

A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE METAPHOR OF “THE BELOVED ONE IS A  
FLOWER”



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7336884>

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**Abstract :** *The article presents a conceptual and sociological review of cultural perspectives on love: how culture affects our experience and expression of love. By applying the conceptual metaphor theory as a framework, this paper focuses on analyzing flower metaphors for love from the cross-cultural perspective based on figurative expressions in Chinese and English poems. The evidence suggests that love is a universal emotion experienced by a majority of people in all the world’s cultures, but manifests itself in different ways because culture has an impact on people’s conceptions of love and the way they feel, think, and behave in romantic relationships.*

**Key words:** *metaphor, culture, poems, emotion, love*

### Introduction

For centuries, romantic love has been explored by writers, philosophers, artists, and musicians who have described its various aspects and revealed multiple emotions and feelings related to this type of love (Karandashev, V, 2015). Based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, Lakoff 1993), emotional metaphors have become one of the best researched domains (Kövecses 1986, 2000). Love is one of basic emotional concepts. and it is also an abstract concept, which is not only difficult to conceive and express, but also contains rich conceptual content, so it is difficult to define accurately and comprehensively (Lu Guojun, 2007).

Metaphor is understood as a set of correspondences, or mappings relationship between source domain and target domain (Lakoff, 1986, Kövecses, 2010), such as LOVE and FLOWER due to the fact that there are some possible likenesses between the two domains. Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p3). Emotions are commonly said to be private and heavily culturally dependent experiences that are inaccessible to others. For this reason, the language and underlying conceptualization of emotional experience are expected to be highly culture-specific. It seems that several unrelated languages share several conceptual metaphors for particular emotion concepts. One of these concepts is love. This article adopts the conceptual metaphor theory as a framework and analyzes the metaphor of “the beloved one is a flower” in Chinese and English poems.

### Discussion

When we speak of flowers, such common expressions as beautiful, tender, charming and sweet-smelling come to our mind. To most men of any country in the world, the woman who they love are as beautiful and charming as flowers. Seeing flowers makes the poets think of the beloved one and express their yearning and missing. The metaphor can be found both in English and Chinese poems.

(1) Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.  
For my dream of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.

— The lover tells of the rose in his heart Bulter Yeats

(2) O my love is like a red, red rose. That’s newly sprung in June.  
O my love is like the melody. That’s sweetly played in tune.

— A red red rose Robert Burns

Example (1) is about a person who that author loves and misses his lover deeply because the fact that the author is not being in his hometown. At the same time, he compares the good-looking of his beloved woman with a rose. Robert Burns used the same metaphor in example (2), the “red rose” to make readers know that his lover is as beautiful as a red rose, and he fully expresses his faithful, everlasting and deep love to his lover.

(3) I ne'er was struck before that hour  
With love so sudden and so sweet,  
Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower.

— First Love John Clare

In example (3), the author was struck by sudden love, the woman who he fell in love with is as beautiful as a sweet spring flower, and his heart was stolen away by her.

From the above analysis, we can know that the poets believe that their loved ones are the most charming and beautiful in the world, nothing can rival their loved ones in beauty except flowers. There are a lot of English poems that the beloved is referred to as a flower so as to express love and missing. The beloved one is also conceptualized as a kind of flower in Chinese poems.

(4) 孤灯不明思欲绝，卷帷望月长空叹，美人如花隔云端！

—李白 长相思

(My lonely lamp burns dull, of longing I would die; Rolling up screens to view the moon, in vain I sigh. My flower-like beauty is high. Up as clouds in the sky.)

— Lovesickness Li Bai

In example (4), the poet uses the phrase of“美人如花”(flower-like beauty) to describe his lover is like a flower so beautiful and tender. The flower-like beauty who the poet misses intensely seems is close at hand; But actually, the beauty is as far as clouds. It is impossible for them to meet each other due to the fact that the beauty is far away just like the moon.

(5) 世间花叶不相伦，花入金盆叶作尘。

惟有绿荷红菡萏，卷舒开合任天真。

此花此叶常相映，翠减红衰愁杀人。

— 赠荷花 李商隐

(People in the world only love flowers, but pay little attention to the leaves. The flowers are planted in the pots, but the leaves are dropped into the soil and turned to dust. There is only one kind of flower whose leaves can not be neglected. This is lotus! ! Lotus flowers open and close, lotus leaves roll back and forth, and flowers and leaves contrast finely with each other. I'm afraid that the color of the flowers and leaves will fade, which makes me sad.)

— To my beloved wife Li Shangyin

In example (5), the first line and the second line describe the characteristics of other flowers in a general sense, that is, green leaves are not taken seriously, which be used to highlight the unique feature of lotus. The poet compares himself to green leaves of lotus, and compares his wife to lotus flowers. Lotus flower and green lotus leaves are a unity, the poet hope that he and his wife can be a perfect couple.

(6) 去年今日此门中，人面桃花相映红。

人面不知何处去，桃花依旧笑春风。

— 题都城南庄 崔护

(In this house on this day last year a pink face vied; In beauty with the pink peach blossom side by side. I do not know today where the pink face has gone; In vernal breeze still smile pink peach blossoms full blown.)

— Written in a Village South of the Capital Cui Hu

In example (6), the poet fell in love with a girl like a peach blossom in full bloom. The peach blossom in spring breeze is gorgeous, but the "face" brings out the charm and beauty of pink peach blossom, then we can imagine how beautiful the girl is! Moreover, the girl's face is more charming, beautiful and graceful against peach blossom.

As we saw, the metaphor of “the beloved one is a flower” can be found in English and Chinese poem, and using the metaphor can make people feel that love is so romantic and pleasant. Love is viewed as a kind of flower both in English and Chinese literary texts. When comparing speakers' love to a flower, a rose often emphasizes how intense, passionate, and new feelings those are, and lotus flower and peony signify the purity and introverted feelings for love. Flowers make us feel the beauty and joviality of love, these feelings are positive attitudes toward love shared by all human being.

After all, English and Chinese belong to very different language families and represent very different cultures of the world, which presumably did not have much contact with each other when these conceptual metaphors evolved. The cognitive linguistic view of metaphor is powerful and rich. In it, metaphor is understood to exist on several interconnected levels. Perhaps the main idea is that metaphorical thought is based on bodily experience and neuronal activity in the brain. According to Kövecses, Z. (2005), if some metaphors are based on universal embodied experience and the same perceptions, these metaphors may occur in many languages and cultures around the world.

### Conclusion

Love emotions are experienced by many people, in various historical periods, and in most cultures of the world. Yet, these feelings display diversity - cultures influence how people feel, think, and behave being in romantic love. Thus, love is universal, but still culturally specific. People express their love explicitly and implicitly. English-speaking people place emphasis on explicit and direct ways of love expression to a romantic partner, while Chinese emphasis on implicit and indirect ways.

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