

Hope Love Passion: Meaning of Food in the Fierce Wife (Taiwanese Version)

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the characteristic and analyze the meaning of food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife (Taiwanese Version)*. The study reveals that there are two groups of food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife*. The first group includes metaphors that explicitly relates to food, which can be divided into three groups: candy as hope; dumpling as family; and food as lover. The second group includes metaphors that implicitly relate to food, such as consumption of food verbs or taste: the verb “to eat” connotes sexual intercourse; sweetness connotes happiness; and bitterness connotes suffering. These two groups of food metaphors are related and convey two messages: firstly, without “hope” man cannot overcome obstacles; and secondly, if a woman becomes too absorbed with taking care of her family, she risks losing her own identity. Food metaphor is a critical element that indicates that TV series have a role not only to entertain, but also to educate the audience

Keywords: Food metaphor, *The Fierce Wife*, Taiwanese TV Series

Introduction

Significance of the Study

Food is considered one of the four requisites for humans because it provides energy and nourishes the body. Food also relates to every part of human activity, particularly with respect to culture. That is to say, food is the production of culture, while food differentiates one culture from another. Hence, the existence of food in one culture reflects beliefs, as well as the norms of that culture.

In term of literature, food is a critical element since it not only reflects the social and cultural setting of the story, but also plays a significant role in conveying messages. Keeling and Pollard (2009, p.4) argue that:

We see here in one of the earliest texts of world literature the integral role of food as signifier, not only the product of culture but one that gives shape to the *mentalities*, that structure thought and expression.

According to Keeling and Pollard’s argument, the presence of food in various kinds of narratives can be interpreted in various ways. Analysis of the meaning of food in narratives enhances the understanding of the story, as well as the function of such narratives with respect to the audience. This paper uses “*The Fierce Wife (Taiwanese Version)*”, a famous TV series, which narrates the story of a housewife who must overcome the obstacle that her husband has an affair with her cousin, as the data to study the meaning of food in TV series.

Objective of the Study

1. To investigate the characteristic of food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese Version).
2. To analyze the meaning of food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese Version).

Research Question

1. How does *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese Version) construct the meaning of food?
2. What are the meanings conveyed by food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese Version)?
3. What are roles of food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese Version)?

Literature Review

This study of the food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese version) focuses on the characteristics and the meaning of such metaphors. Therefore, two groups of research are relevant: food metaphors in narratives and Taiwanese drama.

Food Metaphors in Narratives

A vast body of research has studied the metaphor of food in many kinds of narratives, such as novels, films, poems, autobiographies, and jataka (the stories concerning the previous births of Gautama Buddha).

Campell (1997) examined the autobiographical significance of Fisher's use of food and cooking as a metaphor. The research shows that Fisher's accounts of her physical experiences with food convey both positive and negative reactions to events in her life. More specifically, food becomes the means for coping with physical and psychological needs.

Harrison (2001) analyzed the myths and the metaphor of food in *Une Vie de boy*, a novel about a colony written by Feridnand Oyono, a Cameroonian author. The study revealed that food within this novel both underscores the shared humanity of Europeans and Africans and shows how the colonial system redefined group membership.

Ratchatakorntrakoon (2012) studied the use of verbs about consumption, such as to drink, to eat, to be hungry, to be thirsty, that appear in connection with something that is not food in *Jatakathakatha*. The results show that the use of verbs about consumption in conjunction with something that is not food is an implicit food metaphor used to convey the idea that kama is similar to food.

Huard (2016) explored the representation of food in two films: *Half of Heaven* (Spain, 1986) and *The Moon in the Mirror* (Chile, 1990). It was found that food features prominently as a metaphorical representation of the complex power struggles and political shifts that were occurring in these two countries at that time.

Costantini (2017) explored the complexity of food tropes in Hopkins, evident in his life choices, religious beliefs, and the controversial relations he established within a social system in which eating habits were closely tied with the practices of the self. Special attention was paid to ideas of social ritualism, embodiment and self-construction that the poet attached to food consumption and its rejection.

Wulandari (2017) discussed the metaphor of food and foodways in the novel, *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri. The results show that food and foodways metaphorically represent nostalgia experienced by the main characters and food also becomes the field of showing identity.

Apart from narratives, food design event has been used as data to study. Tseng (2017) analyzed how the multimodal metaphors of food were creatively represented and elaborated within it. The study shows that the multimodal metaphors of food are complex

metaphors composed of combined sets of primary metaphors, enriched by schema propositions and embedded with food performance.

From this literature reviewed, it can be seen that in many forms of narratives, food is connected with abstract aspects such as experience and struggle. As well, the constructed meanings of food exist in various cultures.

Taiwanese Drama

There is a wide range of research about Taiwanese drama from the production to the influence of drama on audiences. Some of the research used “Meteor Garden”, a famous TV series that was popular throughout Asia as the data to study.

Vichitakul (2003) examined the cultural impact of the Taiwanese TV drama, “Meteor Garden”, on Thai juveniles in terms of cultural shareability, learning pro-social values, para-social interaction and role modeling. The results of this study show: 1. Viewers can share the cultural concepts within “Meteor Garden” at a moderate level; 2. Viewers learn pro-social values from “Meteor Garden” at a moderate level, with the values that viewers learn at the highest being enjoyment; 3. The degree of para-social interaction between viewers and “F4” is moderate; 4. Viewers regard “F4” as their role modeling at a moderate level; 5. The degree of cultural shareability is positively correlate with the degree of learning pro-social values at a moderate level; 6. The degree of para-social interaction is positively correlate with the degree of role modeling at a high level.

Yang (2012) used an inter-Asian Meteor Garden, as an example to illustrate the formation of women’s desire within the context of nation formation and neoliberal globalization. The study shows that Korean dramas and Korean living reduces democratic politics to life politics; however, paradoxically, they also provide an occasion for understanding women’s “disagreement” rooted in their unhappy reality and this disagreement is the basis of democratic politics.

Kasarello (2015) defined and classified Taiwanese dramas in terms of genre, origin, audience, structure and meaning, placing the phenomenon in a broader cultural and historical context. The study revealed that Taiwanese drama, as a form of imaginary reality, embodies several characteristics of a fairy tale. Articulating tension between Confucian virtues and the modern values of individual emancipation, Taiwanese drama reflects at the syntagmatic level a mixture of old and new ideologies.

Wang (2015) studied “Love Keeps Going” to show how varied instances of self-referentiality in the narrative serve different ends. Wang concluded in her study that self-reflexive narrative devices are being used to guide the interpretive and effective responses of viewers to Taiwanese idol-drama narratives. Furthermore, her research explained how self-reflexivity in idol-dramas serves such audience-involving functions in this enormously popular genre of Asian storytelling.

Wang (2016) examined the recent proliferation of parodic intertextuality in Taiwanese idol drama and suggest that this functions to interrogate genre issues in Taiwanese television production. Wang proposed that the idol drama uses parody not only to comedic ends, but further serves to implicitly critique dominant modes of Taiwanese television.

Lai (2016) explored the inter-Asian operations of Taiwanese “idol drama” – star-centred TV dramas set in twenty-first-century Taiwan targeting female audiences. It was found that different articulations about Taiwanese identity, with social and gender values in the forefront and national relations in the background, have been mediated in this inter-Asian packaging to form a multi-faceted system of images that together represent Taiwanese economic and cultural relations with other East Asian countries.

As can be seen, there is no research that use food metaphor in *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese version). The reviews of relevant literature enhance the development of the argument and the mythology of this article.

Theory and Methodology

This article uses the concept of metaphor as a theoretical framework. The concept of metaphor has been mentioned among many scholars for a long time. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle (1965, p.61), suggested the concept of metaphor in his book, "On the Art of Poetry":

Metaphor is the application to one thing of a name belonging to another thing; the transference may be from the genus to the species, from the one species to another, or it may be a matter of analogy.

According to Aristotle's concept, when something is explained by analogy with another thing, it is naturally a metaphor, for instance, "THOUGHT IS FOOD" or "IDEAS ARE FOOD". These verbal expressions draw an analogy between thoughts/ideas and food to convey the message that thoughts/ideas share qualities with food that man can consume thoughts/ideas, after that thoughts/ideas give man energy to create new things.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.6-7) extended the theoretical framework about metaphor by demonstration of "metaphorical concept", such as, "TIME IS MONEY":

You're *wasting* my time.
This gadget will *save* you hours.
I don't *have* the time to *give* you.
How do you *spend* your time these days?
That flat tire *cost* me an hour.
I've *invested* a lot of time in her.

In the above example, it can be seen that the word "MONEY" does not appear, but the reader can understand the correlation between time and money because of the use of verbs relating to money, such as waste, save, have, give, spend, cost, as well as invest. The concept of metaphor goes beyond the scope of analogy, stretching to a "metaphorical concept". This article adapts the concepts of metaphor as the theoretical framework to divide the characteristics of food metaphors into two groups. The first group includes metaphors that explicitly relate to food and the second group includes metaphors that implicitly relate to food.

The methodology used in this study is content analysis, with the data being the 39 episodes of *The Fierce Wife* (version Taiwanese) released in www.kseries.com.

Findings

The *Fierce wife* narrates the life of Xie An Zhen, who, after 10 year of marriage, abandons her work to become a housewife for her husband, Wen Rui Fan. An Zhen's cousin, Wei En, comes back from the USA and moves into An Zhen's house. An Zhen finds her world crumbling when she discovers that her husband is having an affair with her cousin. An Zhen's close friends, Rui Xian advises An Zhen to work as a car salesperson in the same showroom and encourages her to try to get her husband back. An Zhen's boss, Tein Wei, trains An Zhen to improve her personality. An Zhen becomes well-known because she appears on an on-air cooking show. Rui Fan is dismissed from his post because of the adulterous relationship he is having with Wei En. Wei En becomes pregnant, she meets Tien Wei's mother who is psychologist. Tien Wei's mother advises

Wei En to accept her bitter experience in her children time, so she can start new life. Wei En decides to end the relationship with Rui Fan and goes back to the USA.

It can be seen that the theme of *The Fierce Wife* is female, emotion and family, which is the classic theme of Asian dramas. This contributed to the popularity of this drama throughout Asia. Food metaphors play a significant role not only in enhancing the emotional scenes, but also in conveying the message of the drama.

Characteristics of Food Metaphors in *The Fierce Wife*

According to the theoretical framework, food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife* can be divided the two groups: the first group being metaphors that explicitly relate to food and the second group includes metaphors that implicitly relate to food.

Explicit Food Metaphor in *The Fierce Wife*

In *The Fierce Wife*, many kinds of food are used to associate with abstract things, such as love, hope and family. It is important to note that the appearance of food metaphors closely relates to the plot. That is to say, the food metaphors exist when the story opens, the conflict emerges, the story suspends, as well as at the end of the story.

The Fierce Wife opens with the happiness of An Zhen when she is still obsessed with taking care of her husband and daughter. An Zhen has no idea about her life since she believes that the principal aim of a married woman is having and maintain a happy family. This message is communicated by a conversation between An Zhen and her sister in law, Wen Rui Xuan, when An Zhen prepares dumplings:

An Zhen: Look at this dumpling, it holds together because a dumpling cover wraps the filling tightly. When we boil it in the 100 C water, it becomes a delicious dumpling. There are no more principles, if you don't wrap a dumpling properly, it will be broken.

Rui Xuan: Good analogy. Where did you get this idea? Google?

An Zhen: No, I conclude it from my own life.

Rui Xuan: Ok. Maybe I misunderstand, next time I will cook dumplings at my home.

(*The Fierce Wife*, episode1)

The above a conversation occurs between Rui Xuan and An Zhen because Rui Xuan is suspicious of her husband and needs some advice from An Zhen. In order to teach Rui Xuan to trust her husband, An Zhen draws an analogy between dumplings and family. She compares a wife with the dumpling cover and compares a husband with the filling. A happy family is similar to a delicious boiled dumpling in that it is comprised of a wife who trusts her husband, like a dumpling cover that wraps the filling tightly. Thereby, a broken dumpling is equivalent to a broken family caused by distrust between a wife and husband. It can be seen that Rui Xuan understands An Zhen's messages, so she plans to cook dumplings at her home. This connotes that Rui Xuan tries to trust her husband.

It is noticed that this food metaphor harmonizes well with the opening of the drama because it introduces the audience to the attitude of the main character, An Zhen. From the conversation, it can be deduced that An Zhen is not only an optimistic, but also a clever woman. Furthermore, this underscores the conflict of the drama. The more An Zhen trusts her husband, the sadder she becomes, especially when she learns that her husband is having an affair with her cousin. In this emotional scene, the food metaphor plays a significant role in communicating the emotion of the main character.

Young An Zhen: Mother, father doesn't stay with us. What can we do?

An Zhen's Mother: Don't cry my dear, please eat this candy. Next time we will be happy. Is the candy sweet?

Young An Zhen: Yes mom.

An Zhen's Mother: Life is sweet and our future is sweet as well. You should believe like that.

(The Fierce Wife, episode10)

An Zhen recalls the memory when her father left her and her mother. It can be seen that An Zhen's mother encourages An Zhen to see the bright future leading to happiness, similarly to the happiness the sweet candy brings An Zhen. An Zhen recalls her mother's words every time, from the first time she suspects that her husband has a secret relationship with her cousin, until her husband leaves her and moves out to live with her cousin.

This candy metaphor emerges in many episodes, including episodes 10, 11, 22 and 26. It can be seen that An Zhen eats candy in each of these episodes, except episode 11, an episode that presents her deepest sorrow because she is confident that her husband has a mistress.

It is important to note that candy is a symbol of hope because it is used when the character is faced with the loss of a loved one, either father and husband. The action of eating candy connotes that the character has hope that a bright future is coming, while the action of not eating candy conveys that there is no hope. This communicates the sorrow of the character effectively, even though the character does not say anything.

Apart from dumplings and candy, Hot Taiwanese Suki and rice are used to connect a mistress and a wife. These food metaphors emerge in episode 22, which presents suspension of the story in that many supporting characters try to persuade Rui Fan and Wei En to stop their adulterous relationship. In order to induce Rui Fan to abandon Wei En and return to An Zhen, Hao Kangde (Rui Fan's best friend and Rei Xuan's husband) draws an analogy between food and person:

Kangde: Are you so innocent, Rui Fan? Now, your relationship between you and Wei An just starts. It makes your heart beat like you eat hot flavorful Suki. Can we eat hot Suki every day, cannot we? When you have diarrhea, you will miss the flavorless rice. Rice which you can eat every day is important to your life.

Rui Fan: Each one likes to eat different foods. Everyone has right to decide his own life.

(The Fierce Wife, episode 22)

From the above dialogue, it can be seen that Kangde compares Wei En with hot flavorful Suki since she brightens up Rui Fan's boring life; while An Zhen is similar to flavorless rice since she is a boring wife. Moreover, Kangde elaborates on his analogy by explanation of the drawback of hot flavorful Suki and the benefit of rice. It can be seen that Kangde's analogy is quite delicate in that it not only conveys the feeling of the character to other characters, but also describes the quality of a mistress and a wife.

It can be argued that this analogy is incomplete without Rui Fan's answer. From Rui Fan's answer, it can be inferred that he realizes the benefit of rice, but he is addicted to the hot flavorful Suki since he and Wei An just had sex. Thereby the connotation of sex is conveyed in that sex is like food – when someone tastes it, they will become addicted and want to eat it more and more.

Implicit Food Metaphor in The Fierce Wife

The above discussion indicates that the connotations of food are constructed by metaphors whereby some verbs about food consumption, as well as taste, have a connotation that relates to food. Furthermore, some tastes of food are used to convey the situation in a character's life.

As discussed above, hot flavorful Suki and rice are compared with a mistress and a wife where the verb "to eat" connotes having sex. This metaphor appears in episodes 13, 22 and 26. It is noticed that the verb "to eat", which connotes having sex, is used in a negative sense in that it is used to describe the adulterous relationship between a husband and a mistress.

Kangde: I secretly eat, but I can clean my mouth. But now you don't secretly eat a normal meal.

Rui Fan: I told you many time that I and Wei An love each other with sincere hearts. We love, but we don't have sex. Wei An always tells me to take care of An Zhen.

Kangde: So sorry, what a good man you are. If I don't eat meat in a day, I will starve. Saying that you love each other, but you don't have sex is unbelievable.

(The Fierce Wife, episode 13)

From the above conversation, a clear connection can be drawn between the verb "to eat" and having sex in that the verb "to eat" shares many characteristics with having sex, such as putting something in their body, enjoying doing this activity, as well as ending with happiness, which induces one to repeat this activity. Moreover, this conversation represents that the action of infidelity is normal for a married man, similar to hiding to eat a meal behind their wives and their wives have no suspicion when they only "clean their month".

It is interesting to analyze why the verb "to eat" is used to describe the action of having sex with an adulterer, as in when Wei An is called by Rui Xuan and Kangde "You are a brother in law muncher" (The Fierce Wife, episode 18). As mentioned above, the verb "to eat" shares many characteristics with having sex. This metaphor conveys that the relationship between a husband and a mistress is a short-term relationship since a mistress has only one role in satisfying a sexual need. That is to say, when a man is hungry, he wants to have sex with any woman, so he secretly eat a meal, after that he is full, in other words, his need for sex is satisfied. That is why Kangde does not believe that Rui Fan and Wei An have not had sex together.

While candy is used as a symbol of hope with the sweet taste of candy used to signify happiness, bitterness is compared with suffering. These metaphors appear in episode 23 that shows the lowest point of An Zhen life when Rui Fan asks her for a divorce and Tien Wei will dismiss An Zhen from her sales position. However, An Zhen has good luck when she can sell the most expensive car in her showroom.

Maybe, I haven't reached the lowest point of my life.

Maybe, I can taste the sweetness through my bitter experience.

Maybe, I don't need to wait for sweetness from other people, but I can make it for myself.

Maybe, everything is possible, I can overcome all obstacles.

(The Fierce Wife, episode 23)

The above quotation is An Zhen speaking with herself. It can be seen that the opposite taste of sweet and bitter are connected to the opposite emotions of happiness and sadness. The sentence "*I don't need to wait for sweetness from other people, but I can*

make it for myself” implies that An Zhen realizes that her happiness depends on herself rather than her husband or her daughter. This realization contributes to her courage that she *“can overcome all obstacles.”* It can be noticed that An Zhen gradually has a better life after she has courage to improve her personality being a working woman.

From this analysis of both explicit and implicit food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife*, it can be inferred that the two characteristics of food metaphor harmonize well. That is to say, the two groups of food metaphor not only relate to each other, but also elaborate on the meaning communicated by metaphors, which will be discussed next.

The Meaning of Food Metaphor in the Fierce Wife.

From the analysis above, it can be seen that food metaphors closely relate to the plot by which communication by metaphor is also associated with the two messages of the series: firstly, without “hope” one cannot overcome obstacles; and secondly, if a woman becomes too absorbed with taking care of her family, she risks losing her own identity

Without “hope” one Cannot Overcome Obstacles

It can be seen that the message without “hope” one cannot overcome obstacles is conveyed by the actions of the main characters, such as An Zhen as discussed above. Apart from An Zhen, the action of Wei An at the end of the series emphasizes the importance of hope to overcome obstacles as well.

At the end of series, Wei An realizes that she cannot live happily if she cannot accept her bitter experience in her childhood. In spite of becoming pregnant, Wei An abandons Rui Fan and goes back to live with her family in the US. Before going back to the US, Wei An goes to see An Zhen in order to ask for her forgiveness. When Wei An meets An Zhen, Wei An gives An Zhen back a little box which contains many items, including cookies and candy. An Zhen gave Wei An this little box on the first day when Wei An went to Rui Fan’s office.

Wei An: “... You worried that I would be hungry in the afternoon so you prepared cookies and candies for me. An Zhen, I will give you back this box.”

An Zhen: “I give you this box again, I hope you will remember the good manner with which other people treat you. Don’t remember the bad manner, it is like I am being kind to you.”

(*The Fierce Wife*, episode 38)

The cookies and candies have rich connotations. Firstly, cookies and candy symbolize An Zhen’s concern about the welfare of her cousin, Wei An. Secondly, cookies and candies connote hope that is the shared meaning throughout the series since they are given on the first day that Wei An started her work. Thirdly, cookies and candies signify goodwill since they are used to a reminder of *“the good manner”*. Additionally, they cover the meaning of forgiveness because An Zhen accepts the apology from Wei An. It can be said that the meaning of forgiveness connects to the meaning of hope, since forgiveness from An Zhen is the hope that encourages Wei An to start her life as a single mother in the US.

If a Woman Becomes too Absorbed with Taking Care of her Family, She Risks Losing Her Own Identity

There is no doubt that *The Fierce Wife* became a famous series because it educates women, the main target audience, to maintain their identities. This message is conveyed by the action of An Zhen who spend so much time to take care of her family that she does not have time to take care of herself. An Zhen gradually lost her dream, her passion, her future, even her identity. This message is accentuated in the climax of the series when An Zhen knows that Rui Wah is in a secret relationship with Wei An.

An Zhen: "... Your brother loves me so much, does he?"

Rui Xuan: "Yes, he loves you so much, where will you go?"

An Zhen: "I will go food shopping and come back home."

(*The Fierce Wife*, episode 20)

It is interesting that this conversation happens in the scene of the car showroom during the lunch break of An Zhen. Before the conversation, Tein Wei threatens An Zhen that she will be dismissed if she cannot be on her sale duty on time. The action when An Zhen goes food shopping can be interpreted that she abandons her world outside the home in order to defend her family, whereby food in this context is connected to family.

Because of her sorrow that her husband is having a secret relationship with her cousin, An Zhen loses sight of the fact that she is too obsessed with taking care of her family, she has lost her identity. It can be said that the cause of her pain is the misconduct of her husband and her cousin, but she aggravates the situation by abandoning her working position. After that, An Zhen spends all of her time at home and lets the sorrow become deeply embedded in her mind. As discussed above, An Zhen finds the courage to live for herself when she turns back to work and can sell the most expensive car in the showroom. This not only encourages, but also educates the audience that women should have respect for themselves. It can be concluded that a woman should take care of her family, including herself.

Discussion

It can be seen that the findings in this study are consistent with the findings in previous studies, that food can be used to represent abstract ideas, such as emotion, action, as well as convey a message. This indicates that the use of metaphors is a dominant element in all kinds of narrative. Moreover, this study expands the scope of the use of conceptual metaphors through an analysis of the relationship between the existence of metaphors and the plot of the story. This provides strong evidence that metaphors are a critical element that play a significant role in the progression of the story.

Limitation of Study

The data of this study is a Taiwanese series with no subtitles, therefore, the data was collected for the analysis by the dialogue being translated into Thai language. Accordingly, some food metaphors might have either been lost or changed, or even added, in the process of translation.

Conclusion

This research has aimed to investigate the characteristic and analyze the meaning of food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife* (Taiwanese Version) by adaptation concepts of metaphor as the theoretical framework.

From text analysis, it is found that there are two groups of food metaphors in *The Fierce Wife*. The first group includes metaphors that explicitly relate to food, which can be

divided into three groups: candy as hope; dumplings as family; and food as lover. The second group includes metaphors that implicitly relate to food, such as consumption of food verbs or taste: the verb “to eat” connotes having sex; sweetness connotes happiness; and bitterness connotes suffering.

It can be concluded that these two groups of food metaphors are related; furthermore, food metaphors are closely associated with the plot of the series. By this association, food metaphors convey two messages: firstly, without “hope” one cannot overcome obstacles; and secondly, if a woman becomes too absorbed with taking care of her family, she risks losing her own identity.

It is important to note that food metaphor harmonizes well with the core of the series that focuses on women, emotion and family. For this reason, food metaphors play a critical role in communicating both the emotion of the characters and lesson from the character’s behavior. It can be argued that TV series can have a role not only to entertain, but also to educate the audience.

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