

A Metaphorical Analysis of Female Worship in the Kam Epic: *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors*

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Abstract: Metaphor is a cognitive mechanism in which people understand an abstract and unfamiliar object by comparing it to a more concrete and familiar one, according to rhetoric, while modern cognitive linguistics holds that metaphor is a cognitive mechanism in which people understand an abstract and unfamiliar object by comparing it to a more concrete and familiar one, according to modern cognitive linguistics. It's a basic human cognitive and thinking model. Therefore, cognitive metaphor study is devoted to revealing the deep cognitive patterns of language and explaining various cognitive behaviors through languages. Myth is an important vector of human culture and has a profound influence on the formation of national cultural psychology. The Kam's epic *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors* as a narrative ancient song of the Kam covers the longest history of the Kam and has the highest content about the Kam's ancestors. This epic has many descriptions of woman ancestors and a large number of metaphors of women as well, which reflects the unique position of women in the Kam culture. This study draws on the cognitive metaphor theory to investigate the female metaphors with the purpose of uncovering the development and evolution of the Kam's woman worship perception in their history by using MIP metaphor identifying method.

Keywords: Cognitive metaphor; Female worship; *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors*

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1. Introduction

Myth is the carrier of thought and awareness of ancestors, also the Genesis is the most typical embodiment of primitive people's general view. Myth is not equal to history, but it reflects the history of social development. An epic has a great and far-reaching influence on the formation and development of national cultural tradition. Marx and Engels once said that literature is a kind of social ideology, which like other social ideologies, is the product of objective social reality reflected in people's minds. As well as, any epic which was based on the historical facts of objective existence and existing realistic relations. The national epic contains the mythological story of human worship of nature and the historical records. It is an ancient literary style and an encyclopedia of a nation. Epics correspond to the thinking mode of ancestors and become the great power to promote the development of human beings and society.

As a minority with a long history, Kam culture has profound primitive legends, cultural traditions, social structure, customs, and habits. The Kam is good at using poetry to express feelings, to express etiquette, to honor ancestors, to carry out social activities, and to record important events in history. The epic *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors* is the representative of the ancient songs of Kam's sacrifice ceremony and literatures. The epic is divided into two parts, namely the Genesis and the Heroes, records some major happenings in the Kam's history, from the goddess Satianba gave birth to all things, to the migration and

battle of the gods and grandchildren, as well as the struggle and labor life between Kam's ancestors and nature. The Satianba worship is a female ancestors-mother worship. The Kam pronunciation "Satianba" means "a mother who gives birth to thousands of aunts." The Heroic part narrates generations of Kam's leaders led the people to fight against foreign enemies, and constantly migrated. It reflects the awakening of human beings, the decline of maternal rights and the rise of patriarchy. With a rich content, the epic is an encyclopedia of the early life of the Kam people. Gorky once said, "literature is to serve the cause of life." Through the rich contents of epics, we can learn about the lives and thoughts of our ancestors, understand the infancy of mankind, and have a perceptual understanding of primitive society.

In this study, the conceptual metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics is taken as the theoretical framework to study the evolution of female worship in the *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors*. It is expected to illuminate the changes of Kam's female worship across time, and provide a new perspective for people to interpret Kam epic and understand Kam society, folk customs, etc.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Contemporary cognitive linguistics regards metaphor as a cognitive tool and a cognitive activity, which has a potential and profound influence on our understanding of the world. Lakoff and Johnson formally put forward the theory of conceptual metaphor in *Metaphor We Live By* and believe that most abstract thinking is metaphorical. Metaphor is a cross-domain mapping process from one domain (origin domain) to another (target domain). The target domain is more abstract, more difficult to understand, more complex, while the origin domain is more concrete, familiar, and easy to understand. In the current study, concrete language metaphors provides access for more abstract emotion and concept of gynaeolatry. There are many theories on the working mechanism of metaphor in the history of metaphor research. Lakoff and Johnson put forward the "mapping theory," starting with the similarity of metaphors, which reveals the working mechanism of metaphors.

The *Philosophy in the Flesh-The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* published jointly by Lakoff and Johnson in 1999, which comprehensively elaborated the theoretical framework of embodied philosophy ^[1]. They regard embodied philosophy as a kind of non-objectivism, that is, experientialism. Lakoff and Johnson pointed out that, "concepts are formed through the body, the brain, and the experience of the world, and can only be understood through them ^[1]. Concepts are acquired through experience, especially through perception and muscle movement. People form concepts and categories in experience and behavior, also semantics." Physical experience and subject-object interaction, in other words, play a crucial part in cognitive processing and verbal expression. Concepts and ideologies are exemplifications and manifestations of a person's life experience.

In this study, the author adopted the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) put forward by the Pragglejaz group in 2007 when they tried to identify the metaphorical expressions in the *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors*. MIP is an effective way to identify metaphorical expressions. It is based on the principle that metaphorical meaning is an indirect meaning derived from a comparison between lexical unit contextual meaning and lexical unit more basic meaning, the latter being separated from the real context but visible in other situations.

3. Data Collection

Based on the MIP, 113 metaphorical expressions closely relating to the female worship were identified in the *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors*, and were divided into nine main types, namely entity metaphor, birth and death metaphor, migration metaphor, war metaphor, status metaphor, cultural metaphor, unity metaphor, nature metaphor, human civilization metaphor. There are many sub-metaphors as well, which constitute multi-level metaphoric concept expressions, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Distribution of conceptual metaphors in *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors*

Chapter	Main Metaphor	Sub-metaphor	Frequency
Genesis (1-3)	Entity metaphor	Satianba is the Creator	17
		Satianba is the Supreme Ruler	14
	Birth and death metaphor	Birth Metaphor	2
		Death Metaphor	3
	Nature metaphor	Nature Metaphor	5
Human civilization metaphor	Human Civilization Metaphor	1	
Migration (4)	Entity metaphor	Entity Metaphor	7
		Animal and Plant Metaphor	5
	Migration metaphor	Migration Metaphor	2
	Nature metaphor	Nature Metaphor	1
Settlement (5)	Entity metaphor	Entity Metaphor	6
	Birth and death metaphor	Death Metaphor	4
	War metaphor	War Metaphor	4
Troubled Times (6-10)	Entity metaphor	Entiy Metaphor	16
		Satianba is the Creator	1
	Birth and death metaphor	Satianba is the Supreme Ruler	1
		Birth Metaphor	2
	Migration metaphor	Death Metaphor	3
		Migration Metaphor	9
	War metaphor	War Metaphor	4
	Status metaphor	Division of Labor Metaphor	5
Cultural metaphor	Architectural Metaphor	1	
Total	0	0	113

4. Analysis of the Metaphors of Female Worship

4.1. The metaphorical analysis in Genesis

In Genesis, it is said that the Kam people treated Satianba, a female ancestor, as the first mother who gave birth to all livings and gods. It can be seen from **Table 1.** that the frequency of metaphorical expressions in Genesis is 42 times, accounting for 37% of the total, and there are entity metaphor, birth and death metaphor,

nature metaphor, and human civilization metaphor. In fact, under these metaphor types, there are many kinds of sub-metaphors, such as Satianba is the Creator, Satianba is the supreme Ruler, etc. For example:

Chinese version: “萨天巴生地取名叫嫡滴，萨天巴生天取名叫乌闷，地是摇篮为母体，又生诸神在上苍。”

English version: “Satianba gave birth to the earth named Di Di, gave birth to the heaven named Wu Men. The earth is the cradle and be treated as matrix. She gave birth to the gods.”

The period of Genesis is the peak of people’s worship of Satianba. People’s understanding and worship of Satianba is based on her reproductive and creative abilities. Satianba is the embodiment of the mother in human world. In later period, her descendants marry to breed offspring, which showed that human beings began to realize that female breeding offspring was the result of mating between men and women. The tentative process of human evolution from primitive society to civilized society is a metaphor that human life and social civilization need both men and women to create and maintain together. These show that human ancestor worship began to turn to a stage of paying equal attention to both genders.

4.2. The metaphorical analysis in Heroes

The period of Heroes begins with the chief Wang Su led the people migrate to the south. It records how the chiefs led the people defeat demons, resist natural disasters and invasions of foreign enemies, as well as move to south, settled in Pingyang (a southern place name). Though goddess or their incarnations appear occasionally, they give advice to male patriarchs to help them get out of predicaments. It mainly praises male patriarchs for their bravery and resourcefulness, which can be reflected in fierce wars, the gender of patriarchs, the rotation of life, and labor divisions. At the end of this part, it tells a story about Sayang, a female assistance who didn’t eat a grain of rice for three years to keep grain and bean seeds for people, implying the gradually rise of the female worship. In **Table 1.**, the metaphorical expressions in Heroes are 71 times, accounting for 63%. They are entity metaphor, migration metaphor, nature metaphor, birth and death metaphor, war metaphor, status metaphor, and cultural metaphor. For example:

Chinese version: “王素把纪子唤到身旁，要他管理男人和田地、山场；王素把龙奴叫到身边，要她管理女人和家务、住房。”

English version: “Wang Su called Jizi to his side and asked him to manage men, fields, and mountains; Wang Su called Long Nu to his side and asked her to manage women, housework, and housing.”

In Heroes, male patriarchs appear more frequently than female patriarchs. Although Long Nu is a representative of women, her appearance is to highlight Jizi, a male patriarch, who has an immortal soul. It is the peak of male worship and the decline of female worship. At the end of Heroes, women worship rose gradually, from the original male worship on the top to the equal state of male and female worship. This is also a symbol of Kam society entering civilization.

5. Causes of the Evolution

Lakoff & Johnson (1999) put forward the concept of “Embodied Philosophy” in *Philosophy in the Flesh - The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* and discussed three basic principles of experience philosophy: experience of mind, unconsciousness of cognition and metaphor of thinking ^[1]. They believe that cognitive linguistics is based on experiential philosophy. Cognition and meaning are based on physical experience. Myth is an embodiment of the thinking of the primitive people. When they “seek the roots,” they make fascinating mythological answers to the formation of all things in the universe, thus forming their unique epic content, a manifestation of life experience from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

The Kam myth formed from a primitive thinking which is simple, innocent, intuitive and romantic. After a systematically analysis, the metaphorical expression of female worships in the *Songs of Kam Remote*

Ancestors has undergone four periods: the heyday, the declining period, the rising period, and the equal period. The changes are caused by the worship of the female fertility, the spouse marriage system, and the sex division of labor. In primitive history, women were idols worshipped by mankind. They were treated as mothers to all lives. “Matriarchal society worships female genitalia, which admires the mysterious power of women’s body. Mother’s abdomen and uterus are regarded as the source of life, symbolizing the constant and regenerative source power of lives, thus the vulva and the mother are worshipped.” As society developed and the arrival of spouse marriage system, people realized that female fertilities can only work by the cooperation of men. Therefore, men’s status increased, women’s supreme status began to weaken, and matriarchal clan society gradually transitioned to paternal clan society. In addition, sex division of labor caused by physiological genders and natural reasons is a fundamental reason for the change of female worship as well. William J. Goode (1964) pointed out, “The general rule of sex division of labor is obvious indeed. In all societies, some tasks are assigned to women, while others to men. In addition, there are some tasks for both.” Women bear the generative mission of their race and had to be pregnant many times from sexual maturity, which is an important reason why women are valued. Compared with women, men are faster, more powerful, and more aggressive. Women, especially after maturity, are troubled by menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, which take up more time and cannot engage in heavy and long-term manual labor. Therefore, hunting activities and the arduous task of protecting the clan were completed by men. Especially in war times, people pinned their hopes for stability on male patriarchs, thus the prestige of the male patriarchs gradually replaced the status of women.

6. Conclusions

Based on the conceptual metaphor in cognitive linguistics, this paper makes a preliminary study on the metaphorical expression of the evolution of female worship in the epic *Songs of Kam Remote Ancestors*. The study finds that the epic contains 9 types of conceptual metaphors which are closely related to the theme of female worship, and the metaphorical expression of female worship has gone through five periods: the heyday period, the weakening period, the declining period, the rising period, and the equal period. These changes are closely related to the worship of female fertility, the spouse marriage system, and the gender division of labor.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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