

**The contemporary theory of metaphor: A perspective from Chinese.** By Ning Yu.  
Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998. Pp. vii, 278.

*Metaphor* follows George Lakoff's view that 'figurative language lies at the core of communication and cognition' (2). Yu's stated goals in this book, a revision of his PhD dissertation, are to describe the mapping of the concrete onto the abstract and nonphysical and to compare the Chinese with the English conceptual system. He says he wishes to 'call attention to the importance of metaphors in Chinese', and their 'considerable similarity' to their English counterparts (241).

Y concentrates on three main types of metaphors: (1) those expressing anger and happiness, often as a liquid or gas in a container; (2) time as space, with objects moving toward or past a stationary observer, or with an observer walking through a stationary location; and (3) events as attributes with a physical location ('I'm in trouble.').

Y observes that while 'anger is heat' in both English and Chinese – following the metonymic principle of describing the physiological effects of emotions (237) – anger is often imagined as a 'hot liquid in a container' in English but as a 'gas' in Chinese. He also notes that Chinese tends to mention body parts explicitly in expressions involving emotion, e.g. 'spleen gas' means 'temper/anger', while English metaphors like 'he is seething with anger' mention no body part names.

The book offers convenient summaries at the end of each topic-centered chapter plus a summary of the summaries in the conclusion. These may be a bit repetitive to an attentive reader, but they are useful for anyone who wants a quick, minimum-effort overview of Y's main points.

Y certainly would have made things easier for most of his readers if he had incorporated the Chinese characters for the examples into the main text instead of relegating them to the back of the book. There are a few minor typos, mostly in the Pinyin Romanizations, which very inconveniently lack tone markings.

Y collected his data from the official PRC party organ, the *People's Daily*, various other publications, and Chinese dictionaries. Y does point out that metaphors exist at different levels of awareness and intentionality. He may be right that more consciously-created metaphors are usually extensions of the relatively established ones in the language, but it might have been useful to clearly identify the 'basic' metaphors first, perhaps from a corpus of *spoken* rather than written Chinese. Many of the examples from the *People's Daily* – which tends to employ a relatively silted, bureaucratic style to report officially approved content – were 'sore thumb' metaphors that stood out as such in a text (example: 'The economy needs soft braking and soft landing. '); while in fact probably few people are conscious of 'gas' being a metaphor when they say someone 'got angry'. Some of the dictionary examples cited, like *qián chén* 'previous dust' meaning 'past experience', are low frequency, literary, or dated items, though Y acknowledges this where called for.

The author does manage in this work to distill some interesting observations about Chinese metaphors, thus offering an interesting starting point for further studies on metaphor, analogy, and conceptualization of the world in human language. [Karen Steffen Chung, *National Taiwan University*]