing to its golden time.

The first description of broken, old and scattered scenes in Grand View Garden appeared in Chapter 40 of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Broken lotus leaves, fading grass and scattered caltrops used picture modality and the dialogue between characters used oral modality. These plants showed loosened management and less capable managers in Jia family, and indicated the fall of Jia family. When Yuanchun had a visit to Jia family, they hang fake flowers or lanterns on bare branches. If Jia family was still in golden age and had good management, broken lotus leaves, grass and caltrops would be removed in time. However, the broken plants existed, and even created a more chill, and depressed atmosphere.

3.3. Plants are Emotion

In the last four paragraph in Chapter 26 of the masterpiece, there was a description of Daiyu's desperate sobbing. The description used picture, colour, tactile, and space distribution modalities. When Daiyu was on her way back her court, she saw the shadows of bamboos and cold moss on the ground. Colour of both plants are pale and dark-green, indicating that she was desperate. Although

there were some flowers on the way, cold wind made these flowers faint and wretched. Daiyu's faint body stood in the corner of wall and below the flowers lonely. Such space distribution and apparent contrast produced an atmosphere of isolation and represented Daiyu's extreme loneliness and sorrow.

In Daiyu's life belief, she believed that a happy gathering was doomed to separate, so she felt it was unnecessary to gather. Therefore, Daiyu was always worried when she witnessed something happy. For example, when she saw Jia families cared for Baoyu after he was beaten, she recalled her miserable family and became depressed. When she saw intimate interactions between Baochai and her mother, she sobbed at once. She lost her family, lived in relatives' home, so she was extremely sensitive and was cautious about all tiny issues. She bitterly endured the pressure of society and torture from her body. In such a condition, it was inevitable for her to be pessimistic and helpless.

In Chapter 27, there was a sentence depicting the ground strewn with various petals, such as balsam and pomegranate petals. "Falling flowers" activated picture modality, "falling" activated movement modality and "thick" activated space distribution modality. In this metaphor, falling flowers are Baoyu's worries. There were some misunderstandings between Daiyu and Baoyu, but they did not explain to each other. Baoyu worried Daiyu, so his emotion was exteriorized by flowers when he saw the falling. The more he felt worried, the more flowers fell. Besides, the thick flowers on the ground showed the level of his worry.

3.4. Plants are Relationship

"This opened at a picture of fragrant osmanthus above withered lotus in a dried-up pond"^[19]. In this description, picture modality and space distribution were shown. Osmanthus represented Xia Jingui, wife of Xue Pan and withered lotus represented Xianglian. The osmanthus was located at up position in this picture and caused great pressure on lotus at down position. This up-and-down distribution showed the relationship between Xiangling and Jingui. Jingui was mean, and she abused and tortured the poor girl. Besides, the lotus was in dried-up pond. In this metaphor, dried-up pond referred to Xue Pan's family. Such enclosure space distribution of lotus and pond indicated relationship between Xue family and Xiangling. Withering lotus struggled in the small pond, indicating that Xiangling married Xue Pan and Xue family prisoned her heart and body.

In Chapter 17, the plants' distribution in Happy Red Court was described in detail. Plantain and crab-apple trees grew in two different parts in one yard, independent but also integrated. Baoyu was the master of the court.

Plantains did not have a core part, so in Buddhism they represented mysterious things and something out of rules. Besides, plantains could also cause a feeling of sadness because of the sound in the rain. Lin Daiyu was a mysterious character because she was a fairy grass before she became a human, and she often sobbed. Therefore, Plantains are Daiyu.

Crab-apple trees were like an umbrella, the flowers were brilliant and they were compared to a sleeping beauty. Its colour showed energy and enthusiasm. In the book, Xiangyun took out crab-apple flower slips in poem club and Xiangyun was active and energetic like colour of crab-apple flowers. Therefore, the crab-apple flowers were mapped onto Xiangyun.

Two main plants occupied the whole court. Colour of two parts was contrast but at the same time integrated. The distribution of plants reflected Daiyu and Xiangyun had both similarities and conflicts. Daiyu and Xiangyun had similar miserable experience, and both were talented. Daiyu was regarded as an excellent woman poet and Xiangyun won in collective poems in Reed Snow Cottage. Their talents were shown completely when they made collective poem in Concave Crystal Lodge. One's poems were delicate while poems of the other were acute. However, they also had small wrangles because Daiyu was sensitive but Xiangyun was positive. For example, Xiangyun once compared Daiyu to a girl with low statue, which made both angry.

Plantain and crab-apple trees grew in Happy Red Court, representing that Baoyu, as the master of Happy Red Court, had deep friendships with both girls. Xiangyun grew up with Baoyu. Daiyu once lived in one court with Baoyu at the beginning of the story. They had harmonious relations.

For example, in Chapter 50, two girls poured liquors together before Baoyu going to ask for plum flowers from Miaoyu. Baoyu regarded Lin Daiyu as soulmate, also regarded Xiangyun as his younger sister. In a word, three characters were independent but also intimate like plantains and crab-apple trees in Happy Red Court.

4. Conclusion

This paper studied multimodal metaphor of plants in *A Dream of Red Mansions* through deconstruction and code. It is found that there are four major multimodal metaphors: personality metaphors, destiny metaphors, emotion metaphors and relationship metaphors. This study will not only enrich the studies in multimodal metaphor in pure-verbal genres, but it will also help to interpret metaphorical characters and plots through interactions among images, colour, sound, space distribution modalities, and promote Chinese literature *A Dream of Red Mansions* to more readers.

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