

A Cognitive Study into the 凤 (fèng) Imagery in Chinese Metaphorical Idioms of 凤 (fèng) and Suggestions for Teaching Chinese Metaphorical Idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai Students*

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Abstract

The study analyzed the 凤 (fèng, Chinese phoenix) imagery in 182 Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) from the Chinese Idiom Dictionary (《中华成语大词典》) from a cognitive linguistic perspective. The study aimed to explore the semantic meaning of these idioms and propose teaching methods to help Thai students avoid errors in understanding their semantic meaning. The study found that the Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) use the 凤 (fèng) as the source domain to map onto humans or things (target domain) and create eight categories of 凤 (fèng) imagery. Furthermore, there are 18 other types of animal imagery created by 18 other types of animal metaphors in these idioms, such as the imagery of 龙 (lóng, Chinese dragon), 鸡 (jī, chicken) and so forth, which are equivalent to or suppressed by the 凤 (fèng) imagery. The study also found that understanding the semantic meaning of these idioms can be based on understanding the 凤 (fèng) imagery in these idioms. Based on the study's findings, we suggest that teachers use the imagery teaching method to avoid Thai students' errors in understanding the semantic meaning when teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students. By adopting these teaching methods, teachers can integrate the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery into their teaching.

Keywords: Chinese idioms, metaphor, imagery, semantic meaning, teaching Chinese idioms to Thai students

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การศึกษาปริธานจินตภาพของ 夙(fèng) ในสำนวนอุปลักษณ์ภาษาจีนที่ประกอบด้วยคำว่า 夙(fèng) และข้อเสนอแนะในการสอนสำนวนอุปลักษณ์ภาษาจีน ที่ประกอบด้วยคำว่า 夙(fèng) แก่นักเรียนไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาจินตภาพของ 夙 (fèng, หงส์) ในสำนวนอุปลักษณ์ภาษาจีน 182 สำนวน ที่ประกอบด้วยคำว่า 夙(fèng) จากพจนานุกรมสำนวนจีน 《中华成语大词典》ผ่านมุมมองภาษาศาสตร์ปริธาน อีกทั้งศึกษาวิธีการทำความเข้าใจความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์ของสำนวนดังกล่าว และศึกษาวิธีการสอนเพื่อช่วยให้นักเรียนไทยเข้าใจความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์ของสำนวนเหล่านี้ได้อย่างถูกต้อง โดยกำหนดให้คำว่า 夙 (fèng) เป็นวงมโนทัศน์ต้นทาง (source domain) เพื่อเชื่อมโยงมโนทัศน์กับมนุษย์หรือสิ่งต่าง ๆ ซึ่งเป็นวงมโนทัศน์ปลายทาง (target domain) และจัดกลุ่มจินตภาพของ 夙 (fèng) ออกเป็น 8 ประเภท

จากการศึกษาพบว่า มีจินตภาพเกี่ยวกับสัตว์จำนวน 18 ประเภท ที่เกิดขึ้นจากอุปลักษณ์จากสัตว์ต่าง ๆ จำนวน 18 ชนิด ในสำนวนกลุ่มตัวอย่าง เช่น จินตภาพของ 龙 (lóng, มังกรจีน) หรือ 蛟 (jiā, ไก่) เป็นต้น ซึ่งเทียบเคียงกันได้หรือมีภาพลักษณ์อยู่ในระดับต่ำกว่า 夙 (fèng) อีกทั้งผู้วิจัยยังพบว่า ความเข้าใจความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์ของสำนวนเหล่านี้ยังขึ้นอยู่กับความเข้าใจจินตภาพของ 夙 (fèng) อีกด้วย ดังนั้นจึงเสนอแนะให้ครูใช้วิธีการสอนเชิงจินตภาพในการสอนสำนวนอุปลักษณ์ภาษาจีนที่ประกอบด้วยคำว่า 夙 (fèng) เพื่อช่วยให้นักเรียนไทยเข้าใจความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์ของสำนวนเหล่านี้ได้อย่างถูกต้อง ทั้งนี้ในการนำวิธีการสอนนี้มาใช้ ครูควรใช้การวิเคราะห์จินตภาพตามแนวทางปริธานเกี่ยวกับ 夙 (fèng) ร่วมในการสอนด้วย

คำสำคัญ สำนวนภาษาจีน อุปลักษณ์ จินตภาพ ความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์ การสอนสำนวนจีนให้นักเรียนไทย

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

As a mythical animal in Chinese legends, the 凤 (fèng, Chinese phoenix)¹ is a symbol of the Chinese nation (Pang Jin, 2007, pp. 1-3). The 凤 (fèng) plays a vital role in Chinese cognition. Chinese often use the 凤 (fèng) as the source domain to map humans and things in the world around them to create 凤 (fèng) imagery for linguistic expression. This linguistic expression precipitated the transformation into Chinese idioms, which manifests in many Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng).

The Chinese Idiom Dictionary (Zhōnghuá Chéngyǔ Dà Cídiǎn 《中华成语大词典》 Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019)², includes 206 Chinese idioms containing “凤 (fèng)”, of which 182 are metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng), accounting for 88.35% of the total. This proportion is much higher than the average proportion (66.8%) of animal metaphorical idioms in Chinese animal idioms (Yu Jingyang & Piao Meihui, 2015).

1.2 Significance of the research

Chinese idioms are an unavoidable and essential study content for learners of Chinese as a second language at intermediate and advanced levels (Wang Zhimin, 2019). The number of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) is high (182), which appear frequently in daily Chinese communication. For Thai students with intermediate or advanced levels of Chinese, studying Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) is unavoidable and essential in studying Chinese.

¹ The Chinese and Western phoenixes have different cultural connotations (Qiu Yubing, 2002). Therefore, this article uses “凤 (fèng, Chinese phoenix)” to translate the Chinese word “凤”. To avoid too many mentions in the article, the Chinese words “凤” are all translated in the form of 凤 (fèng) in the following exposition.

² To avoid too many mentions in the article, the Chinese words “《中华成语大词典》” are all translated in the form of “Chinese Idiom Dictionary” in the following exposition.

Chinese is an imagery language (Lian Shuneng, 2002; Zhang Jie, 2010). Chinese metaphorical idioms often use metaphors to create imagery and use imagery to demonstrate semantic meaning (Zhou Guangqing, 1994). Imagery is the key to understanding the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms. Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) mainly create 凤 (fèng) imagery through the 凤 (fèng) metaphor to demonstrate semantic meaning, and the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms is the key to understanding the semantic meaning of idioms.

Thai students studying the Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) should focus on understanding the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms. Thai and Chinese people have different cognitions of 凤 (fèng). Thai students' understanding 凤 (fèng) metaphors and 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms must be based on the Chinese cognition of 凤 (fèng) precipitated. However, in second language learning, people tend to understand animal metaphors in the target language based on animal metaphors in their native culture (Littlemore, 2003). Supposedly, Thai students understand the 凤 (fèng) imagery created by 凤 (fèng) metaphor in Chinese metaphor idioms of 凤 (fèng) in this way. In that case, there is a possibility of misunderstanding the semantic meaning of the idiom, leading to failure in acquiring the idiom.

Therefore, based on the Chinese cognitive model of using 凤 (fèng) metaphor to create 凤 (fèng) imagery, the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) is understood by cognitively analyzing the 凤 (fèng) imageries in idioms. This way of understanding is necessary for Thai students to avoid errors and acquire Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng). As such, the cognitive study of 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to teach Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students is of great importance.

1.3 Literature review

Cognitive linguists have long noted the role of imagery in understanding the semantic meaning of idioms. Researchers found that people draw on imagery when understanding the semantic meaning of idioms (Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990). Since the 1990s, scholars have started to study the role of imagery in understanding the semantic meaning of Chinese idioms, but the research results are few. Take CNKI, THAIJO, and SCOPUS as examples. On the THAIJO and SCOPUS websites, some studies have involved imagery in Chinese idioms rather than as an object of study. On the CNKI website, from 1994 to April 2023 (the cut-off time of the references collected in this study), there are only 13 papers on imagery to interpret the semantic meaning of Chinese idioms. The studies mainly focused on the following aspects:

(1) There are only three papers investigating the role of imagery in interpreting the semantic meaning of Chinese idioms. Zhou Guangqing argued that Chinese idioms use imagery to express semantic meaning (Zhou Guangqing, 1994, 1995). Jiang Chengsheng and Liang Jinxiang (2007) believed that imagery determines the semantic meaning of Chinese idioms, and imagery is crucial for depicting idioms

(2) From the perspective of cultural linguistics, a few studies have investigated the cultural meaning of imagery in Chinese idioms (Cui Yingying, 2017; Luo Xiaochun, 2012; Wang Xiaojun & Xu Jing, 2020). These studies all value the importance of the cultural meaning of imagery in expressing the semantic meaning of Chinese idioms.

(3) In studying idiom teaching of Chinese as a second language, scholars have suggested mainly using the culture-based teaching method to guide international students to avoid idiomatic meaning misunderstanding due to cognition (Shi Lin, 2014; Shieh et al., 2017; Wei Shishui, 2018).

These studies have involved the imagery in Chinese idioms but have yet to take the cognitive analysis of the imagery in idioms as a solution to avoid errors in the semantic understanding of idioms.

As mentioned above, neither the ontological studies of Chinese nor the studies of teaching Chinese as a second language have a case study that takes the perspective of cognitive linguistics to interpret the semantic meaning from the imagery in Chinese idioms. The study of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) and 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms has not yet been conducted.

1.4 Research problems

Cognitive analysis of 凤 (fèng) imageries in idioms is essential for understanding the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng), and it is crucial for teaching Thai students Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng). What elements of 凤 (fèng) imagery in these idioms should be the study's focus? Can the semantic meaning understanding of the Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) be based on the cognitive analysis of 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms? In teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students, which teaching methods should teachers use? These are the problems that this study aims to solve.

2. Research Scope and Objectives

2.1 Research scope

In this study, the idioms containing “凤 (fèng)” and the metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) were all collected from the 7th edition of the Chinese Idioms Dictionary. The semantic meanings used for the analysis of imagery all follow the interpretation in the dictionary.

2.2 Research objectives

2.2.1 To study the 夙 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 夙 (fèng)

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the study analyzed the 夙 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 夙 (fèng) to understand the semantic meaning of these idioms.

2.2.2 To suggest the teaching methods for teaching Thai students the Chinese metaphorical idiom of 夙 (fèng)

According to the comprehensible input teaching theory in second language teaching, based on the research findings of this study, the study proposes suggestions for teaching methods for teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 夙 (fèng) to Thai students.

3. Research Theory and Methods

3.1 Research theory

Chinese metaphorical idioms of 夙 (fèng) use 夙 (fèng) metaphors and 夙 (fèng) imagery to construct and demonstrate semantic meaning, which are sediments of the unique cognitive model of the Chinese nation. The study should be based on the theory of metaphor and imagery in cognitive linguistics and the theory of the semantic meaning and imagery of idioms in Chinese semantics to interpret the semantic meaning of these idioms. The disciplinary theory of second language teaching should be used to guide the second language teaching of these idioms.

3.1.1 Metaphor and imagery theory in cognitive linguistics

Metaphor, according to cognitive linguistics, allows people to use one experience (source domain) to understand another experience (target domain) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). The similarity between the source and target domains underlies metaphorical mapping (Richards, 1965).

However, this similarity results from the role of people's cognitive prominence (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996, p. 38).

Imagery in cognitive linguistics refers to the mental impressions people form based on their life and cultural experiences, integrating subjective feelings about objective things (Wang Yin, 2007, p. 173). Metaphor is commonly used to create imagery (Zhu Quanguo, 2007).

3.1.2 The theory on the semantics and imagery of idioms in Chinese semantics

Chinese is an imagery language, and people are accustomed to using imagery to express themselves linguistically (Lian Shuneng, 2002; Wang Wenbin & Yao Jun, 2004; Zhang Jie, 2010). Chinese metaphorical idioms often use metaphors to create imageries and use imageries to demonstrate the semantic meaning (Zhou Guangqing, 1994, 1995).

3.1.3 Comprehensible input teaching theory in second language teaching

Krashen argued that language acquisition is based on comprehension (Krashen, 1985). Only "comprehended input" can lead to the "intake", and the language knowledge studied can be translated into implicit language knowledge for the language learner (Ellis, 1994, p. 349). Therefore, in second language teaching, the instructional content must be comprehensible to learners (Wen Xiaohong, 2012, pp. 43-51).

3.2 Research methods

The research methods and procedures are as follows:

(1) To determine the Chinese cultural connotation of 夙 (fù) using qualitative analysis and inductive methods.

According to the metaphor and imagery theory in cognitive linguistics, complete the following (2)-(5) steps of the study:

(2) To define the Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) and the 凤 (fèng) imagery using qualitative analysis, and statistical methods.

(3) To study the generation pattern of 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) using qualitative analysis, statistical methods, and the inductive method.

(4) To study the categories of 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) using qualitative analysis, statistical methods, and the inductive method.

(5) To analyze the relationship between the 凤 (fèng) imagery and other animal imageries in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) using qualitative analysis and comparative analysis.

(6) Use the theory on the semantics and imagery of idioms in Chinese semantics to illustrate the relationship between semantic understanding of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) and cognitive analysis of 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms using the exemplification method.

(7) According to the comprehensible input teaching theory in second language teaching, and the research findings of this study, to suggest teaching methods for teaching Thai students the Chinese metaphorical idiom of 凤 (fèng) using comparative analysis.

This study used the chart method to present the results of the above steps (1)-(5), and (7).

4. Research Findings

In Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng), people use 凤 (fèng) metaphors to construct 凤 (fèng) imageries based on their cognition of 凤 (fèng) constrained by the connotation of 凤 (fèng) in Chinese culture. To cognitively analyze the 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese idioms, the study should start with the connotation of 凤 (fèng) in Chinese culture.

4.1 The connotation of 凤 (fèng) in Chinese culture

The 凤 (fèng) is a mythical animal created by the ancient Chinese. The connotation of 凤 (fèng) was stereotyped in a long evolutionary process in Chinese culture—many works of literature record the 凤 (fèng). In the Book of Rite (Lǐ Jì 《礼记》) (Yang Tianyu, 2004), it is the king of birds, a precious and rare food, and a messenger of God. In Chu Ci (Chǔ Cí 《楚辞》) (Qu Yuan, 2019), it is good at flying. In The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shān Hǎi Jīng 《山海经》), it is a divine bird that is beautiful, has holy virtue, can sing and dance well, and only appears when the world is at peace (Chen Cheng, 2016, p. 22). In the Modern Chinese Dictionary, the 凤 (fèng) symbolizes propitiousness, and it is male, the female is 凰 (huáng, female Chinese phoenix) (CASS Institute of Linguistics Dictionary, 2016, p. 395).

The connotation of 凤 (fèng) in Chinese culture is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

The connotation of 凤 (fèng) in Chinese culture

Serial No.	Properties	Connotation
1	Status	The king of birds, God's messenger
2	Appearance	Beautiful, outstanding in appearance
3	Mate	In and out in pairs, and its mate is either a 凰 (huáng, female Chinese phoenix), a 鸾 (luán, female Chinese phoenix), or a 龙 (lóng, Chinese dragon), or a fish et al.
4	Morality	Has sacred virtues
5	Talent	Has the extraordinary ability to fly, sing, and dance
6	Habit	It only appears in times of political clarity and peace
7	Value	A precious and rare food

4.2 Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) and the 凤 (fèng) imagery

4.2.1 Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

Chinese idioms mainly use metaphor and metonymy to construct semantic meaning (Zhang Hui, 2003). Metaphor is a mapping from one cognitive domain to another; metonymy is a mapping within one cognitive domain (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 103). In the Chinese Idiom Dictionary, there are 206 idioms containing “凤 (fèng)”, and their semantic meanings are created by metaphor and metonymy. The categories of these idioms are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2

The categories of Chinese idioms containing “凤 (fèng)”

Serial No.	Categories of idioms	Quantity	Idioms
1	Metonymical idioms	21	凤管鸾笙 凤管鸾箫 凤冠霞帔 凤鸣鹤唳 凤髓龙肝 凤箫龙管 凤箫鸾管 麟肝凤脯 麟肝凤髓 龙肝凤胆 龙肝凤脑 龙肝凤髓 龙心凤肝 骑龙弄凤 跨凤乘龙 ³ ₁ 炮凤烹龙 炮龙烹凤 烹龙炮凤 烹龙煮凤 驭凤骖鹤 炙凤烹龙
2	Metaphorical idioms	4	乘龙配凤 乘鸾跨凤 跨凤乘龙 ₂ 跨凤乘鸾
		182	These 182 idioms are detailed in the following table 4.

³ “跨凤乘龙” is a metaphor for forming a couple and becoming the immortals (Zheng Weili & Zhou Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 842). In the idiom, there are two 凤 (fèng) metaphors, so there are two 凤 (fèng) imageries. The idiom belongs to different categories of 凤 (fèng) imagery, which is recorded in Table 2 as “跨凤乘龙₁” and “跨凤乘龙₂”, respectively. According to this approach, Table 4 records other idioms with two or more 凤(fèng) imageries.

As shown in Table 2 above, 21 idioms use the parts to map the whole within one cognitive domain. They are all metonymical idioms of 凤 (fèng) as in the following example:

烹龙炮凤 (pēnglóng-páofèng), is compared to cook the rare and precious food. It is sometimes also used to describe dishes that are extravagant and precious. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 1064)

In Chinese culture, the 凤 (fèng) is considered a precious and rare food (Kong et al., 2007), but not the only one. The use of 凤 (fèng) to map all the precious and rare foods is to use the parts to map the whole within a cognitive domain. This idiom is, therefore, a metonymical idiom.

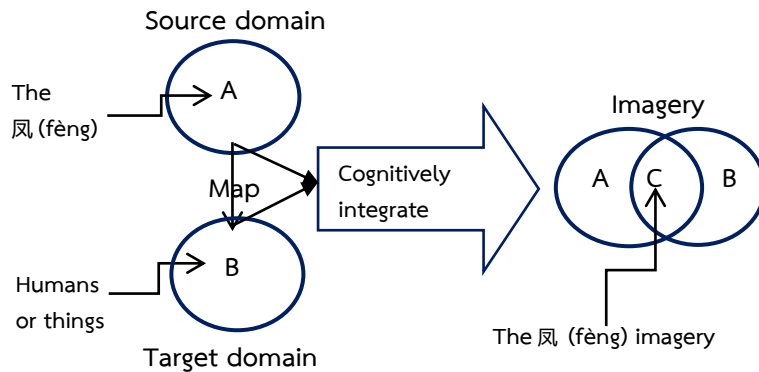
As shown in Table 2 above, 182 idioms use the static and dynamic 凤 (fèng) as the source domain for metaphorical mapping; they are all metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng).

4.2.2 The 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

According to the cognitive linguistic definition of imagery, the 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) refers to people's mental impression of the relationship between 凤 (fèng), humans or things based on their life experiences and cultural experiences. This mental impression represents the cognitive integration of the 凤 (fèng) and humans (or things), which is mediated by metaphorical mapping (Zhao Yanfang, 2001). In these idioms, the creation process of 凤 (fèng) imagery is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

The creation process of 风 (fèng) imagery in the Chinese metaphorical idioms of 风 (fèng)



4.3 The generation pattern of 风 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 风 (fèng)

The similarity between the source and target domains underlies metaphorical mapping (Richards, 1965). However, under the role of people's cognitive salience (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996, p. 38), the similarity is only manifested in one or more features of the source and target domains.

In Chinese metaphorical idioms of 风 (fèng), people used the 风 (fèng) as the source domain to map humans and things based on similarity, under the effect of cognitive salience. They have used three patterns of 风 (fèng) metaphorical mapping—single, clustered, and scattering—to create 风 (fèng) imageries (see Table 3 below).

Table 3

Mapping patterns of 凤 (fèng) metaphor in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

Serial No.	凤 (fèng) (Source domain)	Mapping patterns	Humans or things (Target domain)	Example
1	Appearance	→	Persons or things with outstanding appearance	龙眉凤目 (lóngméi-fèngmù)
2	Mate	Single mapping →	Men and women with an intimate relationship	鳏鱼渴凤 (guānyú-kéfèng)
3	Talent	→	Beautiful song and dance, music	凤歌鸾舞 (fènggē-luánwǔ)
4	Value	→	Precious and rare persons or things	凤毛麟角 (fèngmáo-línjiǎo)
5	Status Habit	Clustered mapping →	Auspicious and festive things	龙凤呈祥 (lóngfèng-chéngxiáng)
6	Morality Talent	→	Virtuous and talented persons or virtuous governance	凤去台空 (fèngqù-táikōng)
7	Status	Scattering mapping →	Persons with power or high position Immortals	凤子龙孙 (fèngzǐ-lóngsūn) 鸾姿凤态 (luánzī-fèngtài)

4.3.1 Using the single mapping pattern to create 凤 (fèng) imageries

In Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng), people have used the 凤 (fèng) with a feature to map a category of humans or things to create 凤 (fèng) imageries (the single mapping pattern, see Table 3 above), for example:

龙眉凤目 (lóngméi-fèngmù), describes a person's handsome and elegant nature. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 922)

In this idiom, people used the 凤 (fèng) with outstanding appearance to map a handsome and elegant person.

4.3.2 Using the clustered mapping pattern to create 凤 (fèng) imageries

In Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng), people have integrated several features of the 凤 (fèng) and use that kind of 凤 (fèng) to map a category of humans or things to create 凤 (fèng) imageries (the clustered mapping pattern, see Table 3 above), for example:

龙凤呈祥 (lóngfèng-chéngxiáng), refers to festive things. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 921)

In this idiom, people integrate the status (God's messenger brings God's blessings) and habit (only appears when something festive is happening) of the 凤 (fèng) and use this 凤 (fèng) to map festive things.

4.3.3 Using the scattering mapping pattern to create 凤 (fèng) imageries

In Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng), people have used the 凤 (fèng) with a feature to map several categories of humans or things to create 凤 (fèng) imageries (the scattering mapping pattern, see Table 3 above), for example:

凤子龙孙 (fèngzi-lóngsūn), the descendants of an emperor or nobleman. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 489)

鸾姿凤态 (luánzi-fèngtài), a metaphor for the immortals' deportment. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 939)

People used the 凤 (fèng) (status: the king of birds, God's messenger) to map the emperor and immortals in these two idioms.

4.4 The categories of 凤 (fèng) imageries in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

The categories of 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) is essentially a division of the meaning of 凤 (fèng) metaphor. There are as many types of 凤 (fèng) metaphors as there are many 凤 (fèng) imageries in idioms. As in the following example:

凤泊鸾漂 (fèngbó-luánpīāo), describes the dashing of calligraphy; it is metaphorically speaking, the separated couple, or someone has the talent but has no chance to use it. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 486)

In this idiom, the 凤 (fèng) metaphorically maps three types of humans or things: dashing calligraphy, a husband separated from his wife, and a talented person. This idiom has three types of 凤 (fèng) metaphors, respectively; thus, there are three 凤 (fèng) imageries in the idiom.

Among the 182 Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) in the Chinese Idiom Dictionary, people have used the 凤 (fèng) metaphors to create 193 凤 (fèng) imageries. These imageries can be divided into eight categories, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Categories of 凤 (fèng) imageries in Chinese metaphorical Idioms of 凤 (fèng)

Serial No.	Categories	Idioms for each category of imagery
1	Metaphors for persons with power or high position	鞭麟笞凤 鞭鸾笞凤 朝阳丹凤 成龙变凤 凤雏麟子 凤雏龙驹 凤附龙攀 凤生凤儿 凤食鸾栖 凤翥龙骧 凤翥鹏翔 凤子龙孙 凤集凤池 麟子凤雏 龙雏凤种 龙飞凤翔 龙楼凤城 龙楼凤池 龙楼凤阁 1 龙攀凤附 龙盘凤舞 龙盘凤翥 1 龙生龙, 凤生凤 龙腾凤集 龙兴凤举 龙血凤髓 龙颜凤姿 鸾飞凤翥 鸾舆凤驾 宁做鸡头, 不做凤尾 攀龙附凤 攀龙托凤 托凤攀龙

Table 4

Categories of 凤 (fèng) imageries in Chinese metaphorical Idioms of 凤 (fèng) (Cont.)

Serial No.	Categories	Idioms for each category of imagery
2	Metaphors for immortals	凤靡鸾吡 鸾姿凤态
3	Metaphors for persons or things with outstanding appearance	彩凤随鸦 雕龙画凤 凤表龙姿 凤泊鸾漂 ¹ 凤彩鸾章 凤骨龙姿 凤楼龙阙 凤毛鸡胆 凤叹虎视 凤臆龙警 凤翥龙蟠 凤翥龙翔 凤翥鸾回 凤舞龙飞 龙雕凤咀 龙飞凤舞 龙翔凤跃 龙翔凤翥 龙跃凤鸣 龙飞凤翥 龙楼凤阁 ² 龙楼凤阙 龙眉凤目 龙盘凤翥 ² 龙骧凤矫 龙翔凤舞 龙翔凤跃 龙翔凤翥 龙章凤彩 龙章凤函 龙章凤姿 龙姿凤采 鸾翱凤翥 鸾颠凤倒 鸾漂凤泊 ¹ 鸾飘凤泊 ¹ 鸾翔凤翥 描龙刺凤 描鸾刺凤 起凤腾蛟 随鸦彩凤 腾蛟起凤 文鹇彩凤 舞凤飞龙 翔鸾舞凤 翔鸾翥凤
4	Metaphors for men and women with an intimate relationship	倒凤颠鸾 颠鸾倒凤 分钗劈凤 凤泊鸾漂 ² 凤愁鸾怨 凤倒鸾颠 凤孤鸾只 凤皇于飞 凤皇于蜚 凤皇于飞 凤舞龙蟠 凤协鸾和 凤友鸾交 凤友鸾谐 凤只鸾孤 寡凤孤鸾 鲛鱼渴凤 娇鸾雏凤 镜分鸾凤 离鸾别凤 鸾俦凤侣 鸾分凤离 鸾凤分离 鸾凤和鸣 鸾孤凤寡 鸾孤凤只 鸾交凤俦 鸾交凤友 鸾胶凤丝 鸾漂凤泊 ² 鸾飘凤泊 ² 鸾只凤单 抛鸾拆凤 鸾俦凤侣 只鸾单凤
5	Metaphors for virtuous and talented persons or virtuous governance	百鸟朝凤 答凤鞭鸾 打凤捞龙 打凤牢龙 丹凤朝阳 放巢囚凤 飞鸾翔凤 凤泊鸾漂 ³ 凤凰在笱 凤狂龙躁 凤鸣麟出 凤鸣朝阳 ¹ 凤去台空 凤仪兽舞 龟龙鳞凤 鸿寿凤逝 鸿轩凤翥 鸿隐凤伏 化鸱为凤 鸡不及凤 鸡栖凤巢 麟凤龟龙 ¹ 龙翰凤雏 龙翰凤翼 龙驹凤雏 龙盘凤逸 龙蟠凤逸 龙蟠凤翥 龙潜凤采 陆通歌凤 鸾漂凤泊 ³ 鸾飘凤泊 ³ 鸾翔凤集 鸣凤朝阳 ¹ 飘鸾泊凤 潜蛟困凤 擒龙打凤 威凤祥麟 威凤一羽 祥麟瑞凤 祥麟威凤 鸦巢生凤 筑巢引凤
6	Metaphors for beautiful song and dance, music	凤歌鸾舞 凤鸣鹤唳 凤吟鸾吹 龙言凤语 鸾歌凤吹 鸾歌凤舞 鸾回凤翥 鸾鸣凤奏 鸾吟凤唱 鸾凤翔鸾
7	Metaphors for auspicious and festive things	凤皇来仪 凤凰来仪 凤凰衔书 凤鸣朝阳 ² 凤引九雏 龙凤呈祥 鸾飞凤舞 鸣凤朝阳 ² 泣麟悲凤 梧凤之鸣 有凤来仪
8	Metaphors for precious and rare persons or things	凤毛济美 凤毛麟角 凤毛龙甲 认鸡作凤 鸞鸡为凤 景星凤皇 景星凤凰 景星麟凤 麟凤龟龙 ² 麟凤一毛 麟角凤距 麟角凤毛 麟角凤觜

4.5 The relationship between the 凤 (fèng) imagery and other animal imageries in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

Among the 182 metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) in the Chinese Idioms Dictionary, up to 92.31% (168) of the idioms, including the 凤 (fèng) metaphor, have two or more animal metaphors. In these idioms, 18 animals are used as source domains along with 凤 (fèng) to match the mapping. The animal imageries created by these 18 animal metaphors can be divided into two categories: animal imageries that are equivalent to the 凤 (fèng) imagery and animal imageries that are suppressed by the 凤 (fèng) imagery. See Table 5 below for details.

Table 5

The relationship between the 凤 (fèng) imagery and other animal imageries in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

Serial No.	Relationship	Animal imageries
1	Equivalent to the 凤 (fèng) imagery	龟 (guī, tortoise) 鹤 (hè, crane) 鸿 (hóng, wild goose) 虎 (hǔ, tiger) 凰 (huáng, female Chinese phoenix) 蛟 (jiāo, flood dragon) 麟 (lín, female Chinese unicorn) 龙 (lóng, Chinese dragon) 鸾 (luàn, female Chinese phoenix) 鹏 (péng, the largest bird in ancient Chinese legend) 鱼 (yú, fish) 鹓 (yuān, birds like Chinese phoenix) 鸳 (yuān, the male of mandarin ducks)
2	Suppressed by the 凤 (fèng) imagery	鸱 (chī, owl) 鸡 (jī, chicken) 鸠 (jiū, turtledove) 枭 (xiāo, evil bird like the owl) 鸦 (yā, crow)

In the Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng), the 13 animal imageries such as 龟 (guī, tortoise) and 鹤 (hè, crane) imagery have the same generation pattern as the 凤 (fèng) imagery. They have the same status, appearance, mate, morality, talent, and value of the 凤 (fèng) imagery. They are equivalent to the 凤 (fèng) imagery.

The five animal imageries, such as 鸱 (chī, owl) and 鸡 (jī, chicken) imagery, have the opposite status, appearance, morality, talent, and value of the 凤 (fèng) imagery and are suppressed by the 凤 (fèng) imagery.

4.6 The way to understand the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

Understanding the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) can be based on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms.

There are two types of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng): those with only 凤 (fèng) metaphor and those with several animal metaphors, including the 凤 (fèng) metaphor. The 凤 (fèng) metaphor is involved in constructing the semantic meaning of both idioms. However, in those idioms with only 凤 (fèng) metaphor, the semantic meaning of the idioms mainly relies on the 凤 (fèng) metaphor. In the idioms with several animal metaphors, including the 凤 (fèng) metaphor, other animal metaphors also construct the idiom's semantic meaning.

4.6.1 Understanding the semantic meaning of those idioms with only 凤 (fèng) metaphor should be based on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms

Understanding the semantic meaning of those idioms with only 凤 (fèng) metaphor should be mainly based on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in the idioms. As shown in the following example:

凤去台空 (fèngqù-tái kōng), the metaphor is that all the talented persons in the past no longer exist, leaving only the remains of where they stayed. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 488)

In this idiom, people use the talented 凤 (fèng) (see Table 1) as the source domain to map talented persons. The idiom's generative

pattern and metaphorical meaning of the 凤 (fèng) imagery is the key to understanding the semantic meaning of this idiom.

4.6.2 Understanding the semantic meaning of those idioms with several animal metaphors can be based on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms

In the idioms with several animal metaphors, including the 凤 (fèng) metaphor, the 凤 (fèng) imagery is related to the other animal imageries in equivalence or suppression. The relationship between the 凤 (fèng) imagery and other animal imageries can be used to understand the semantic meaning of the idioms. As shown in the following examples:

凤臆龙髻 (fèngyì-lóngqì), the breast of a phoenix, the neck hair of a dragon, is a metaphor for the vigorousness of the fine horse. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 488)

认鸡作凤 (rènjī-zuòfèng) refers to treating the mediocre as precious. (Zheng Weili & Zhou Qian, 2019, p. 1206)

In “凤臆龙髻 (fèngyì-lóngqì)”, the 凤 (fèng) imagery and 龙 (lóng) imagery are equivalent; they have the same generation pattern and metaphorical meaning. By mastering the cognitive analysis result of the 凤 (fèng) imagery, the equivalence between the two can be used to infer the cognitive analysis result of the 龙 (lóng) imagery.

In “认鸡作凤 (rènjī-zuòfèng)”, the 凤 (fèng) imagery in the idiom suppresses the 鸡 (jī) imagery. Their metaphorical meanings are opposite. By mastering the cognitive analysis result of the 凤 (fèng) imagery, the suppression relationship between the two can be used to reason about and understand the 鸡 (jī) imagery.

As the above two examples show, parsing the animal metaphors (including the 凤 (fèng) metaphor) in idioms can be based on a cognitive

analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms. Understanding the semantic meaning of such idioms can also be based on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms.

5. Discussions

5.1 Suggestions for teaching methods of teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students

This study found that understanding the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) can be based on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms. Based on the comprehensible input teaching theory of second language teaching and the findings of this study, this study proposes the following suggestions for teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students.

5.1.1 Suggestion for teachers to focus on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) in teaching these idioms to Thai students

Both China and Thailand have a phoenix culture. A Thai researcher found that the phoenix represents nobility, fairness, peace and happiness, and high morals in Thailand; furthermore, the Thai cognition of the phoenix has a Buddhist element (Krungkaeo, 2022). The Thai phoenix retains some of the characteristics of the Chinese phoenix both in appearance and in cultural connotation but also adds, subtracts, and integrates according to Thai cognition (Pang Jin, 2007). There are similarities and differences between the Thai people's cognition of the phoenix and the Chinese people's cognition of the phoenix. These cognitive similarities and differences can be seen in the images of the Chinese phoenix and the Thai phoenix. As shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2

Images of Chinese golden phoenix and Thai golden phoenix

Figure 2-1 The Chinese golden phoenix⁵



Figure 2-2 The Thai golden phoenix on the packaging of a famous rice brand in Thailand⁶



Second language learners tend to understand animal metaphors in the target language based on their own personal experiences constrained by their cultural patterns (Littlemore, 2003). The 凤 (fèng) imagery created by the 凤 (fèng) metaphor in the Chinese metaphorical idiom of 凤 (fèng) coalesces the Chinese nation's unique cognition of the 凤 (fèng). If Thai students understand the 凤 (fèng) imageries in Chinese idioms based on the 凤 (fèng) cognition in their native culture, they may be biased due to cognitive differences.

Shieh et al. (2017) investigated and analyzed the errors in learning Chinese idioms among third and fourth-grade students at Mae Fah Luang University in Thailand. They found that the rate of misunderstanding the semantic meaning of idioms due to cognitive differences and other factors was as high as 55.56%, which is the type with the most errors.

⁵ Retrieved 28 June, 2023 from <https://wapbaike.baidu.com/item/金凤凰/35996>

⁶ Retrieved 28 June, 2023 from <https://www.51hwzy.com/lehuotaiguo/2017-03-16/947.html>

Therefore, teachers incorporating the cognitive analysis of 凤 (fèng) imagery into teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) is of great significance for Thai students to avoid misunderstanding of the semantic meaning of idioms when acquiring them.

5.1.2 Suggestions for teachers to mainly use the imagery teaching method in teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students

Most scholars emphasize that the culture-based teaching method should be the main approach when teaching idioms for Chinese second language learners (Shi Lin, 2014; Shieh et al., 2017; Wei Shishui, 2018). Scholars have yet to mention the imagery teaching method.

However, the imagery teaching method is a well-established method often used in teaching poetry, designed to address the importance of cognitive analysis of imagery in understanding poetry (Duan Hongmei, 2020). In teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students, the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery or the combination of animal imageries, including 凤 (fèng) imagery in the idioms is also essential for understanding the semantic meaning of the idioms.

This study suggests that teachers should mainly adopt the imagery teaching method in their teaching, integrating the research findings of this study into teaching, using the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms as a breakthrough point for students' understanding. When implementing the imagery teaching method, teachers can use visual and culture-based teaching methods as supplementary methods to help students learn the Chinese phoenix's cultural connotation and lay the foundation for cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms.

5.2 Ways in which Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng, Chinese phoenix) demonstrate the semantic meaning through the 凤 (fèng, Chinese phoenix) imagery

Previous research suggested that Chinese idioms demonstrate semantic meaning through imagery (Zhou Guangqing, 1995). However, scholars have yet to study how imagery demonstrates semantic meaning in Chinese idioms and what aspects of the imagery should be focused on to understand the semantic meaning of Chinese idioms.

This study found that the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng, Chinese phoenix) can be understood by cognitively analyzing the generation pattern of 凤 (fèng) imagery, the categories of 凤 (fèng) imagery, and the relationship between 凤 (fèng) imagery and other animal imageries in the idioms (if there are other animal imageries in the idioms).

5.3 The role of cognitive analysis of 凤 (fèng) imagery in the semantic understanding of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng)

The existing studies on the relationship between imagery and the semantic meaning of Chinese idioms agreed that imagery plays a crucial role in the semantic understanding of idioms (Jiang Chengsheng & Liang Jinxiang, 2007; Zhou Guangqing, 1995). However, how important is the role of imagery in the semantic understanding of idioms? Can the semantic understanding of idioms be based on the cognitive analysis of imagery in idioms? Scholars have yet to study these questions.

This study found that the 凤 (fèng) imagery or a combination of animal imageries, including the 凤 (fèng) imagery determines the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng). Understanding the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) can be based on the cognitive analysis of the 凤 (fèng) imagery in idioms.

5.4 Implications of the research findings for the semantic understanding of Chinese animal metaphorical idioms and the teaching of Chinese animal metaphorical idioms in teaching Chinese as a second language

The 凤 (fèng) metaphor is one of the animal metaphors and the 凤 (fèng) imagery is also one of the animal imageries; Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) are a typical member of Chinese animal metaphorical idioms. There are commonalities between classes and members of classes. The findings of this study can be applied to Chinese animal metaphorical idioms as commonalities. The suggestions for teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students can also apply to teaching other Chinese animal metaphorical idioms in teaching Chinese as a second language.

6. Conclusion

This study found that understanding the semantic meaning of Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) can be based on the cognitive analysis of 凤 (fèng) imagery by cognitively analyzing the generation pattern of 凤 (fèng) imagery, the categories of 凤 (fèng) imagery, and the relationship between 凤 (fèng) imagery and other animal imageries in the idioms (if there are other animal imageries in the idioms).

This study is a new case study attempt with theoretical support, but there are no relevant case studies as reference. The feasibility and validity of this research model still need to be verified, supplemented, and improved by the results of peer research.

In teaching Chinese metaphorical idioms of 凤 (fèng) to Thai students, this study suggests that teachers mainly adopt the imagery teaching method. The suggestion is only a teaching method proposal inspired by the imagery teaching method in poetry teaching, based on the research findings of this study and the comprehensible input teaching theory of second language

teaching. The effectiveness of this teaching method needs to be further verified by empirical studies in teaching.

Implications of the Research

The research findings would benefit the academic study of Chinese animal metaphorical idioms and teaching animal metaphorical idioms in teaching Chinese as a second language. In order to further investigate the role of animal imagery in decoding the semantic meaning of Chinese animal metaphorical idioms, and to verify the effectiveness of the imagery teaching method in teaching animal metaphorical idioms in teaching Chinese as a second language, the scope of the study can be expanded by prompting more cognitive studies of Chinese animal metaphorical idioms as well as empirical studies on the imagery teaching method.

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