What is “meta-” for? : a Peircean critique of the cognitive theory of metaphor

Yicun JIANG

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WHAT IS “META-” FOR?:
A PEIRCEAN CRITIQUE OF
THE COGNITIVE THEORY OF METAPHOR

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PHD

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

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WHAT IS “META-” FOR?:
A PEIRCEAN CRITIQUE OF THE COGNITIVE THEORY OF METAPHOR

by

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submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

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A Peircean Critique of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor

by

JIANG Yicun

Doctor of Philosophy

My thesis aims to anatomize the cognitive theory of metaphor and suggests a Peircean semiotic perspective on metaphor study. As metaphorical essentialists, Lakoff/Johnson tend to universalize a limited number of conceptual metaphors and, by doing this, they overlook the dynamic relation between metaphorical tenor and vehicle. Such notion of metaphor is not compatible with the polysemous nature of the sign. The diversity and multivalency of metaphorical vehicle, in particular, cast serious doubts on the hypothesis of “conceptual metaphors” which, being meta-metaphorical constructs, can tell us nothing but a dry and empty formula “A is B”. Consequently, Lakoff/Johnson’s notion of conceptual metaphor is very much a Chomskyan postulation. Also problematic is the expedient experientialism or embodied philosophy they have put forward as a middle course between objectivism and subjectivism. What is missing from their framework is a structural space for dynamic interpretation on the part of metaphor users. In contrast, cognitive linguists may find in Peirce’s theory of the sign a sound solution to their theoretical impasse. As a逻辑ian, Peirce sees metaphor as the realization of iconic reasoning at the language level. His exposition on iconicity and iconic reasoning has laid a solid foundation upon which may be erected a fresh epistemology of metaphor fit for the contemporary study of language and mind. Broadly speaking, metaphor in Peirce can be examined from roughly two perspectives. Macroscopically, metaphor is an icon in general as opposed to index and symbol, whereas, microscopically, it is a subdivided hypoicon on the third level as opposed to image and diagram. Besides, Peirce also emphasized the subjective nature of metaphor. Semioticians after Peirce have further developed his theory on metaphor. For example, through his concept of “arbitrary iconicity”, Ersu Ding stresses the arbitrary nature of metaphorization and tries to shift our attention away from Lakoff/Johnson’s abstract epistemological Gestalt to the specific cultural contexts in which metaphors occur. Umberto Eco, on the other hand, sees interpretation of signs as an open-ended process that involves knowledge of all kinds. Encyclopedic knowledge thus serves as unlimited source for metaphorical association. For Eco, the meaning of a metaphor should be interpreted in the cultural framework based on a specific cultural community. Both Ding’s and Eco’s ideas are in line with Peirce’s theoretical framework where the meaning of a metaphor depends on an interpreter in a particular socio-historical context. They all realize that we should go beyond the ontology of metaphorical expressions to acquire a dynamic perspective on metaphor interpretation. To overcome the need for presupposing an omnipotent subject capable of knowing the metaphor-in-itself, we turn to Habermas’s theory of communicative action in which the meaning of metaphor is intersubjectively established through
negotiation and communication. Moreover, we should not overlook the dynamic tension between metaphor and ideology. Aphoristically, we can say that nothing is a metaphor unless it is interpreted as a metaphor, and we need to reconnect metaphors with the specific cultural and ideological contexts in which they appear.

**Keywords:** metaphorical essentialism; conceptual metaphor; experientialism; Peircean epistemology of metaphor; iconic reasoning; arbitrary iconicity; intersubjectivity; encyclopedic knowledge; rhizome; dynamic interpretation; ideology
DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

____________________

(Jiang Yicun)

Date
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

WHAT IS "META-" FOR?:
A PEIRCEAN CRITIQUE OF THE COGNITIVE THEORY OF METAPHOR

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# CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES .................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................... iii

Introduction ............................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One: The Impasse of Metaphorical Essentialism .................................... 5

1.1 Genealogy of Western Theories of Metaphor ................................................. 5

1.2 Cognitive Theory of Metaphor through the Years. ....................................... 12

1.3 Through the Peircean Looking Glass ............................................................ 17

1.4 Master Tropes without Worlds ................................................................. 22

1.5 Metaphorical Essentialism in the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor ............ 29

1.6 Lakoff/Johnson’s Chomskyan Postulation ................................................. 41

1.7 Experientialism as a Middle Course ............................................................ 47

Chapter Two: A Peircean Epistemology of Metaphor .......................................... 63

2.1 An Unfinished Enterprise .............................................................................. 63

2.2 Metaphor in Peircean Semiotics ................................................................. 81

2.2.1 From Phaneron to Metaphor .................................................................. 81

2.2.2 Three Modes of Iconicity ....................................................................... 96

2.3 Metaphor and the Peircean Abduction ....................................................... 99

Chapter Three: Beyond the Ontology of Metaphor ........................................... 114

3.1 The Subjective Nature of Metaphor ............................................................ 115

3.2 Ersu Ding’s Metaphor Theory ....................................................................... 122

3.3 Umberto Eco’s Metaphorology ..................................................................... 135

3.4 Metaphor and Intersubjective Communication .......................................... 152

3.5 Metaphor and Ideology ................................................................................ 165

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 175

References ............................................................................................................. 182
# LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Three Perspectives of Studying Human Experience........................................84

Table 2: Examples of Water-related Metaphors..............................................................127

Figure 1: Raven.............................................................................................................121

Figure 2: The Chinese Zodiac......................................................................................133

Figure 3: The Rhizome.................................................................................................142

Figure 4: Costumes in China during the Cultural Revolution........................................172

Figure 5: The Picture of Wang Guangmei Being Humiliated during the Cultural
          Revolution..............................................................................................................172
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Introduction

As the title suggests, the present study is based on a philosophical reflection of an everlasting topic: metaphor. If we review the literature of metaphor study in the past few decades, we witness a spate of theses and monographs on this topic from scholars adhering to different theoretical positions, including the cognitive theory of metaphor which has abandoned the earlier socio-historical perspective and dominated much of our contemporary discussions of metaphor since the publication of *Metaphors We Live by*. My addition to the already innumerable publications, therefore, calls for an explanation. Through the years, Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive approach has stimulated hundreds of papers and books. However, not all these responses are positive. Major critiques on the cognitive theory can be found in Keller (1998, 1999), Haser (2005), and Ding (2007, 2008, 2010, 2015a, 2015b). And with a reexamination of the cognitive theory, several questions may naturally arise:

- Is Lakoff/Johnson’s categorization of metaphors sound enough to live up to its ambitious intellectual undertaking in the first place?
- Why should conceptual metaphors have priority and superiority over ordinary metaphors?
- Are conceptual metaphors empirical or metaphysical?
- Is the semiotic movement between tenor and vehicle bidirectional or unidirectional as the cross-domain mapping theory suggests?
- Why should the interpretation of a metaphor stop at the threshold of conceptual cross-domain mapping?

These queries lead us to make further exploration on this topic. In its third issue of 2008, the scholarly journal *Foreign Language and Literature Studies* published an article written by the eminent Chinese scholar, Ersu Ding, entitled “What is ‘meta-’ for?” in which he elaborates the meta-metaphorical or meta-linguistic nature of Lakoff/Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory and suggests a cultural semiotic perspective on metaphor study. Shedding new lights on controversial issues, Ding’s arguments in that paper are both insightful and illuminating, from which the present study finds great inspiration.

Borrowing his unique and profound title, the present research is, therefore, an attempt to snowball this great intellectual effort. In fact, the pun in the title of my thesis
naturally stimulates two queries in readers’ mind: “Why should one use meta-
metaphorical constructs to understand and interpret metaphor?”, and “What is the actual
process of metaphor formation?” With serious scrutiny, the present study finds out that,
in cognitive theory of metaphor, Lakoff/Johnson tend to universalize a limited number
of conceptual metaphors and, by doing this, they overlook the dynamic relation between
metaphorical tenor and vehicle. Lakoff/Johnson can therefore be seen as metaphorical
essentialists, and such view of metaphor is not compatible with the polysemous nature
of the sign. The diversity and multivalency of metaphorical vehicle, in particular, cast
serious doubts on the hypothesis of “conceptual metaphors” which, being meta-
metaphorical constructs, can tell us nothing but a dry and empty formula “A is B”.
Consequently, Lakoff/Johnson’s notion of conceptual metaphor is very much a
Chomskyan postulation. Also problematic is the expedient experientialism or embodied
philosophy they have put forward as a middle course between objectivism and
subjectivism. What is missing from their framework is a structural space for dynamic
interpretation on the part of metaphor users. In contrast, cognitive linguists may find in
Peirce’s theory of the sign a sound solution to their theoretical impasse. As a logician,
Peirce sees metaphor as the realization of iconic reasoning at the language level. His
exposition on iconicity and iconic reasoning has laid a solid foundation upon which may
be erected a fresh epistemology of metaphor fit for the contemporary study of language
and mind.

Put briefly, the present study attempts to answer the following three important
questions on metaphor:

- What is the main problem in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor and
  how should we evaluate the theory?
- What is metaphor?
- What is the real process of metaphor interpretation?

Of all the previous studies on metaphor, very few could provide satisfactory answers to
the above questions. Thus, the current state of research on metaphor calls for a detailed
anatomy of the cognitive theory which hopefully can redress some of the problems that
are besetting us today. For this reason, the present dissertation is not another empirical
study that tries to prove the correctness of any existing theory. It is, rather, one of
refutation and reconstruction. What makes my critique different from all previous studies
is that it will be conducted, as my subtitle suggests, within the framework of Peircean semiotic tradition which subsumes the theories of Umberto Eco and Ersu Ding.

There are altogether three chapters in the present essay. Chapter one aims to provide a thorough critique of Lakoff and Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor, through questioning what “meta-” is for in the cognitive theory. The first section of this chapter provides a general review of the genealogy of the western theory of metaphor, with an effort to draw a coordinate of the cognitive theory in the global picture of the western tradition. The second section is a brief review of the development of the cognitive theory of metaphor. The third section puts forward six most salient and controversial features of the cognitive theory of metaphor based on a serious scrutiny of it from the perspective of Peircean semiotics. Section four points out that Lakoff/Johnson confused concept with meaning, and concept with metaphor. By centralizing the conceptual metaphors in the formation of metaphor, Lakoff/Johnson have overlooked the vivid metaphorical associations that metaphor users attempt to embody in a specific context. Section five gives a thorough discussion on the essentialism in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor. Section six attempts to argue that Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor resembles Chomsky’s logic and that their notion of conceptual metaphors is very much a Chomskyan postulation. Section seven anatomizes the most important philosophy underpinning the cognitive theory of metaphor, i.e., experientialism, and points out several deficiencies in this philosophy.

In chapter two, I attempt to establish a sound epistemology of metaphor through the perspective of the Peircean semiotic tradition. In the first section of this chapter, I hold that the epistemology of metaphor is an unfinished project. In this section, I choose three eras in the western history that can be considered as being crucial for establishing a sound epistemology of metaphor, and explore the reasons of their respective failure. In the search for a better philosophical solution we then turn to the Peircean philosophy of the sign. In other words, in the second section, I attempt to find answers to the question hinted in the title: what is metaphor. For this purpose, I try to establish an epistemology of metaphor in the Peircean semiotic tradition in light of his phenomenological analysis of the sign, with a special concentration on his trichotomous division of signs into index, icon, and symbol. Section three aims to demonstrate the operation of the Peircean abduction in the formation and interpretation of metaphor through a detailed criticism of an important conceptual metaphor or orientational metaphor, MORE IS UP.
In chapter three, I propose that our efforts should not stop at exploring Peirce’s thought on metaphor but should incorporate insights from scholars of the same tradition, like Umberto Eco and Ersu Ding, so as to obtain an integrated framework for metaphor interpretation. In this chapter, I emphasize the importance of a cultural space for dynamic interpretation of metaphor on the part of metaphor users, and also introduce the theory of intersubjective communication from Habermas as a philosophical solution for interpersonal understanding of metaphorical meaning. Structurally, this chapter includes five sections. The first section aims to discuss the subjective nature of metaphor from the perspective of Peircean semiotics. In the second section, I elaborate on Ersu Ding’s theory of metaphor with a special concentration on his concept of “arbitrary iconicity”. The third section attempts to elucidate Umberto Eco’s metaphorology through the relation between metaphor and culture and Eco’s key concept of encyclopedia. The fourth section discusses the relation between metaphor and intersubjectivity through a theory of intersubjective communication in Habermas as opposed to Lakoff/Johnson’s experientialism or embodied philosophy in the cognitive theory of metaphor. Finally, the fifth section examines the relation between metaphor and ideology.
Chapter One: The Impasse of Metaphorical Essentialism

1.1 Genealogy of Western Theories of Metaphor

Theories do not come out of thin air. The western discourse of metaphor has a long history of theoretical development that dates back to Aristotle, during which period quite a number of thinkers have made crucial contributions that have laid a solid foundation for the contemporary theories of metaphor. Thus, before we explore deeper into the central topic of the thesis, we shall have a quick glimpse at the genealogy of western theories of metaphor, through which a coordinate frame for the following explorations may also be delimited.

Scholars of the western world usually attribute “the discovery of metaphor” (Danesi 2004: 10) to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) who coined the word “metapherein”, with “meta” signifying “beyond” and “pherein” “to carry” (Aristotle 1952a: 1457 ff.). The English word “metaphor” then derives itself from the Greek “metapherein” (Danesi 2004: 10). In addition to the “discovery of metaphor”, Aristotle also put forward very influential ideas on figurative language in which metaphor “occupies a central position” (Hanks and Giora 2012: 17). The Greek master’s exposition on metaphor can be found in two of his well-known works, the Poetics and the Rhetoric. In the Poetics, he famously gives a rather broad definition of metaphor, in which he finds out that the loftiness of metaphor helps poetry to avoid being banal and worn-out (Hanks and Giora 2012: 18). In addition to this, Aristotle also provides a possible way of classifying different kinds of metaphorical expressions. For him, “Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion.” (Hanks and Giora 2012: 19) In other words, Aristotle divides metaphor into four types: three kinds of transference plus one proportional kind. And he found the proportional kind of metaphor to be the most charming one (Hanks and Giora 2012: 25). It is safe to say that Aristotle’s notion of metaphor in the Rhetoric is consistent with his idea in the Poetics. In the Rhetoric, Aristotle makes it quite clear that metaphor is not a mere linguistic adornment; rather, it has a certain purpose of persuasive speaking, i.e., a function to persuade others. What he truly holds dear in metaphor is the possible effect it makes either in poems or in daily language and what advantage we may take from using metaphor. What is insightful for the contemporary study of metaphor is its cognitive function in the form of rhetoric learning. With the burgeoning of the cognitive science that attaches great importance to
the study of metaphor, much “significance” and “value” of Aristotle’s classic notion of metaphor might be discovered by emerging researches.

From a glimpse of Aristotle’s conception of metaphor presented above, we know that the map drawn by the Greek philosopher for metaphor study is quite vague and unclear, and his proposed classification of metaphors together with his mention of metaphor’s great value in both poetry and prose are not enough for subsequent scholars to form a convincing epistemology of metaphor. Based on his understanding of metaphor, there emerges two different frameworks of metaphor interpretation: the poetic interpretation that emphasizes metaphor’s role in literary creation and aesthetics, and the rhetoric interpretation that places importance on metaphor’s role in promoting effective communication, but neither of the two theoretical directions can provide adequate answers for the fundamental question of what metaphor is and how it works. This explains why metaphor after Aristotle has been misunderstood or misinterpreted for centuries by many very influential scholars: they have gone too far on Aristotle’s road of rhetoric interpretation of metaphor.

Regardless of its possible negative impact, Aristotle’s rhetoric interpretation of metaphor was developed by many subsequent thinkers. Famous rhetoric teachers of the Roman age, like Cicero and Quintilian, adopted and followed many of the Aristotelean principles and notions on metaphor. The latter is another important scholar in the western academic history who made important remarks on metaphor, and held a similar view to that of Aristotle in that figurative expressions are to improve effective communication (Hanks and Giora 2012: 2). By seeing the communicative function of figurative language as its first and foremost mission, he went much further on the road of rhetoric interpretation of metaphor than his predecessors. In Institutes of Oratory, Quintilian discusses the import of tropes for orators, and believes that metaphor is a species of trope. For Quintilian, one function of metaphor is to add significance, and the other is for ornament or embellishment. Different from Aristotle’s notion of metaphor that was later known as comparison theory of metaphor, Quintilian views metaphor as a simple substitution of one item by another. That Quintilian sees metaphorization as a process of decorative substitution further entrenched the rhetoric view of metaphor (Danesi 2004: 13). As contended by Danesi (2004), both views of Aristotle and Quintilian can be categorized into the rhetorical theory of metaphor, which are “useless for understanding
semantic system in their origin” (Danesi 2004: 14) because they are never unyoked of the literalist view of meaning.

For whatever reason, after Aristotle and Quintilian, the western academia witnessed a period in which metaphor was either neglected or “condemned as a defect of human reasoning” by philosophers (Leezenberg 2001: 1; Danesi 2004: 10). We may call that period “the dark age for metaphor”, in the most part of which “metaphor was delegated to rhetoric and literary theory, while literal language was seen as a norm or standard for ‘serious’ language usage, and as an ideal for rational argument”. Most of the philosophers, such as the British thinker Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), in that long period considered metaphor as a defect of human reasoning and thus should be avoided. Another British scholar, John Locke (1632-1704), held the same view of metaphor as Hobbes. They both believe that metaphor is incompatible with serious thought, and follow the old commandment “Thou shalt not commit metaphor.” (Black 1955: 273) The following remark by Max Black vividly depicts how philosophers of that time regarded and treated metaphor: “To draw attention to a philosopher’s metaphors is to belittle him—like praising a logician for his beautiful handwriting. Addiction to metaphor is held to be illicit, on the principle that whereof one can speak only metaphorically, thereof one ought not to speak at all.” (Black 1955: 273; cf. Hanks and Giora 2012: 49) From a typical remark on metaphor by Locke (1975: 34), we know that Black (1955) was not at all exaggerating:

If we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats: and therefore, however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot be thought a great fault, either of language or person that makes use of them.

Hanks and Giora (2012) contended that most of the philosophers in this period made a category mistake with respect to metaphor. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, some contemporary scholars attribute the fifteen hundred years of silence on the part of philosophical discussion of metaphor to Aristotle’s literalist view of meaning and his interpretation of metaphor as a proportion (Danesi 2004: 12-13). According to Danesi
Throughout the medieval period, St. Thomas Aquinas seems to be an exception. We may have a better understanding of his idea on the issue of metaphor through the following argument (quoted in Davis and Hersh 1986: 250):

It is befitting Holy Scripture to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things. For God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature. Now it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible things, because all our knowledge originates from sense. Hence in Holy Scripture spiritual truths are fittingly taught under the likeness of material things.

According to Danesi (2004), St. Thomas was among a very few scholars of his time who can break free of the literalist view of meaning and admit that spiritual truths are obtainable “by means of comparison with material things”. By claiming that the “likeness of material things” may illuminate spiritual truths, St. Thomas implies the vital role of metaphor in human cognition, and thus indicates that metaphor is not only relative with serious thinking but also a fundamental way of obtaining truth. St. Thomas’s observation was not given due attention until, four hundred years later, Giambattista Vico published his revolutionary magnum opus in the year 1725, i.e., the *Scienza Nuova (New Science)*, in which he tries to bring metaphor back to the limelight. Unlike other thinkers in the age of European Enlightenment, such as Locke, Wilkins and Leibniz, Vico emphasizes the significance and ubiquitous nature of poetic logic (abductive reasoning) in people’s everyday thinking. Vico is probably the first scholar in premodern times who advocated the fundamental function of metaphor in human reasoning and thus tried to establish an epistemology of metaphor different from the secular understanding of metaphor as mere rhetoric. Illuminating and revolutionary as it is, Vico’s conception of metaphor was, however, largely neglected by mainstream philosophers of Vico’s time, such as Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) and the aforementioned John Locke, and those of the immediately succeeding era, like Hegel (1770-1831) and even John Mill (1806-1873). Perhaps, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was an exception, who tended to see metaphor and figurative language in general as evidence of how the human mind manages to understand strange things. Of course, metaphor was not a main focus of study for Kant and we thus cannot expect a full discussion on this topic from this great figure in modern German philosophy.
Perhaps, it would be hard for Vico to imagine that a major advocate of his theory of metaphor would come from the other side of the Atlantic nearly 100 years after his death. The American philosopher and semiotician, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), is a very important and special figure in the history of American philosophy. We may acquire a general idea about this figure from Bertrand Russell’s remark on his scholarship: “The work of Peirce is voluminous and fragmentary. Besides, he was often struggling with difficult problems and novel suggestions. It is therefore not easy to obtain a clear view of his position. It is, however, beyond doubt that he was one of the most original minds of the later nineteenth century, and certainly the greatest American thinker ever.” (Russell 1959: 276) Indeed, Peirce belongs to those philosophers who can always think ahead. Apropos of metaphor, few scholars of his time had the philosophical vision as Peirce who believed that metaphor plays a significant role in human thought and cognition. In fact, Peirce based his understanding of metaphor on his unique perspective on logic. Echoing Vico’s notion of poetic logic, the American thinker saw abductive reasoning as essential to our understanding of the outside world. According to Peirce, abductive reasoning can be subdivided into two kinds: iconic reasoning and indexical reasoning, and metaphorical thinking is considered as one mode of iconic reasoning. In other words, iconic reasoning is the underlying logic of metaphor. More importantly, he also initiated a unique way of understanding metaphor from a semiotic perspective. To be more specific, his insightful division of signs into index, icon, and symbol, followed by a subdivision of iconic signs into image, diagram, and metaphor, have provided us with a rather fresh perspective to examine metaphor: a semiotic view. However, Peirce’s idea on metaphor drew little attention from scholars before 1980s, and still not much afterwards. We will have much more discussion on metaphor in Peirce in the following chapters.

As a contemporary of Peirce, the German philosopher F. Nietzsche (1844-1900) engaged in substantial discussions on metaphor in his analytical framework of perception and conception. In fact, Nietzsche (1979) held very similar notions to Vico and Peirce on the issue of metaphor, who contended that metaphor is the “greatest flaw” (Danesi 2004: 15) of human beings. For Nietzsche, the drive towards the production of metaphor is both fundamental and indispensable (Nietzsche 1979: 88). The drive behind metaphorical and metonymical transference is quite in line with Vico’s poetic logic and Peirce’s abductive reasoning. For Nietzsche, as long as human beings have the ability to desire and dream, the drive for metaphor will never die. Besides, he also had a very
special perspective making a distinction between metaphor and concept, which will be elaborated in the following section of this chapter.

As argued by Danesi (2004: 16), the modern interest in metaphor “as a trace to the nature of human cognition, rather than as a mere figure of speech”, is sparked neither by ideas of Peirce and Nietzsche, or a reappraisal of Vico’s work, but by “the pivotal works of the early experimental psychologists in the latter part of the nineteenth century”, and among them are scientists like Gustav Fechner and Wilhelm Wundt, who first carried out experiments on how people process metaphor (Danesi 2004: 16; cf. Wundt 1901). Through collecting and analyzing data, Karl Buhler made a fascinating conclusion that metaphorical thinking “produced an effective retrieval form of memory” (Danesi 2004: 16). Then, the first half of the 20th century witnessed a Gestalt movement in the field of psychology, during which metaphor became a major focus of research (Wertheimer 1923). Findings of the empirical studies conducted in this period proved, for the first time, the cognitive function of metaphor.

Despite the massive efforts by experimental psychologists, the British theorist, I. A. Richards, is considered as the real scholar who “most kindled a broad scientific interest in metaphor” (Danesi 2004: 16). As an advocate of the Peircean theory of the sign, Richards collaborated with Ogden on a semiotic triangle or reference triangle quite similar to Peirce’s semiotic triad. The main focus of Richards’ research was the study of meaning, and he set forth the contextual theory of the sign. Similar to Peirce’s notion of metaphor, Richards (1938: 48-49) recognized the metaphorical nature of our thinking:

Thinking is radically metaphoric. Linkage by analogy is its constituent law or principle, its casual nexus, since meaning only arises through the causal contexts by which a sign stands for (takes the place of) an instance of a sort. To think of anything is to take it as of a sort… and that “as” brings in (openly or in disguise) the analogy, the parallel, the metaphoric grapple or gerund or grasp or draw by which the mind takes hold. It takes no hold if there is nothing for it to haul from, for its thinking is the haul, the attraction of likes.

Through depicting the “linkage by analogy” as the “constituent law or principle” of our thinking, the above quote clearly demonstrates the operation of sign-mediated human thinking. Such position is quite in line with Vico and Peirce. In The Philosophy of Rhetoric, Richards (1936) expresses his idea that metaphor can create new meaning. His further exposition on the dynamic relation between different parts of a metaphor laid a foundation for what was later known as the interaction theory of metaphor. Richards
(1936) also introduced the terms of “tenor” and “vehicle” for the two interacting items of metaphor, which, afterwards, are well-accepted and employed by many scholars. Contemporary researchers also use “target” to replace “tenor” and “source” to replace “vehicle”, which is merely a matter of terminology. For the sake of consistency, I adopt Richards’ version, i.e., “tenor” and “vehicle”, during the development of the present thesis.

After Richards, the American scholar, Max Black, also put forward very influential notions on the interaction theory of metaphor. In fact, he not only developed the interactionist theory to describe metaphorical thinking as a common reasoning of our mind, but also put forward a very influential classification of metaphor theories. Through a meta-analysis, Black (1962) divided the western theories of metaphor into three types: the substitution view, the comparison view, and the interaction view. This typological classification is so inclusive that it may subsume nearly all theoretical traditions on metaphor study in the history of western thought. According to this division, Aristotle’s conception of proportional metaphor has been considered by many (Hanks and Giora 2012) as the origin of the comparison theory of metaphor. The German scholar Nöth (1990: 129) had a rather insightful comment on the relation between the three types of theories on the basis of Black’s division:

Each of these theories alone can probably illuminate only one side of metaphor. Thus, with respect to the definitional criteria for metaphor in the narrow sense, the substitution and comparison theories must be seen as complementary. Both theories describe metaphor primarily from a paradigmatic point of view. The interaction theory proposed by Black (1962) and earlier by Richards (1936), on the other hand, explains metaphor primarily from syntagmatic point of view as the resolution of a semantic tension between the metaphoric expression and its context. But even the syntagmatic structure of metaphor necessarily presupposes a paradigmatic dimension, so that the two aspects are again complementary.

As a dualistic theory (Nöth 1990), the comparison theory of metaphor emphasizes the relation between the tenor and the vehicle, and thus highlights the comparison between the two parts and the similarity as the outcome of the comparison. The substitution theory stresses the transference from one to another, and thus highlights the replacing movement in the process of metaphorization. Todorov (1972) criticized such theoretical perspective for failing to realize that substitution occurs only on the part of the signifieds while the signifiers “remained constant”. Different from the above two theories, the interaction
theory lays stress on the context in which metaphors appear. As an interactionist, Umberto Eco (1984, 2014) advocates that the study of metaphor should be based on the cultural context they appear in and users’ interpretation in the context, and his metaphorology may also represent one type of interaction theory of metaphor. Since the three types of theories highlight different aspects of metaphor and are mutually complementary, it is usually not easy to figure out, in real situations, which one of the three categories a theory of metaphor should be classified into. For instance, it is quite difficult to classify the cognitive theory of metaphor into anyone of them.

From the 1960s to 1970s, the prevalence of Chomskyan linguistics suppressed the development of the cognitive trend in both linguistics and psychology as championed by Black and Gestalt psychologists (Danesi 2004), for Chomsky typically saw metaphor as a mere deviation from the fundamental linguistic rules he held dear. Then, in the late years of 1970s, as the transformational generative grammar began to be questioned by many linguists and psychologists, metaphor began to draw great attention of many scholars and thus finally came to the central part of the academic stage. A pivotal study in this period was conducted by a group of psychologists headed by Howard Pollio in the year 1977, the finding of which showed that metaphor pervades our ordinary speech and it should no longer be seen as a deviation or mere rhetoric decoration (Pollio et al. 1977). This empirical study became a turning point in the mainstream discourse of metaphor in the western academia, after which metaphor has been studied extensively. It is worth pointing out that, in addition to verbal metaphors that have drawn much of the researchers’ attention, other modes of metaphor or deviations of standard metaphor such as visual metaphors have also been explored in the same period, and this trend becomes more popular in the digital age with the burgeoning of researches in multimodality (Kennedy 1982; cf. Nöth 1990). Of course, among the many ambitious approaches that purport to treat metaphor from different perspectives, the most famous and influential one is Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor to be anatomized in the immediately succeeding sections of this chapter.

1.2 Cognitive Theory of Metaphor through the Years.

Anyone who intends to talk about the contemporary theories of metaphor will find it difficult to bypass Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor. Major arguments and core ideas of the cognitive theory can be found in Lakoff/Johnson (1980), even though Lakoff (1987) further elaborates his theory of categorization and
philosophical grounding (internal realism and embodied philosophy). Taking a psychological point of view and partially influenced by Max Blake’s theory on domains (although this is not acknowledged by the authors themselves), Lakoff/Johnson (1980) criticize the traditional theories of metaphor (especially the comparison theory) by drawing a distinction between their cognitive approach and traditional ones. From their cognitive perspective, metaphor is a matter of conceptualization rather than rhetoric and our ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical (Lakoff/Johnson 1980). They also criticize traditional views on the distinction between literal and figurative languages. In this way, they hope to draw researchers’ attention away from everyday language so as to concentrate on the role of metaphorical concepts in our overall conceptual system. Like Chomsky, although they may not appreciate such comparison, Lakoff/Johnson (1980) also discuss the surface expressions and root concepts of metaphor as well as their cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system. For them, the choices of metaphorical expressions we make are not random; rather, “they are determined by a set of fundamental metaphors or ‘conceptual metaphors’ that lie deep in our collective unconscious” (Ding 2015a: 9). In other words, conceptual metaphors are deemed as a pre-existing schema underlying ordinary metaphorical expressions. More specifically, our everyday metaphors are organized by an idealized cognitive model called gestalt (Lakoff 1987).

Lakoff/Johnson reiterate their cognitive theory of metaphor in a new edition of *Metaphors we live by* published in 2003. Except for adding some empirical evidence in the afterward, the original content of the book remains unchanged in the new version. In a more recent paper, Lakoff (2008) lists 18 results from the old theory (17 from *Metaphors We Live by* and one from “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor”) that he thinks have stood the test of time. In recent years, Lakoff/Johnson have relied heavily on the development of neuro science. However, not all scholars agree with him. Powell (1987), for example, points out that the cognitive theory of metaphor goes to unnecessary lengths to emphasize the ways in which ordinary language metaphors may enter into entailment (or truth-conditional) relationships which are based on propositional content, and that it does not take the subjective basis of meaning into account. Powell (1987) argues that the cognitive theory is only partially different from the traditional Anglo-American theories on metaphor in that it still adopts an objective scientific methodology.
As the cognitive theory grows more “metaphysical” in its research, the number of its critics has increased. In fact, some cognitive linguists themselves (Gibbs and O’Brien 1990; Gibbs and Colston 1995; Gibbs 1996) have also recognized the necessity to prove the psychological reality of conceptual metaphor through launching related empirical studies, but the existing research findings are far less than satisfactory. Gibbs and his colleagues (1990, 1996) have carried out numerous experiments to support the idea that conceptual metaphors are the underlying motivation for the understanding of idioms. Their study is sharply challenged by Keysar and Bly (1999), who argue that idioms cannot be used to prove the existence of conceptual metaphors. Dews and Winner (1999) and Giora and Fein (1999) refute the cognitive idea that abstract concepts are understood in terms of concrete ones by holding the point that the processing of literal meaning and non-literal meaning are dependent on salience. Glucksberg and McGlone (1999) point out that interpreting metaphor through the mapping between two domains is inadequate and lacks empirical evidence. Shen (1999) and Titone and Connine (1999) further track down some contradictory linguistic data that could not be explained by the cognitive model of cross-domain mapping. While Lakoff/Johnson (2003) believe there are at least seven types of evidence derived from various empirical methods, none of them seems to give an adequate answer to the questions and problems mentioned above.

The first decade of the present century in particular has witnessed an intensive critical reflection on the cognitive theory of metaphor. Haser (2005) has challenged cognitive semantics by refuting its major claims concerning metaphor, metonymy, and the experiential philosophy. In fact, Haser’s (2005) study is the first of its kind that presents detailed and systemic responses to Lakoff/Johnson’s philosophical claims in their cognitive theory of metaphor. As is averred by Haser (2005), McCawley’s comments that Lakoff/Johnson (1980) is “well-argued” and “maintains a high standard of precision” should be “taken with a grain of salt” (Haser 2005: 54). By proposing a new perspective on the distinction between metaphor and metonymy and providing an account of metaphorical transfer that does not rely on the notion of conceptual metaphor, this study reveals many weak points and contradictions in the cognitive theory that could not justify themselves. Haser (2005) further points out a number of contradictory statements throughout Lakoff/Johnson (1980). Through analyzing the rhetorical strategies in Lakoff/Johnson’s arguments, Haser (2005) observes many tactics that are contended by them as being “unfair”, such as belittling Lewis’s philosophical position on objectivism and Rakova’s (2002) criticism of the cognitivist approach. Another
strategy of Lakoff/Johnson, as is contended by Haser (2005: 63), is that they “superimpose part of their own theory onto scholars” who probably do not adhere to their cognitive theory of metaphor. Lakoff/Johnson’s way of arguing is considered as “assailing the strawman” by Haser (2005), for not only do they fail to provide any quotations from the proposed theorists (homonym theorists), but also they avoid mentioning any single representative of the putative theories such as the abstraction theory and homonym theory of metaphor. Through explaining the cognitive theory’s relationship to some earlier theories, Haser (2005) also pinpoints how Lakoff/Johnson “tend to distort important insights from other scholars” (Haser 2005). Another focus of Haser’s criticism is on Lakoff/Johnson’s arguments on objectivism. As is argued by Haser (2005), the cognitive theory of metaphor has become “unpalatable to quite a few scholars working in adjacent fields” (Haser 2005: 9). Moreover, Haser (2005) also pointed out that Lakoff/Johnson failed to account for the partiality of metaphorical transference from the source domain to the target domain, whereas they assign the undue responsibility of resolving this problem to the abstraction theorists of metaphor whose theoretical framework does not concern the hypothesized conceptual metaphors and thus will never be puzzled by such an issue. Haser (2005) attributes this to Lakoff/Johnson’s strategy of evading the issue they are unable to tackle. Evidently, Haser’s (2005) study may be seen as the loudest voice so far against the dominant cognitive myth of metaphor. Nevertheless, the philosophical challenges brought up by Haser (2005) also need to be examined, and there is a good possibility that Wittgenstein’s theory of family resemblance can serve as an effective remedy to the cognitive theory.

A more recent critique of the cognitive theory of metaphor is found in Ding (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). Through the introduction of the metaphor theory of Qian Zhongshu, a late Chinese scholar, Ding (2007) contends that the cognitive theory of metaphor has neglected two vital characteristics of metaphor: vehicular diversity and vehicular multivalency. Using a theory of sign interpretation developed by Peirce, he gives a clear presentation of the associative structure of metaphor motivated by similarities between things or states of affairs which underlies the entire process of concept formation or semiosis. Ding’s study has thus provided a starting point for further inquiry into a dynamic cultural dimension of metaphor.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory is successfully drawing a worldwide attention on the import of metaphor in meaning and
mind. The title of their famous book *Metaphors We Live by* has become an object of imitation and quotation in the field of scholarship and beyond. Their effort of bringing metaphor under the limelight was rewarded by an academic school with quite a number of followers who are generally labeled as cognitive linguists. Zoltán Kövecses (2010: vii) enumerated the new developments in diverse areas of study related to the cognitive theory of metaphor.

- the neural theory of metaphor
- the theory of conceptual integration
- metaphor in discourse
- the relationship between embodiment and metaphor
- the embeddedness of metaphor in cultural context
- the nature of mappings
- metaphor in gestures
- the study of multimodal metaphor
- metaphor identification
- metaphor processing
- the corpus linguistic study of metaphor
- emotion metaphors
- the theory of metonymy
- metaphor in foreign language teaching
- metaphor in the study of grammar
- and others.

This further proves that the impact of their theory is indeed rather enormous. It seems to be true for many of Lakoff/Johnson’s followers that the cognitive approach of metaphor study settles every problem and all they should do is to collect as many conceptual metaphors as they can. Put in another way, most of them take “conceptual metaphor” for granted and see the collection of “master tropes” or even the discovery of new “master tropes” as their common task. For them, to follow Lakoff/Johnson’s logic of metaphorical essentialism is self-evident and they never question it. They feel so secure
in their own bubble that they start to accept only information, whether it is true or not, that fits their opinions, instead of basing their opinions on the evidence out there.

It should be pointed out that, although I have serious doubts on Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor especially in relation to their conceptual metaphor hypothesis, I am not at all an opponent of the cognitive enterprise. I am aware that cognitive scientists and psychologists, such as Glucksberg and McGlone, have achieved much, either independently or in collaboration, in exploring the psycho-linguistic relationship. Many findings of their researches are rather insightful (cf. Glucksberg and McGlone 1999) for exploring the relation between mind and language. I am, however, against their “cognitive view” of metaphor, which means that my critique will be confined to the original ideas and notions directly made by Lakoff/Johnson. Although the cognitive theory of metaphor is a very influential school in cognitive linguistics, it still is not the whole field. Therefore, it will be a misunderstanding to assume that, by criticizing the cognitive theory of metaphor, I am against all researches done by other cognitive linguists. And it will be equally a misunderstanding to assume that I deny all the advantages in the cognitive theory of metaphor. There are, of course, some advantages in their theory, but the emphasis of the present study is on the undesirable features of the theory and the corresponding negative effects it has caused in the contemporary study of metaphor.

1.3 Through the Peircean Looking Glass

Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]) assume that the core ideas in their cognitive approach are completely fresh, and they therefore make the following statement in the preface to Metaphors We Live by:

Mark had found that most traditional philosophical views permit metaphor little, if any, role in understanding our world and ourselves. George had discovered linguistic evidence showing that metaphor is pervasive in everyday language and thought—evidence that did not fit any contemporary Anglo-American theory of meaning within either linguistics or philosophy. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: ix)

As a matter of fact, before Lakoff/Johnson, Max Black (1955: 273) had a similar misunderstanding in terms of previous philosophers’ views on metaphor, which might have misled Lakoff/Johnson in this respect:

I should like to do something to dispel the mystery that invests the topic; but since philosophers (for all their notorious interest in language) have so neglected the
subject, I must get what help I can from the literary critics. They, at least, do not accept the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not commit metaphor’, or assume that metaphor is incompatible with serious thought.

Echoing the discussion in the previous section of this chapter, such statements particularly refer to the “dark age of metaphor” before Vico rather than the whole period of western thought. From the brief theoretical history of metaphor study presented in Section One, we are able to have a glimpse of the intellectual environment for the emergence of Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor. Many positive attempts and explorations had been made by earlier theorists, including Max Black himself, for a better understanding of metaphor, but it was not a right time for developing a systematic theory. Nevertheless, the fact that a sound understanding of metaphor was suppressed for most of the time in history should not be used as an excuse for not showing due respects for those who deserved much more, such as Vico, Peirce, and Nietzsche. Therefore, by “misunderstanding”, I refer particularly to Lakoff/Johnson’s neglect of the semiotic tradition of metaphor championed by Vico and Peirce. In other words, I believe that the above arguments by Lakoff/Johnson and Black are not applicable to the American philosopher and semiotician, Charles S. Peirce, who views iconic reasoning essential to our understanding of the world. In fact, Peirce made it very clear a long time ago that our thinking is either indexical (metonymical) or iconic (metaphorical), which long predates what Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 6) have considered as their “most important claim”, i.e., “human thought processes are largely metaphorical”.

If we take a holistic view of the western philosophy of language, as reflected in the historical review presented in the first section of this chapter, Lakoff/Johnson’s idea that metaphor is more than rhetoric becomes even less “innovative”. As Jäkel (1999) has pointed out, there is a long tradition in linguistics and philosophy anticipating the core ideas stated in the cognitive theory of metaphor. Names of the scholars on Jäkel’s list include Kant, Blumenberg, Weinrich, and Whorf. Haser (2005: 75) enriched this list by adding Goodman, Black, and Beardsley onto it:

Quite a few scholars have put forward what Jäkel (1999) calls “forgotten contributions to the cognitive theory of metaphor.” Apart from Goodman, major proponents of accounts that are in some sense reminiscent of Lakoff/Johnson’s theory include Blake and Beardsley. That Lakoff/Johnson do not pay tribute to these scholars is all the more puzzling since Johnson (1981b) does contain a discussion of these theories.
From the citation of Goodman in Johnson (1981), we know that at least Mark Johnson was not unaware of Goodman’s notion that metaphor “permeates all discourses, ordinary and special” (Goodman 1968: 80). Haser (2005) even believes that Nelson Goodman’s notion of metaphor “anticipates Lakoff/Johnson’s (1980) conception of metaphors as ways of organizing and conceptualizing our experience, which presents the bedrock assumption of their approach” (Haser 2005: 77).

In fact, as we have already pointed out in the first section, the “forgotten contributions to the cognitive theory of metaphor” could go further back in time to G. Vico, St. Thomas, and even Aristotle. Aristotle (1952b: 1410b) had already implied the cognitive function of metaphor from which we can “best get hold of something fresh”. For him, metaphor “permeates all kinds of discourses as a template for understanding life in its many details, complexities, and vicissitudes” (Danesi 2004: 11). Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 190) also acknowledge this, but they assert that this theoretical tradition “was never carried over into modern philosophical thought” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 190). This conclusion is, however, untenable. By contending that to metaphorize well “implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars” (quoted in Ricoeur 1977: 23), Aristotle brings people’s attention to metaphor users’ manipulation over two seemingly unconnected entities, i.e., to make the dissimilar similar. In this process, the metaphor user’s mental association is considered indispensible. This capacity for creative association is further defined and reexamined by Vico (1948) in terms of poetic logic through which the competence of metaphorization plays a vital role in human cognitive activities. Viewing metaphor as a fundamental and primal instrument of thought (Leary 1990), Vico recovers the connection between verbal language and the senses. By doing this, he had put metaphor in the proper position of philosophy. The following remark by Danesi on the relationship between Vico’s conception of metaphor and Lakoff/Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) is essentially right:

While much has been documented within CMT on the role of metaphor in language and thought, there is nothing in CMT that was not prefigured by Vico in his New Science. Moreover, CMT would be greatly enhanced as a theoretical enterprise if it were to seriously consider and adopt Vico’s notion of poetic logic. (Danesi 2004: 25)

Thus, the insights of all these philosophers and linguists on this topic have, to a great extent, lessened the originality of the cognitive approach.
In line with Vico, Peirce developed an effective method of meaning interpretation through his theory of the sign. Of all the Peircean semiotic propositions, his trichotomous division of signs into index, icon, and symbol seems to be the most useful and insightful to the study of metaphor whose formation and interpretation is based on iconic reasoning. Peirce referred to this trichotomy as “the most fundamental division of signs” (CP 2.275). For Peirce, metaphor is the result of making links between things or states of affairs on the basis of similarity. He defined this process as “iconic reasoning” which is one of the two forms of abduction, the other being indexical reasoning. Even after human beings have developed verbal language, they continue to reason iconically which results in metaphors. One prominent feature of iconic reasoning is that it is open-ended and heterogeneous and therefore no particular metaphorical pattern can be said to claim monopoly over the structuring of our thinking and behavior. Such a theoretical position is quite different from Lakoff/Johnson’s metaphor theory.

For the most part of the 20th century, Peirce’s conception of metaphor was neglected by the mainstream academia. In the following chapters, we will elaborate the importance of Peirce’s semiotic theory in helping establish a sound epistemology of metaphor. What should be admitted here is that based on the existing publications and manuscripts of Peirce, one can make a quick conclusion that metaphor is not Peirce’s focus of exploration and he also cannot be called a theorist on metaphor study. This becomes a main reason many scholars have great doubts on whether there should be a “Peircean conception of metaphor”. Some scholars (Anderson 1984) added that Peirce realized the importance of metaphor in his late years, but, regrettably, had not got enough time to make a full discussion on it. Besides, his ideas on metaphor are scattered in his writings of different periods and this has contributed to the unsystematic feature of his notions on metaphor.

Peircean scholars did publish several important articles on metaphor in the 1980s when the cognitive theory of metaphor began to draw people’s attention. However, dialogues between the aforementioned two schools were very few afterwards. In fact, many theorists take this phenomenon as being “odd”, as Danaher (1998: 171) argued in the following quote:

Given that language is a cognitive system and that cognition is a semiotic system, it is odd that two prominent lines of research in contemporary linguistics, one an outgrowth of Peircean notions (Jakobson 1965, Andersen 1973…Anttila 1977and
Danaher (1998) saw some commonalities between the two traditions and believed that they could communicate. According to Haley (1999), one point of agreement between Peirce and Lakoff lies in that: “Metaphor is not an exclusively ‘literary’ or even linguistic phenomenon, but is instead a fundamentally conceptual or cognitive mechanism.” (Haley 1999: 422) Thus, they hope to bring these two intellectual traditions together so that they can shed light on each other.

While admitting the commonalities, these scholars argue, we should also see the great distinctions between the two schools. Different from Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor, the Peircean conception of metaphor never attempts to conceptualize metaphorical expressions and never advocate metaphorical essentialism. This is, perhaps, the most evident distinction between the two schools. As a Peircean scholar, Haley (1999) was quite positive on the idea that the cognitive theory of metaphor could benefit from Peirce’s theory: “It is my thesis that the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce offers just the conceptual footing Lakoff and Johnson are trying to reach.” (Haley 1999: 418) By saying this, Haley (1999) indicated that Peirce’s theory of the sign can provide a better way for Lakoff/Johnson to make further improvements and correction on their cognitive theory. However, Lakoff/Johnson and advocates of their school did not seem to follow Haley’s advice; rather, they turned to neuroscience to find evidence for proving “conceptual metaphors”. As argued by Haley (1999), Lakoff/Johnson had missed a goldmine by ignoring Peirce.

Looked at from the angle of Peircean semiotics, the most salient and controversial features of Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor are as follows:

- The demarcation between concept and meaning is rather vague in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor. As a consequence, metaphorical meaning is often confused with metaphorical concepts.
- Lakoff/Johnson presuppose a well-structured Gestalt which determines the formation of metaphors. In that sense, their conceptual metaphors are like Plato’s ideas which exist all by themselves and then are realized in different sets of metaphorical expressions. Both of them are theoretical assumptions that are yet to be justified.
Lakoff/Johnson’s theory does not make any distinction between icons (metaphors) and symbols (lexical items) so that when they think they are discussing metaphors, they are actually talking about normal words and phrases that no longer require iconic reasoning. Their re-iconification of lexical items is a good exercise for linguists but does not reflect the real process of language use.

Lakoff/Johnson’s theory does not pay enough attention to the diversity of metaphorical vehicles which leads them to the controversial conclusion that we live by certain sets of conceptual metaphors. By taking the position of metaphorical essentialism and experiential determinism, the cognitive theory is incompatible with the polysemous nature of the sign and does not square with the fact of arbitrary iconicity.

By focusing on only a small number of ‘master tropes’, the explanatory power of the cognitive theory of metaphor becomes too limited. We are yet to be convinced that other metaphors are not equally important.

The nature of conceptual metaphor theory is incompatible with the essence of metaphorical thinking. To be more specific, what the theory holds valuable is exactly what real metaphorical thinking ceaselessly breaks through.

We shall respectively refer to all of these features as this thesis develops in the subsequent parts.

1.4 Master Tropes without Worlds

Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor is based on their philosophical account of meaning which is more widely known as cognitive semantics. According to Rudi Keller (1999) who is also an advocate of Peircean semiotics, Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of meaning is as problematic as the “objectivist semantics” they have fiercely criticized. The German linguist and semiotician thus pinpoints four major deficiencies of their theory, one of which concerning Lakoff/Johnson’s vague definition of their important term “concept” is stated as follows:

Cognitive semantics’ concept of the concept ‘concept’ is either unclear or simply trivial. Certainly it is plausible to assume that the expression bird corresponds to the concept ‘bird’. However, it is implausible to assume that there is a concept ‘bye-bye’ which corresponds to the expression bye-bye—other than in the trivial sense that
there must be something going through the speaker’s mind when he says bye-bye, and that this something is a concept. (Keller 1999: 178)

The problem Keller (1999) points out here might be attributed to Lakoff/Johnson’s failure in making a clear demarcation between meaning and concept. Their tendency of muddling the two terms began when they made great effort to interpret metaphor through their conceptual metaphors. Similar to Lakoff/Johnson, Leezenberg (2001), another theorist in metaphor study, also tends to dissolve the difference between the two terms by holding that “a concept is, rather than has, a meaning” (Leezenberg 2001: 252). Upon these arguments, some doubts and questions naturally arise. Terminologically, does concept equal meaning? Or, more specifically, are metaphorical concepts really identical to metaphorical meaning? Since Lakoff/Johnson (2003 [1980]) have not made any account of this, it is necessary for us to have a discussion on this topic so as to have a better look at the problem of their theory of meaning. The fact that people ask “What’s your meaning?” instead of “What’s your concept?” when they have difficulty in understanding others immediately serves as evidence that meaning and concepts are different things. The following notions by Keller (1999: 178-179) on meaning and concept can duly initiate our discussion on the demarcation between the two:

1. Meanings are linguistic entities and concepts are cognitive entities. Meanings and concepts are not identical.
2. Semantics’ central and primary concern are linguistic signs’ rules of use. The meaning of a conventional sign is its rule of use.
3. Because of their meanings, some linguistic signs are capable of representing concepts. Others, also because of their meanings, are not.
4. Concepts are dependent upon and grounded in language. They are formed, learned, and retained by means of the rules of the use of those expressions that denote them. Every concept can be expressed in language, but not every linguistic expression represents a concept. The concept ‘triangular table’ can be expressed, for example, with the words triangular table, while the word bye-bye expresses no concept at all.

These notions by Keller (1999) pinpoint the difference between meaning and concept as well as a triadic relationship between meaning, concept, and the sign (linguistic signs). Despite all these important differences between the two, what should be pointed out here is that concept and meaning actually have distinct roles in the sign system. The process of conceptualization is also a process of symbolization, and concept formation is based
on people’s ability to make abstraction. For example, the concept “water” encompasses all sorts of waters such as seawater, rainwater, drinking water, and industrial water. The concept of “table” in our mind is a general designation of all the features and functions a table in the real world has, regardless of its specific material or places of origin. The concept “wood”, likewise, is the general abstraction of all things in wooden nature, regardless of the size or length, thickness, or color of the specific referent. However, if we describe somebody’s style of communication as being “wooden”, or saying “he is wooden in his communication”, the utterer is not using wood by its dictionary or literal meaning but its metaphorical meaning. In other words, metaphor helps to create new meaning and to form fresh concepts.

Throughout their works, Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]) want to prove the centrality of conceptual metaphors, or master tropes, in the formation of metaphor. By doing this, what they have overlooked is vivid metaphorical associations that the metaphor users are trying to convey in a specific context. Consequently, the conceptual metaphors they have presented to us are abstract and empty concepts rather than diversified metaphorical expressions with real meaning in a real communicative situation. Thus, the hypothesized conceptual metaphors in cognitive theory of metaphor represents a type of reductionism in the field of metaphor study, for Lakoff/Johnson and their followers tend to reduce every metaphorical expression they encounter into a dry formula “A IS B”. Put briefly, they have collected a limited number of metaphorical concepts (conceptual metaphors) they abstracted from linguistic expressions, and believed that they had finally grasped the driving source for metaphor formation. In fact, those conceptual metaphors like ‘ARGUMENT IS WAR’ and ‘TIME IS MONEY’ are not at all the fundamental drive for metaphor; rather, they are inductive results from limited language materials done by linguists. According to Lakoff/Johnson, these conceptual metaphors are “metaphors we live by”, but, ironically, these empty concepts are not metaphor in themselves. Lakoff/Johnson have confused the term “concept” with not only metaphor but also the term “meaning”. What they have failed to realize is the distinction between metaphor and concept, and the demarcation between meaning and concept. They also did not realize that when we use a metaphor like “he is a snake” or “he is a dog”, we mean a specific physical or mental likeness between the man and the specific animal rather than referring to the empty concept “HUMAN BEINGS ARE ANIMALS” which is a meta-metaphorical construct.
Lakoff/Johnson’s failure in elaborating the true meaning of metaphor leads us to rethink the meaning of “meaning”. The word “meaning” can easily occur to everybody’s mind due to our simple belief that the outside world *means* something to us. In fact, the abstract and all-embracing nature of meaning makes it rather difficult to be accurately defined. Meanwhile, it is also an eternal topic over thousands of years, during which a large number of important scholars have accounted for it from various perspectives. The following quotation from *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics* is an explanatory definition of “meaning” made from a more general perspective of semiotics:

‘Meaning’ is at issue whenever something can be said to be a *culturally established sign* of something else, whether linguistic as in the ‘The French word “neige” means snow’ or non-linguistic as in ‘A white flag means surrender’. Meaning generated in the use of signs may be intentional or non-intentional (though some scholars would recognize only the intentional variety, thus emphasizing the production side). It may be literal (where the link between the sign and what the sign stands for is explicit and fully conventional) or figurative or indirect (where further inferencing is required, even though a degree of conventionality is often involved as well, as in the case of figures of speech and indirect speech acts). It may be seen as ‘timeless’ (sentence meaning and word meaning) or as occasion-specific (in which case Grice would use the term ‘utterer’s meaning’). (Cobley 2010: 263)

This definition further demonstrates the inclusiveness of the word *meaning*. Different from some linguists and philosophers that understand meaning in a broader sense that covers both sense and reference (cf. Dummett 1976; Lyons 1977; Allan 1986), Peirce defines the term meaning in a narrower sense so as to exclude the aspect of reference. He views the traditional notions of meaning as being inadequate to account for how a sign (including language) actually works, and therefore develops the modern notion of meaning through a triadic relation of the sign. For Peirce, every meaning has a sign vehicle without which no signifying process is possible. He understands meaning as a mediating relation between a sign and its object, and introduces the encompassing term “interpretant” to represent and pinpoint the relationship. Meaning is, according to Peirce, by no means a stable one; rather, it is always renewable in the process of unlimited semiosis or endless series of interpretants (*CP* 1.339). Through understanding meaning as “proper significate effects of a sign” (*CP* 5.475), the Peircean account of meaning also purports to study meaning in relation to sign users (Nöth 1990). Thus, whether a meaning is expressed literally or metaphorically depends to a great extent on the sign users’
purposes and intentions, and the production of metaphorical meanings also acquires a different logical process in users’ mind from that of literal meanings. In the Peircean framework, metaphor and meaning are very clearly distinguished. As is categorized by Peirce, metaphor is a type of iconic sign, while meaning is represented by the term “interpretant” in the semiotic triad. Despite the difference between the two, they are at the same time very closely related with each other: a theory of metaphor is usually underpinned by a philosophy of meaning or a theory of signification. Similarly, we may also get a fine demarcation between meaning and concepts in Peirce. Meaning is, for Peirce, usually open for interpretation while a concept usually contains one or more fixed meanings.

Generally speaking, concepts are mental representations of things, events, ideas, or states of affairs. Keller (1999) understands them as cognitive entities in that the process of conceptualization plays a vital role in human cognition. The concept “tree”, for instance, is the generalization and abstraction of the trees in the real world, i.e., it stands for a type of plants. With such representational feature, a concept is, in fact, a sign in our conceptual system. With the development of human cognition, there are so many mental concepts which are symbolized in the sign system, especially the system of linguistic signs. Given the arbitrary nature of the sign, different language systems may have different sign vehicle for the same concept. For example, the word “tree” in English and the character “树” in Chinese represent the same concept “tree”. Looked at from the angle of Peircean semiotics, the most salient demarcation between meaning and concept seems to be that concepts are the Peircean symbols (CP 2.302) as opposed to indices and icons in his division of signs into three types, while meaning is the Peircean interpretant as opposed to representamen and object in the semiotic triad. In other words, the two terms are at different hierarchical levels in the sign system, thus, playing different roles in the signifying process: concept is a type of signs while meaning is an indispensable element of the sign. A sign has a meaning, i.e., its interpretant. You may express a meaning to others or to yourself (for example, meditation). A concept is communicable because it has a meaning. For a newly met concept like “signified” or “structural hole”, you may ask: “What’s the meaning of this concept?” You would know its meaning when you get the definition of the concept. Here, the meaning of the concept refers to its definition. Thus, as a kind of signs, a concept is effective through its meaning, and meaning, on the other hand, constitutes the major content of a concept. Put briefly,
meaning is mutable and open to interpretation and communication, whereas a concept is relatively more stable and closed once it is formed. In other words, a concept, especially those symbolized or lexicalized concepts in the sign system, is a fixed term with a relatively stable definition either produced in an individual mind or shared by members of a community. Another important distinction between meaning and concept lies in the fact that meaning is rooted in a context while concept is usually isolated and abstracted from that context. This difference may cause two different perspectives of study, one on the basis of meaning and the other in terms of concept. Lakoff/Johnson’s metaphor theory belongs to the latter.

Such demarcation between meaning and concept can also be found in Nietzsche, one of Peirce’s contemporaries. Nietzsche (1979) insightfully divided human thought into two operable domains: perception and conception. The domain of perception consists of “impressions and sensations”, while the domain of conception consists of “the ideas that the mind makes from perception” (Danesi 2004: 15). In other words, percepts and concepts belong to different stages of human thought. Both percepts and concepts are signs and thus have meaning. This means that, although meaning and concept are both products of our mind, they are intrinsically different.

As is discussed above, concept and meaning should not be deemed as being identical. Same is the case with the metaphorical meaning and concepts. People understand metaphor through its meaning, and they normally will not reduce it into an abstract concept like Lakoff/Johnson’s conceptual metaphors for the sake of “fundamental understanding”. Guided by a vague idea on meaning and concept, Lakoff/Johnson thus have laid undue emphasis on the metaphysical concepts reduced from ordinary metaphorical expressions. As a result, one prominent deficiency of their cognitive theory lies in their overconcentration on inducing abstract and empty metaphorical concepts rather than accounting for the real metaphors and contexts of concrete metaphorical expressions. As is criticized by Haser (2005: 2-3), “an accurate analysis of metaphors and metonymies should relate to linguistic expressions, rather than putative metaphorical or metonymical concepts.”

Turning to a different frame of reference, metaphorical concepts proposed by Lakoff/Johnson as conceptual metaphors are, to some extent, close to Kant’s term “category”, which are nearly a priori. If we take a thorough look at those conceptual metaphors, we will find that Lakoff/Johnson pay much attention to the psychological or
cognitive aspect of metaphor formation while overlooking the much broader cultural-historical parts. They deem their work as being successful once they have obtained abstract metaphorical concepts in a conceptual domain. As mentioned many times earlier, their great problem lies in that they have confused metaphor with concept. In fact, their tendency of muddling metaphor and metaphorical concept burgeons in their first chapter of *Metaphors We Live by* where they announce that “whenever in this book we speak of metaphors, such as ARGUMENT IS WAR, it should be understood that metaphor means metaphorical concept” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 6). The fact is that a large number of the metaphorical concepts they propose as conceptual metaphors, such as MORE IS UP, LESS IS DOWN, and IDEAS ARE FOOD, are not metaphors at all. Furthermore, many conceptual metaphors like IDEAS ARE FOOD and MORE IS UP are even not meaningful expressions, nor do they reveal any fundamental truth. Even the supporting illustrations for conceptual metaphors provided by Lakoff/Johnson are not tenable, because most of them are actually lexical items rather than real metaphors in English language as is shown in the following quotation:

**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.

I don’t *have enough* time to *spare* for that. You’re *running out* of time.

You need to *budget* your time.

*Put aside* some time for ping pong.

Is that *worth your while*?

Do you *have* much time *left*?

He’s living on *borrowed* time.

You don’t *use* your time *profitably*.

I *lost* a lot of time when I got sick.

*Thank you for* your time. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 7-8)
In fact, verbs like “waste”, “save”, “spend”, “cost”, and “budget” all have a denotative or dictionary meaning relevant to time in modern English, thus, their collocation with “time” are actually literal rather than metaphorical. It is thus rather questionable to group these expressions under one conceptual metaphor “TIME IS MONEY”. As pointed out by Hanks and Giora (2012: 7), such created “headings” (conceptual metaphors) for ordinary metaphors cannot work in front of the infinite number of unpredictable metaphors:

A very large number of linguistic metaphors (indeed, an infinite number, both actual and possible) fit into a comparatively small set of conceptual metaphors. However, there are many other linguistic metaphors that do not fit neatly under the heading of any particular conceptual metaphor, despite the best efforts, sometimes rather strained, of some metaphor theorists to create conceptual metaphors as headings for any number of linguistic metaphors. There are undoubtedly general principles at work – for example, the salient properties attributed to animals are often exploited metaphorically – but the idea that all linguistic metaphors are realizations of conceptual metaphors is a gross oversimplification.

Hanks and Giora (2012) are essentially right when they use the word “oversimplification” to describe the operational feature of the cognitive approach. Conceptual metaphors are lifeless because they have been separated from real metaphorical thinking. In other words, by producing abstract metaphorical expressions, Lakoff/Johnson have dramatically reduced the connotative meaning of a metaphor in real communicating situations. As a result, they dissoner the concepts from the world and the context they root in, and can only get rather dry and empty formulas.

1.5 Metaphorical Essentialism in the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor

Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]) and Lakoff (1987) have criticized what Putnam called “metaphysical realism”, arguing that a new realism which adopts the view of internal consistency should replace that of external reality. However, the internal realism they propose is also based on the acknowledgment of the ontological existence of a certain “reality-in-itself”. By viewing certain master tropes as fundamental and prerequisite schemas that shape human thought, Lakoff/Johnson presumes the ontological existence of some metaphorical concepts. In this sense, their cognitive theory seems to follow the Platonic line of ontological realism which holds the idea that concepts expressed in a language correspond to real states of things or affairs that exist independently of language.
The following statement, for instance, reveals Lakoff/Johnson’s metaphysical notion of conceptual metaphor:

Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system. Therefore, whenever in this book we speak of metaphors, such as ARGUMENT IS WAR, it should be understood that metaphor means metaphorical concept. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 6)

By contending that “there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system”, Lakoff/Johnson presuppose the ontological existence of a metaphorical concept “ARGUMENT IS WAR” in people’s conceptual system. On the other hand, they also attempt to equate “metaphor” with “conceptual metaphor”, which are very different things. In the “ARGUMENT IS WAR” metaphor, the meaning projection of “war” onto “argument” is considered to be fundamental for people to understand the word “argument”. In that sense, we can say that Lakoff/Johnson’s experientialist notion of metaphor is a kind of metaphorical essentialism.

It is interesting to note that Lakoff (1987: 161), when criticizing what he calls “objectivism”, also gives his definition of essentialism as follows:

ESSENTIALISM: Among the properties that things have, some are essential; that is, they are those properties that make the thing what it is, and without which it would not be that kind of thing. Other properties are accidental – that is, they are properties that things happen to have, not properties that capture the essence of the thing.

He then described it as a “metaphysical assumption” accompanying the “objectivist metaphysics” he refuted. Ironically, what he had shown us in the conceptual metaphor theory is also an essentialist point of view. Such a metaphorical essentialism is, however, incompatible with the polysemous nature of the sign. For example, Lakoff/Johnson have postulated “LIFE IS A JOURNEY” as a master trope, but the fact is that life as a topic can be discussed in relation to numerous other vehicles such as book, stage, poetry, and wine among which no particular category has priority over others. We are yet to be convinced that “LIFE IS A JOURNEY” is a conceptual metaphor while “LIFE IS A BOOK” is not. Keller (1998) is right in contending that linguistic signs “are not a prerequisite for our communicative attempts; they are their (usually unintended) result” (Keller 1998: vii). Indeed, no particular sign is so fundamental to have the monopoly over our mind, and those “conceptual metaphors” are merely results rather than prior conditions of our communication.
At the most general level, Lakoff/Johnson’s metaphorical essentialism entails the following assumptions on this issue:

- A well-structured Gestalt structures people’s thought and determines the formation of metaphor.
- There exist universal categories with ordered hierarchies for one gestalt.
- There is a coherent system under every conceptual metaphor.

As pointed out earlier, Lakoff/Johnson’s theory of metaphor presupposes a well-structured gestalt and such a pre-existing gestalt intrinsically requires universal categories with ordered hierarchies and a coherent system of signification under one conceptual metaphor. However, these assumptions are all problematic and deserve close scrutiny.

As for the well-structured gestalt, Lakoff/Johnson argue that “our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 3)”. This is an obvious overstatement. Different from the Gestalt psychologists in 1950s and 1960s (Osgood and Suci 1953; Asch 1958; Werner and Kaplan 1963; Koen 1965), Lakoff/Johnson believe in a Gestalt with pre-existing concepts in people’s mind. They then further claim that these “concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people,” to the extent that they even “govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 3). The use of the word “govern” reflects Lakoff/Johnson’s tendency of exaggerating the function of concepts and conceptual system in our cognitive system. After making these overstatements, Lakoff/Johnson focus their attention on metaphorical concepts and make it very clear in the following statement, and also many others, that some metaphors structure our mind: “Primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. And we have found a way to begin to identify in detail just what the metaphors are that structure how we perceive, how we think, and what we do.” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 4) This is actually where Lakoff/Johnson’s mistake begins. As acknowledged by them, most of their ideas on how people’s conceptual system is reflected in their language “derive in great part from the work of Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, and others who have worked in that tradition.” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: xi) The fact, however, is that linguists, in their thorough critique of the
Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, have shown convincingly that our concepts structure what we perceive and do so only to a minor extent. Lakoff/Johnson, on the other hand, go to an extreme and try to locate a small number of metaphorical concepts (such as ARGUMENT IS WAR, TIME IS MONEY, and MORE IS UP) that they claim structure what we perceive and do. The following is an example they use to show how the structuring happens:

Many of the things we do in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument—attack, defense, counterattack, etc.—reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 4)

In this exemplified case, Lakoff/Johnson consider the metaphorical concept, ARGUMENT IS WAR, as a primary metaphor or root analogy that govern the way people construe argument in the same culture. Such an assumption contradicts their own statement on the non-existence of general primary qualities in the world:

As we are about to see, color is the tip of the iceberg. What Locke recognized as perceiver-dependence is a fully general phenomenon. Cognitive science and neuroscience suggest that the world as we know it contains no primary qualities in Locke’s sense, because the qualities of things as we can experience and comprehend them depend crucially on our neural makeup, our bodily interactions with them, and our purposes and interests. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 26)

The above statement by Lakoff/Johnson is actually a very good point, although philosophers have been saying this all along. Contrary to this, the logic of Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory forces them to highlight some qualities such as the war-like qualities of argument as being more important and fundamental than other qualities in things or states of affair, hence the emphasis of primary qualities. They argue that conceptual metaphors such as ARGUMENT IS WAR structure the way we think and act. In actual situations, however, many of the things we do and perceive in arguing are also structured by many other objects or events than war. For this simple reason, the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is not that important, at least no more important than other ordinary metaphors that have similar a cognitive function. The phrase “live by” in their book title, therefore, seems too sensational.

Lakoff/Johnson’s subsequent statement about argument and dance further shows that they tend to define something on the basis of their own presupposition or imagination:
Imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, the participants are seen as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way. In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently. But we would probably not view them as arguing at all: they would simply be doing something different. It would seem strange even to call what they were doing “arguing.” Perhaps the most neutral way of describing this difference between their culture and ours would be to say that we have a discourse form structured in terms of battle and they have one structured in terms of dance. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 5).

Once again, Lakoff/Johnson’s statement does not hold true. As is pointed out by Haser (2005) and Ding (2015a), dance can mean many different things, including those that are negative or undesirable. The notion of dance is, in fact, “a complex entity that consists of a large number of semantic components and any one of them or any combination of them could be selected as relevant to a particular situation of verbal communication” (Ding 2015a: 10). Likewise, people may view argument in various other ways like seeing it as a futile activity, and no culture is so limited as to view argument only from one single perspective. Thus, Lakoff/Johnson’s example provides the ground for an argument against their own hypothesis.

Regarding the issue of categorization, Lakoff/Johnson have a tendency to collect concepts and expressions together so as to form a universal category. For instance, they categorize all the following expressions under one ‘universal’ category “ARGUMENT IS WAR”:

To give some idea of what it could mean for a concept to be metaphorical and for such a concept to structure an everyday activity, let us start with the concept ARGUMENT and the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. This metaphor is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions:

ARGUMENT IS WAR

Your claims are indefensible.
He attacked every weak point in my argument.
His criticisms were right on target.
I demolished his argument.
I’ve never won an argument with him.
You disagree? Okay, shoot!
If you use that strategy, he’ll wipe you out.

There are, however, several problems with these examples in the above list. To be more specific, the first example could be about basketball, and so is the first half of the second example. The second half of the second example could be about shooting, while the third example could be about construction and so on. As is averred by Haser (2005: 11), “Lakoff/Johnson’s groupings of metaphorical expressions under metaphorical concepts are almost invariably disputable.” Even if all these expressions can be put into the same category as related to war, they are not reflections of a pre-existing category. Rather, “ARGUMENT IS WAR” is an abstraction of what these expressions have in common. It is therefore a meta-linguistic construction done by scholars. Let’s take the HUMAN IS ANIMAL metaphor as another example. When someone says “David Wong always wags his tail when his boss comes around”, will he or she have to go back to the HUMAN IS ANIMAL pattern to find the lower category HUMAN IS MAMMAL in order to understand the HUMAN IS DOG metaphor at the lowest level of the hierarchical system? There is no evidence that one particular way of linking things takes precedence over others or is in any way superior to them. This further explains the futility of the so-called universal categories.

Back to the example of ARGUMENT IS WAR, what Lakoff/Johnson did not realize in this particular case is that argument might also be considered as a war in a verbal form, i.e., a sub-category of war. In fact, it is quite possible that argument is seen as a species of war. If the relation between argument and war is understood from this perspective, then we may look back again to Aristotle, for he had already made classification for this kind of metaphor: a transference from genus to species. According to the definition in dictionary, “A genus is a class of similar things, especially a group of animals or plants that includes several closely related species.” In other words, species is a sub-set of genus and a genus consists of several species. “A transference from genus to species” means to use a set to stands for its sub-set. In “I am defending my idea.,” defending linguistically is a species of defending. From this perspective, verbal war is a species of war, thus argument is a species of war. This explains why the metaphorical association between argument and war pervades different cultures. Of course, such view of categorization by Aristotle also gives a fatal refutation to those who still see ARGUMENT IS WAR as a conceptual metaphor.
Besides their tendency of universalization and oversimplification, Lakoff/Johnson’s problem also lies in their overlook of the arbitrary nature of human categorization. The process of categorization is based on similarities that we observe in things. As long as we can find similarities in objects, it will not be hard to categorize them. For instance, a wooden log and a brick have little to do with each other, but they can all be used to beat people. Thus, if it is necessary, we can put the two things in the category entitled “things which can be used to beat others”. In fact, many scholars have already noticed such feature of our categorizing process. Hayek (1956) compared the grouping of things and events with the naming of them, and stressed the arbitrariness of categorization: “It is anything but self-evident that things and events are grouped together in the same way as they are with the names that we impose upon them; much experience is latent in the inclusion of essentially different things under the same name.” (Hayek 1956: 517) In line with Hayek, Keller (1998: 65) made a more detailed and insightful argument on making categories:

The categories formed through our communicative practice survive according to the degree of their functional suitability within the respective culture. Logically, nothing would stop us from creating a category that includes all living things that lay edible eggs: chickens and other birds, sea urchins, ants, sturgeons and other fish. We could also create a category of all things that can be transported by bicycle. In our language, there are no words that generate these classifications. This is not because of the “ridiculousness” of such categories, but solely because there is evidently no recurring need for them in our form of life. Words and concepts are (in a certain sense) tools for communication and thought. Tools are a means of providing standard solutions for recurrent problems. Logically and technically, it is entirely possible that there be a tool for getting tennis balls out of milk bottles. It is solely because a solution to this problem is too infrequently required that no such instrument exists. If there were cultures with religions that worship egg-laying animals, or systems of transportation in which bicycles are important, the appropriate vocabulary and correspondent categories would have arisen in those cultures. From a logical perspective, the categories produced by a natural language often are rather confused and crazy. What counts in evolutionary processes is not logic, but utility. Linguistic evolution is ad hoc and shamelessly utilitarian.

What Keller emphasizes here is that human categorization is culture-specific and subject to utilitarian considerations, and effective categories are established intersubjectively. In other words, there are no such things as absolute universal categories. As a matter of fact, Keller’s “functional suitability” may be illuminated with Peirce’s categorisation of signs
into index, icon, and symbol which does provide an effective typology for the cognitive approach to metaphor study. As we have mentioned earlier, Lakoff/Johnson do not make any distinction between icons (metaphors), and symbols (lexical items). Consequently, they often have to de-symbolize (or re-iconify) dead metaphorical expressions such as you are wasting my time and you need to budget your time in order to back up his conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY. These expressions, however, are actually lexical items and therefore symbols in the Peircean sense, that is, metaphors that have already been conventionalized or lexicalized in English language, and no one experiences any active metaphorical association in mind while using them. Their re-iconification of symbolic signs may be a good exercise for linguists but does not reflect the real process of language use. Thus, the Peircean trichotomy exposes how fuzzy the definition of metaphor is in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor.

Furthermore, Lakoff/Johnson’s experientialism or embodied philosophy virtually presupposes an idea of universalism, especially when they have to account for the understandability between individual experiences, and they have the following to say concerning this basic question:

What is innate about language is commonly equated with what is universal about language. But we have seen that much that is universal about language concerns universals of common experiences, which occur after birth. Those universals are due, not just to what we are born with, but also to universals of experience that depend on common environmental factors. They include universals of the conceptual poles of grammatical constructions, universals of spatial relations, and universals of metaphor. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 508)

What kind of experiences should be seen as common ones, and what should be seen as uncommon ones? In fact, people who have quite different experiences and grow up in contrasting environments are still likely to understand each other. The point here is not whether those experiences, those grammatical constructions, and those metaphors are universal or not, but why understanding is still possible despite of those multi-aspects of distinctions we have between each other.

Also problematic is the assumed coherent system of signification structured under one conceptual metaphor. For instance, for the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 6) assumes a systematic projection from “war” to “argument”, as argued by them: “We saw in the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor that expressions from the vocabulary of war, e.g., attack a position, indefensible, strategy,
new line of attack, win, gain ground, etc., form a systematic way of talking about the battling aspects of arguing.” This is, however, not true. Words and expressions like “attack”, “win”, “indefensible”, “strategy”, and “gain ground” are not limited to the vocabulary of war and therefore cannot form a stable system in terms of war. The only possibility of them being systematic is that there is a pre-existing Gestalt of war in Lakoff/Johnson’s minds, in light of which they interpret these words and expressions. In fact, Lakoff/Johnson do discuss in detail the systematicity and the entailment relationship between metaphorical concepts and frequently mention what they call “coherent system”, as is stated in the following two paragraphs:

The metaphorical concepts TIME IS MONEY, TIME IS A RESOURCE, and TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY form a single system based on subcategorization, since in our society money is a limited resource and limited resources are valuable commodities. These subcategorization relationships characterize entailment relationships between the metaphors. TIME IS MONEY entails that TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, which entails that TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY.

We are adopting the practice of using the most specific Metaphorical concept, in this case TIME IS MONEY, to characterize the entire system. …This is an example of the way in which metaphorical entailments can characterize a coherent system of metaphorical concepts and a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 9)

What is being described here may seem coherent and systematic, but it is the result of contingent language choices. Concepts like “TIME IS MONEY”, “TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE”, and “TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY” do not construct a coherent system; rather, they are just expressions that Lakoff/Johnson collate under one heading, which can prove nothing but the fact that one can find some commonalities among a group of metaphors. Just as criticized by Haser (2005: 11), “The possibility of grouping a metaphorical expression under disparate metaphorical concepts creates insurmountable difficulties for Lakoff/Johnson’s approach.” In fact, the TIME IS MONEY metaphor held by Lakoff/Johnson are exclusive for other conceptions of time that might break the “coherence” of the system.

One possible reason that might cause such a problematic approach lies in Lakoff/Johnson’s abandonment of a socio-historical perspective in their metaphor study. To take the TIME IS MONEY metaphor as an example, Hoover (2016) adopts historical
evidence from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* to argue that seeing time as a valuable commodity predates viewing time as money. And his argument goes as follows:

The metaphor clearly predates payment by the hour, however, as shown by the following comments by the Host from the introduction to *The Man of Law’s Tale* in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1386):

Lordynges, quod [said] he, I warne yow, al this route [company],
The fourthe party of this day is gon.
Now, for the love of God and of seint john,
Leseth [lose] no tyme [time], as ferforth as [as far as] ye may.
Lordynges, the tyme wasteth nyght and day,
And steleth [steals] from us, what pryvely [privately] slepyng,
And what thurgh necligence in oure wakynge,
As dooth the streem that turneth nevere agayn,
Descendynge fro the montaigne into playn.
Wel kan [can] senec [Seneca] and many a philosophre
Biwaillen tyme moore than gold in cofre;
For–los of catel [possessions] may recovered be,

The Host’s invocation of Seneca suggests that the metaphor of TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY / LIMITED RESOURCE is much older still, and it has always seemed to me that Lakoff/Johnson paid too little attention to the implications of their theory for language history. If they are right about how central our use of metaphor is in helping us understand the abstract with respect to the concrete, TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY / LIMITED RESOURCE presumably predates money. Unfortunately, the fact that the earliest records of language reflect hundreds of thousands of years of language use precludes anything resembling a proof of their theory. (Hoover 2016: 1-2)

As well demonstrated in the above quotation of Hoover, since the expression of time as a valuable commodity long predates that of time as money, the “systematicity” and “coherent system” assumed by Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 7-10) becomes quite invalid. At the same time, Hoover (2016) also brought about an acute problem in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor: their postulation of conceptual metaphor
is based on little consideration of language history and its evaluation. In fact, metaphors we use in real life situations throughout history do not form a systematic whole, but are separate or scattered episodes of our understanding of the world. Thus, systematicity has never been a precondition for the formation of metaphor. As has been argued in previous paragraphs, people can view things from various perspectives rather than from one angle. Back to the issue with the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, it is true that time is often compared with limited resources in terms of the relative short human lifespan. But from the angle of a person who is anxiously waiting for something to happen, or for a prisoner who pray every day to get out of the jail cell, time is viewed as being eternal. In such kind of situations, people usually find other things to do in order to “kill time”. It will be very difficult for Lakoff/Johnson to deny that anybody who can see time as money will also try to “kill time” in a certain life situation through playing computer games. Besides, the marking of time (for example the marking of festivals) also reveals people’s recognition of the endlessness of time: people mark time in order to be aware of the passing of it. All these show that Lakoff/Johnson merely emphasize one angle and deem this angle to be fundamental and a priori for others.

Looked at from the Peircean perspective, Lakoff/Johnson’s metaphorical essentialism is partially caused by the logical confusion of using the inductive results achieved by earlier empiricist linguists as the starting point of their hypothetical deduction. For instance, they repeatedly highlight TIME IS MONEY as a systematic structure that subsumes a series of “related” metaphorical concepts such as TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, while ignoring examples of “time is life”, “time is a snail”, or other possible metaphors. In this way, they turn the simple inductive result TIME IS MONEY into an a priori schema. And because they deduce from an inductive result, their hypothesis on metaphor becomes almost unfalsifiable. What they ignore is that metaphor is actually a result of iconic reasoning in which the same metaphorical meaning can be expressed through diverse vehicles. To convey the meaning of “John is tall” metaphorically, for example, one can choose vehicles such as tree, mountain, wire pole, giraffe, Yao Ming (the Chinese basketball player), or even a Titan, who all possess the semantic marker of ‘being tall’. Therefore, we may hear people say John is a cedar, John is as tall as an Alp, John is like a wire pole, John is a giraffe, John is a Yao Ming, John is a living Titan, etc. As such, the vehicles for expressing tallness can be living creatures, lifeless objects, or even imaginary figures. Clearly, no conceptual metaphor is needed. From this perspective, the conceptual metaphor theory is both unproductive and
unnecessary. Of course, different vehicles in the above examples may entail some other associative meanings besides “tallness”, but on the single issue of “John is tall”, all the above vehicles highlight the same metaphorical meaning “tallness” in a specific context and hide other semantic markers they may have respectively.

Due to the unproductive meta-linguistic nature of conceptual metaphors, Lakoff/Johnson gradually lose their point on what their “meta-” is for. In fact, their logic in the cognitive theory often leads to puzzling conclusions. To take the conceptual metaphor “MORE IS BETTER” as an exemplary case, they frequently refer to this master trope and provide some “evidence,” many of which are lexical items (lexicalized metaphors) rather than real metaphors, to prove its ontological existence. If we think their argument through to the end, however, we would also come to the conclusion of “LESS IS BETTER” since “less” surpasses “more” in the English idiom less is more. Similarly, the Chinese traditional art of ink painting also holds the philosophy of “less is more” as its golden doctrine, in which “less” also surpasses “more”. This proves that MORE IS BETTER is not a universal concept that takes precedence over individual minds. There is a Chinese idiom saying when a thing is rare, it becomes precious ‘物以稀为贵’ /wu yi xi wei gui/ which also contradicts this conceptual metaphor that Lakoff/Johnson hold so dear. Since the two concepts “MORE IS BETTER” and “LESS IS BETTER” coexist and are equally important in both Chinese and English culture, we should not emphasize one concept while neglecting the other. Instead, whether more is better or less is better is determined by a particular mind in a specific situation, and making such abstraction as “MORE IS BETTER” a rather meaningless and unproductive labor.

As stated above, conceptual metaphors in Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]) are results of their essentialist view rather than evidence of universal cognitive patterns. They are merely meta-linguistic abstractions that tell us nothing but a dry and empty formula “A IS B”. In this way, they divert people’s attention away from the cultural and socio-historical contexts in which metaphors are rooted, and spend their time collecting abstract conceptual metaphors that are not very important. The following paragraph clearly shows how empty and meaningless those conceptual metaphors are (some are not even metaphors): “We saw in our discussion of the IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor that, although the metaphor was based on similarities, the similarities themselves were not inherent but were based on other metaphors—in particular, THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, IDEAS ARE OBJECTS, and the CONDUIT metaphors.”
(Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 214) As elsewhere, “IDEAS ARE FOOD” is not a metaphor; rather, it is a meta-linguistic category constructed by Lakoff/Johnson. The same is true for “THE MIND IS A CONTAINER” and “IDEAS ARE OBJECTS”. Indeed, what makes the cognitive metaphor theory an efficient tool for abstracting meta-linguistic categories is precisely what makes it less suited to found a productive theory of metaphor, less able to interpret the process of metaphorization, and less able to account for the factors and relations that constitute the metaphorical meaning.

In a nutshell, conceptual metaphors are linguistic reconstructions whose number, if we let them develop in light of Lakoff/Johnson’s reasoning, might finally exceed ordinary metaphorical expressions we use in daily life. In this sense, what is the real significance of these meta-metaphorical constructs?

1.6 Lakoff/Johnson’s Chomskyan Postulation

Soaking in metaphorical essentialism, Lakoff/Johnson (2003 [1980]) believe that those abstract meta-metaphorical constructs — conceptual metaphors — they brought forth are fundamental and thus have the monopoly over the structuring of our thinking and behavior (cf. Ding 2010). Such metaphysical construction could find its resemblance in Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar where the metaphysical deep structure takes up the centre of syntactic study. What the present section wants to argue with ample evidence is that Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor resembles Chomsky’s logic and that their notion of conceptual metaphors is very much a Chomskyan postulation. Although both schools will not embrace such kind of comparison, they do have something in common.

It should be pointed out that, theoretically speaking, Lakoff/Johnson’s embodied philosophy of language is drastically different from Chomsky’s linguistic rationalism. Perhaps, what they cannot accept is mostly Chomsky’s notion that meaning is naturally obtainable through the mastery of grammatical rules in syntax. They thus contrasted cognitive linguistics with Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar in a whole chapter of their Philosophy in the flesh (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 469-512), contending that their linguistic theory is based on empirical findings in cognitive science, while the Chomskyan linguistics merely on a priori philosophical assumptions. They question Chomsky’s approach of dealing with syntax as is revealed in the statement below:

But from a Chomskyan perspective, “syntax” is constrained in such a way that semantic and pragmatic considerations in principle could not enter into “syntax.”
Chomsky’s philosophy requires that his notion of “syntax” take precedence over the
distributional generalization criterion. Any distributional generalizations over
syntactic elements that require the inclusion of semantics or pragmatics in the
statement of the generalization cannot be part of “syntax,” since they are ruled out a
priori by Chomsky’s philosophical assumptions. The question here is which is to
take precedence, the distributional generalization criterion or Chomsky’s a priori
philosophy. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 482)

To be fair, this criticism hits the Chomskyan linguistics right on the head. Ironically,
Lakoff/Johnson seem to be doing the same in their cognitive theory of metaphor: they
give precedence to conceptual metaphors and examine how they are realized. In other
words, the way they dealt with metaphor or semantics is quite similar to the way
Chomsky dealt with syntax. As argued in the earlier sections, Lakoff/Johnson’s
definition of conceptual metaphor is very close to Kant’s category which is a priori in
nature. As a result, they have duplicated a Chomskyan postulation in their cognitive
theory of metaphor. For this reason, although Lakoff/Johnson (1999) officially took
Chomskyan linguistics as one of their targets of criticism, we can easily find several
important features the two theories have in common:

1. They are both closely related to the cognitive science. As is contended by
   Lakoff/Johnson, the generative grammar and the cognitive theory of metaphor
   are related to two generations of cognitive science respectively with the former
   the first generation and the latter the second. Chomsky also sees the study of
   human mind through language as an aspiration of his linguistic inquiry.

2. They have a similar logic of universalizing a certain category they bring forth.
   Similar to the deep structure in Chomsky’s Universal Grammar, conceptual
   metaphors or master tropes for Lakoff/Johnson are also universal or near
   universal categories for metaphor users (Lakoff/Johnson 1999; Ding 2010).
   Metaphor users tend to perceive things in a unidirectional way manipulated by
   those conceptual metaphors. Take the conceptual metaphor MORE IS UP as an
   example. In Lakoff/Johnson’s logic, all people naturally believe that “more”
   means “up” due to their physical experience in life.

3. Major criticisms against Chomskyan linguistics by former linguists are also
   applicable to Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor. Hinzen (2012: 636)
   summarized three “recent prominent and widespread criticisms” (cf. Tomasello
   2005; Tomasello 2008; Christiansen and Chater 2008; Evans and Levinson 2009;
Levinson and Evans 2010) on Chomsky’s universal grammar as follows:

(i) UG has no coherent formulation and is indeed unnecessary (Tomasello, 2005, 2008).

(ii) UG is in conflict with biology: it cannot have evolved by standardly accepted Neo-Darwinian evolutionary principles (Christiansen and Chater, 2008).

(iii) There are no linguistic universals: UG is refuted by abundant variation at all levels of linguistic organization, which lies at the heart of human faculty of language (Evans and Levinson, 2009; Levinson and Evans, 2010).

Interestingly, we can find in the conceptual metaphor theory nearly the same deficiencies. To some extent, we can safely replace the UG with “conceptual metaphor” in the statements above:

a. The CMT has no coherent formulation and is indeed unnecessary.

b. The CMT is in conflict with biology.

c. There are no metaphorical universals: Conceptual metaphor is refuted by diverse variation of ordinary metaphorical expressions and unpredictable metaphorical creations, which lies at the heart of metaphor. Thus, there are no metaphorical universals.

4. Chomsky distinguishes the deep structure from the surface structure in syntax. Lakoff/Johnson also see metaphorical expressions as surface level structures and metaphorical concepts as deep level structures.

5. Both theories fail to provide sufficient evidence to justify themselves. Lakoff/Johnson adopted empirical findings in the neuroscience to prove that neuro inputs to the neural module which is deemed as instantiating Chomskyan “syntax” are indispensible, indicating that such an autonomous “syntax” is “physically impossible” (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 480). Similarly, cognitive linguists never seem to provide sufficient findings of empirical studies to justify “the existence of conceptual metaphors” (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 495). Empirical evidence could not justify the priority and monopoly of those “conceptual metaphors” over other ordinary ones. Furthermore, it is also quite untenable to take neural reflection and neural nodes as evidence for the existence of conceptual
metaphors. In fact, Lakoff/Johnson’s (1999: 507) evidence of neural “metaboly” and evolution cannot effectively refute the philosophy of innateness, for Chomsky did not imply that “innateness” is instantiated through people’s neural system.

6. Similar to their criticism on the innateness in Chomskyan linguistics, the a priori assumption in Lakoff/Johnson’s (1999, 2003[1980]) conceptual metaphor theory is so “paramount” that it is taken for granted throughout their works and is not subjected to question (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 470). They also query Chomsky’s universal grammar and its underlying Cartesian reason and put forward experientialism based on Putnam’s internal realism. Epistemologically, however, they never explain how an individual’s experience can be apprehended by another mind; rather, they have left the question unsettled in their philosophical framework. Thus, Lakoff/Johnson’s theoretical framework also presupposes a “universal reason” or “near universal reason”, for experientialism is based on individuals’ bodily experience and cannot justify the transcendental conceptual metaphors. Those conceptual metaphors are very much like universal concepts. For example, the so-called orientational metaphors like MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN are explained as being based on “absolute” physical basis of all human beings. Thus, conceptual metaphors seem to be above individual bodily experiences, and are more like a pre-existing Gestalt. In other words, Lakoff’s hypothesis of species-specific master tropes are very similar to Chomsky’s hypothesis of universal grammar. Here, let us have a look at one of Lakoff/Johnson’s criticism on the Cartesian method of thinking in Chomsky’s linguistics: “The Method of Introspection. Just by reflecting on our own ideas and the operations of our own minds with care and rigor, we can come to understand the mind accurately and with certainty. No empirical study is necessary.” (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 471) Ironically, we can find in Lakoff/Johnson’s metaphor theory almost the same logic. There is a universal grammar as an essence of language for Chomsky, and there is a conceptual metaphor as an essence of metaphor for Lakoff/Johnson. What is the big difference between the two?

7. Lakoff/Johnson also criticized Chomsky for frequently making substantial changes on his theory. Then, how about the situation in their theory? The most
famous, also the most often adopted, conceptual metaphor, ARGUMENT IS WAR, is revised to “ARGUMENT IS STRUGGLE” in the second edition of Metaphors We Live by published in the year 2003. Since the difference between ARGUMENT IS WAR and ARGUMENT IS STRUGGLE is so evident, we have great doubts on the fundamentality and universality of their original concept “ARGUMENT IS WAR”. Why do they have to change it if it is so fundamental and important for other metaphors in their proposed “coherent” system of metaphorical concepts? Most importantly, who has the right to change it if it is really one of the metaphors we live by? In other words, without it, what shall we rely on? Besides, they also seem to have abandoned the term “experientialism” in their later writings and substituted it with “embodied philosophy” because the word “experientialism” never appeared in either Philosophy in the Flesh in 1999 or the afterword of the second addition of Metaphors We Live by in 2003 (other parts of the book remain unchanged in the second edition). At least they did not mention a word on the inner relationship between “embodied philosophy” and the earlier concept “experientialism”.

8. Lakoff/Johnson also point out that Chomskyan linguistics is in line with the assumptions of first-generation cognitive science, and the cognitive linguistics they have championed has become part of the second-generation cognitive science (Lakoff/Johnson 1999). However, what the second generation cognitive science can prove is still limited.

9. Lakoff/Johnson have inverted the relationship of metaphorical expressions and his meta-metaphorical construct (conceptual metaphors), just as Chomsky has inverted the relation between surface structure and deep structure. And what he calls metaphorical thought exists only in the linguist’s mind. He believes that “metaphorical language is a reflection of metaphorical thought” just as Chomsky believes that language is a realization of universal grammar. Let us have a thorough look at Lakoff/Johnson’s inverted logic:

The Love Is A Journey example reveals the fallacy in tenet I clearly. If metaphor were just a matter of words, then each different linguistic expression should be a different metaphor. Thus, each of the example sentences should be entirely different metaphors, with nothing in common among them. “Our relationship has hit a dead-end street” should be distinct from and unrelated to “Our relationship is spinning
its wheels,” which in turn should be different from and unrelated to “We’re going in different directions” and “Our relationship is at a crossroads,” and so on. But these are not simply distinct, different, and unrelated metaphorical expressions. They are all instances of a single conceptual metaphor, namely, Love Is A Journey, which is characterized by the conceptual cross-domain mapping stated in Chapter 5. There is one conceptual metaphor here, not dozens of unrelated linguistic expressions that happen to be used metaphorically. Metaphor is centrally a matter of thought, not just words. Metaphorical language is a reflection of metaphorical thought. Metaphorical thought, in the form of cross-domain mappings is primary; metaphorical language is secondary. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 123)

In fact, the above statement is quite untenable and misleading. First of all, traditional metaphor theory already recognized similarity between two situations. Secondly, nobody denies that there are commonalities among certain metaphorical expressions. Thirdly, metaphorical expressions like “Our relationship has hit a dead-end street”, “Our relationship is spinning its wheels,” “We’re going in different directions”, and “Our relationship is at a crossroads,” are not instances of a pre-existing conceptual metaphor; rather the latter is the result of a generalization process. Metaphorical thought is definitely not the cross-domain mapping, for Glucksberg and McGlone (1999) had already proved that there is no such kind of love-journey mapping in our mind when we are using related metaphorical expressions. This proves that conceptual metaphor has no psychological basis.

Virtually, when people are speaking or talking in their mother tongue, they seldom refer to the grammatical rules in the moment of uttering. Traditional grammarians’ work is to make observations on the existing language data, and few of them ever attempted, not even in the slightest effort, to claim the existence of a universal grammar in which daily utterances are rooted. To propose a universal grammar is, to some extent, shutting the door to language innovation, which again never existed in the mind of the traditional grammarians. The distinction between the traditional grammarian and Chomsky’s generative grammar lies in that the former adopted the method of pure induction, while the latter employed the former’s inductive results as his starting point of deduction. In other words, the latter initiated his deduction by dint of the former’s inductive results. People in a certain speech community can be rather alert or sensitive to non-grammatical expressions produced by children or foreigners, which means that
grammar has certain patterns based on which people can recognize and rectify the illegal ones in their language. There is, however, a different story in the case of metaphor. People hear or read much fewer “incorrect metaphors” than inaccurate plain sentences. Compared with daily language speakers, it is harder for metaphor users to be wrong. To take a step back, even if people hear someone producing an inappropriate metaphor, they can hardly replace it with an accurate one at once, for there are only appropriate or inappropriate metaphors rather than standard or nonstandard metaphors. Maybe the real reason lies in that metaphor is a language performance on a higher level. In other words, if Chomsky’s Universal Grammar has more or less acquired its superficial explanatory power by dint of several grammatical coincidences in different languages, then Lakoff/Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory is more likely to lose its universality and rationality due to the abductive and heterogeneous nature of metaphorization.

1.7 Experientialism as a Middle Course

In A Theory of Linguistic Signs, Rudi Keller (1998: 24) revisited Aristotle’s classification of three levels of observation “in considering signs, their relationship to the cognitive world and to the world of things”:

(a) the linguistic level of signs (words, sentences);

(b) the epistemological level of cognitive correlates (concepts, propositions, etc.);

and

(c) the ontological level of things, truth values, and facts.

The following question arises with respect to Keller’s Aristotelian classification: Due to the arbitrary nature of the sign, how do people establish meaningful relationships between subjectivity and objectivity by the help of signs while avoiding relativism in signification at the same time? As a matter of fact, this is a key question for all modern philosophers in terms of how subjects obtain objectivity, in other words, the mediation between subjectivity and objectivity or mediation between idea and reality.

Lakoff/Johnson also have to answer this important question in the cognitive theory of metaphor. But before putting forward their own idea on the mediation between idea and reality, Lakoff/Johnson criticized what they called two traditional views: objectivism and subjectivism. This section will illustrate that the extreme “objectivist view of meaning” they have fiercely argued against is a “dead horse” which only exists in their imagination, and that the subjectivism they also combat is actually where they
stand. As a target of criticism, they enumerated main ideas in the objectivist account of meaning and metaphor and explained why these ideas are untenable:

*By definition, there can be no such thing as a metaphorical concept or metaphorical meaning.* Meanings are objective and specify conditions of objective truth. They are by definition ways of characterizing the world as it is or might be. Conditions of objective truth simply do not provide ways of viewing one thing in terms of another. Hence, objective meanings cannot be metaphorical.

*Since metaphor cannot be a matter of meaning, it can only be a matter of language.* A metaphor, on the objectivist view, can at best give us an indirect way of talking about some objective meaning M’ by using the language that would be used literally to talk about some other objective meaning M, which is usually false in a blatant way.

*Again by definition, there can be no such thing as literal (conventional) metaphor.* A sentence is used literally when M’ = M, that is, when the speaker's meaning is the objective meaning. Metaphors can only arise when M’ ≠ M. Thus, according to the objectivist definition, a literal metaphor is a contradiction in terms, and literal language cannot be metaphorical.

*Metaphor can contribute to understanding only by making us see objective similarities, that is, similarities between the objective meanings M and M’. These similarities must be based on shared inherent properties of objects—properties that the objects really have, in and of themselves.* (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 209)

Of course, as a product of our mind, meaning cannot be absolutely objective. If the world is meaningful in any sense, it is meaningful for us humans. In fact, the concept of meaning itself is meaningless to the objective world. To put it differently, when we are talking about the meaning of a thing, an event, or a phenomenon, we refer to the meaning of it from the perspective of an individual, a group, or a community. In this sense, meaning does have a quite solid subjective basis, and there is not a “meaning-in-itself” in the world. In other words, it is not that things have a meaning, but we endow things with a meaning. Lakoff/Johnson’s problem lies in that, while making the above summary on the so-called “objective account of metaphor”, they never mention any name of scholars or any particular school that hold these ideas. It is thus not impossible that such kind of notions are also their assumptions. If this is true, it will be very much against the basic principle of academic research, for, unless they have evidence, it is quite inappropriate for them to randomly assume that such believes exist in other people’s mind. They saw Aristotle as the father of the “traditional theory” of metaphor.
(Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 121), but we cannot find such accounts of metaphor in any of Aristotle’s works. In other words, when they criticize the “objective account of metaphor”, it is very likely that they are actually beating the air (Leezenberg 2001: 136-137).

What is more, Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 119) listed five basic “tenets” that they assume to be generated from the “objective account of metaphor” as demonstrated below:

1. Metaphor is a matter of words, not thought. Metaphor occurs when a word is applied not to what it normally designates, but to something else.

2. Metaphorical language is not part of ordinary conventional language. Instead, it is novel and typically arises in poetry, rhetorical attempts at persuasion, and scientific discovery.

3. Metaphorical language is deviant. In metaphor, words are not used in their proper senses.

4. Conventional metaphorical expressions in ordinary everyday language are ‘dead metaphors,’ that is, expressions that once were metaphorical, but have become frozen into literal expressions.

5. Metaphors express similarities. That is, there are preexisting similarities between what words normally designate and what they designate when they are used metaphorically.

As for tenet one, Lakoff/Johnson seem to think that if metaphor is a matter of words, it cannot be thought, but why not? According to their logic, if someone contends that metaphor is a linguistic expression, it is impossible for him or her to believe that it is also a kind of human thinking. Actually, being a linguistic expression and being an idea are not at all contradictory. It is thus very unconvincing to define those who see metaphor from a linguistic view as objectivists. There is also nothing wrong with the second and the fourth tenet either. There is indeed great difference between conventional language or lexical items and metaphor. Conventional language is the product of symbolization in the Peircean sense while metaphor is based on iconic thinking. Those that do not require iconic thinking have already been lexicalized or symbolized, that is, they have become dead. Tenet three is more like a position held by Chomsky who is not an objectivist. As for tenet five, we cannot deny that metaphor is based on similarity, for this is fundamental to metaphor. From the view of a receiver rather than a metaphor user, it does express similarity. Due to the contradiction between these tenets, we cannot believe that they,
actually, coexist in objectivists’ mind. Leezenberg’s (2001: 136-137) also realized the deficiency in the cognitive theory of metaphor and the following of his comment on this issue is essentially right:

Much of its argument [viz. the argument of cognitive semantics] against ‘objective semantics’, however, is phrased in such sweeping terms as to be hardly worth taking seriously. Lakoff and Johnson often resort to straw man argumentation, and rarely explicitly ascribe specific doctrines to specific authors; worse, where they do, they seriously distort the views they criticize by numerous errors of a rather elementary nature. The ‘objectivist tradition’ they fulminate against is not ‘fundamentally misguided’ or ‘humanly irrelevant’ but simply nonexistent.

As analyzed above, Lakoff/Johnson could not provide any reliable evidence for the existence of the objective account of metaphor they take as a target of criticism. To be more specific, by objectivism, they mainly refer to external realism (Lakoff/Johnson 1999) as opposed to the internal realism championed by them. This can be inferred from the following argument:

We will suggest, first, that human concepts are not just reflections of an external reality, but that they are crucially shaped by our bodies and brains, especially by our sensorimotor system. We will do so by looking at three kinds of concepts: color concepts, basic-level concepts, and spatial-relations concepts. After that, we will use studies of neural modeling to argue that certain human concepts and forms of conceptual reasoning make use of the sensorimotor system. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 22-23)

In fact, by the time Lakoff/Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live by* was first published in the year 1980, the metaphysical/external realism has long been forsaken by most philosophers (Haser 2005), let alone the late 1990s when their second collaborated book *Philosophy in the Flesh* came out. Roughly at the same time in 1980s, there was a fierce debate among western philosophers that has lasted even to the present day concerning the tension between deconstructionist anti-subject perspective and the philosophy of the subject (Habermas), during which nearly nobody holds the view of absolute objectivism or metaphysical realism. The debate has lasting influence for humanity scholars. It is, therefore, quite unlikely that Lakoff/Johnson have no knowledge about this influential academic event. Ignoring the latest development in western academia, they continued to criticize the disembodied reason generated from external or metaphysical realism:
…human reason and human concepts are mind-, brain-, and body-free and characterize objective, external reality. If these tenets are false, the whole worldview collapses. Suppose human concepts and human reason are body- and brain-dependent. Suppose they are shaped as much by the body and brain as by reality. Then the body and brain are essential to our humanity. Moreover, our notion of what reality is changes. There is no reason whatever to believe that there is a disembodied reason or that the world comes neatly carved up into categories or that the categories of our mind are the categories of the world. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 22)

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, most philosophers already abandoned the above criticized belief a long time ago, and very few people today think that human concepts are just reflections of an external reality. Furthermore, a transcendent reason is not necessarily a disembodied reason, but for Lakoff/Johnson (1999), they are identical. In fact, different from the disembodied reason, a transcendent reason is tenable if it is intersubjectively established. That categorization is a mind-based human behavior has become a common sense for many, therefore, no purely objective “categories of the world” can justify themselves. In other words, criticizing a certain “category-in-itself” equals beating a dead horse.

Interestingly, Lakoff/Johnson often intermingle fairly “incompatible positions” (Haser 2005: 9). For instance, one of the pioneers of experientialist realism, as is stated in Johnson (1981), even returns to the objectivist stance (cf. Leezenberg 2001: 139-140). Haser (2005) also pointed out that “key proposals put forward by Lakoff/Johnson are reminiscent of theories developed by philosophers such as Putnam and Goodman, who at times are grouped along with objectivists” (Hasar 2005: 10; cf. Haser 2005: 73). Unlike what is stated in Lakoff (1987: 122-123), Putnam borrows the term “objectivism” from Husserl’s work to refer to his metaphysical realism (cf. Haser 2005: 80; Conant 1990: xliv). Haser (2005) further argues that Lakoff/Johnson’s contention that their experientialist realism is different from any traditional western philosophy is quite untenable, and that their theory of meaning dates back to Plato. Haser (2005: 11) thus explains: “… Lakoff’s account of cognitive semantics is situated within a philosophical tradition inaugurated by Plato, who is incidentally one of the foremost objectivists. Due to conclusive arguments by Wittgenstein, among others, this line of thinking is almost completely discarded in contemporary philosophy.” Indeed, Lakoff/Johnson’s theoretical framework does lead them to the same conclusion as what is held by the objectivists (or metaphorical realists), since those conceptual metaphors are no less than
Plato’s ideas-in-themselves. In other words, we may see the conceptual metaphors as “concept-in-themselves”. Another example of Lakoff/Johnson’s objective view on metaphor can be found in their criticism on the objectivist similarity theory:

Suppose metaphor necessarily expressed a preexisting similarity. Then the Marriage As Business Partnership metaphor would express a preexisting equal relationship. That is, marriage would inherently have to involve equality of the spouses. But the Marriage As Parent-Child Relationship metaphor also exists. It posits an unequal relationship. If metaphor expressed a preexisting similarity, then marriage would have to be inherently an unequal relationship. But the marriage relationship cannot be both inherently equal and inherently unequal. Since both metaphors exist, the similarity theory would require a contradiction! The mapping theory does not, since both mappings need not be simultaneously activated. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 127)

In fact, marriage as a phenomenon is quite complicated. In certain aspects, the couple may be partners, in others they may be like a child and a parent. There is no contradiction when these different aspects are conveyed in metaphors. It seems that Lakoff/Johnson have a habit of inserting adjectives like “inherent” into other people’s views, as Haser (2005) has pointed out many times. What is revealed in the above argument is that they believe in inherent meaning in words or concepts, and argue that these inherent semantic features are necessarily transferred from metaphorical vehicle to metaphorical tenor. In the above example, they believe that equality is an inherent semantic feature of the concept “patterner”. This reveals their semantic objectivism. In fact, novel metaphors require a combination of an objective ground and a subjective view, while conventional metaphors are usually intersubjectively established constructions and are based on culture. The following comment by Haser (2005: 83) about Lakoff/Johnson’s criticism against the objectivism is essentially right:

…Lakoff/Johnson’s reasoning rests on a tacit re-definition of truth. Instead of giving compelling counterarguments against objectivism, Lakoff/Johnson change the topic. The correct ways of impugning objectivism would be to show that the objectivist conception of truth is relative to conceptual systems. This is a far more complicated task than pointing out that different languages have different systems of metaphors – a task which has been tackled by philosophers such as Putnam (1978d [1977]) and Goodman (1978a). While Lakoff/Johnson’s contentions recall insights familiar from contemporary philosophy, the authors do not furnish the arguments that have motivated theorists to take an anti-objectivist stance. Instead, we are offered invalid arguments – if any – designed to lead to the same conclusions.
After refuting the so-called metaphysical objectivism or “the objective account of metaphor”, Lakoff/Johnson’s target of criticism turns to “subjectivism”. And they enumerated five tenets that they believe the subjectivist will hold:

1. In most of our everyday practical activities we rely on our senses and develop intuitions we can trust. When important issues arise, regardless of what others may say, our own senses and intuitions are our best guides for action.

2. The most important things in our lives are our feelings, aesthetic sensibilities, moral practices, and spiritual awareness. These are purely subjective. None of these is purely rational or objective.

3. Art and poetry transcend rationality and objectivity and put us in touch with the more important reality of our feelings and intuitions. We gain this awareness through imagination rather than reason.

4. The language of the imagination, especially metaphor, is necessary for expressing the unique and most personally significant aspects of our experience. In matters of personal understanding the ordinary agreed-upon meanings that words have will not do.

5. Objectivity can be dangerous, because it misses what is most important and meaningful to individual people. Objectivity can be unfair, since it must ignore the most relevant realms of our experience in favor of the abstract, universal, and impersonal. For the same reason, objectivity can be inhuman. There are no objective and rational means for getting at our feelings, our aesthetic sensibilities, etc. Science is of no use when it comes to the most important things in our lives. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 188-189)

In spite of some radical ideas, we may find many similarities between the subjectivism and the experientialism or the embodied philosophy held by Lakoff/Johnson. In fact, the cognitive theory of metaphor is a variant of subjectivist theory of meaning (Langacker 1990). Although it tries to avoid the weak points of objectivists’ view, it still resorts to the false solutions of “subjectivist or conceptualist theories of meaning” (Langacker 1990: 5; cf. Keller 1999: 178). Take color for example. Lakoff/Johnson criticized subjectivists for their failure in accounting for color, but their understanding of color is also based on individual’s bodily experience and thus excluded the cultural aspects of color. Such idea may be revealed from one of their remarks quoted below:

Subjectivism in its various forms—radical relativism and social constructionism—also fails to explain color, since color is created jointly by our biology and the world, not by our culture. This is not to say that color does not differ in its significance from
Frankly speaking, to say that “color is a function of the world and our biology interacting” equals to saying nothing. Like subjectivists, Lakoff/Johnson do not recognize the role of culture in the formation of color. In fact, everything in human society is created by culture. The physical part of color is created jointly by our biology and the world, while the subjective part of color is defined by culture. One thing is clear: the naming of color is also arbitrary and different from culture to culture.

In order to solve the problem concerning the mediation between subjectivity and objectivity, Lakoff/Johnson resorted to Putnam’s internal realism for a possible solution (Lakoff 1987; Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]). Employing the concept of experience as mediation between subjectivity and objectivity, they extended the internal realism and developed experientialism. In fact, terms like “embodied realism” or “embodied philosophy” are more frequently mentioned than experientialism by Lakoff/Johnson in their later works, especially after the publication of Philosophy in the Flesh in 1999. Perhaps, this is because that the term embodied philosophy is more inclusive than experientialism, and thus is applied to many more human activities concerning the relationship between the mind and the world.

Traditional realists believe there is a direct connection between human consciousness and reality without a need of any linguistic mediation (Ding 2010). What makes Lakoff/Johnson’s embodied realism different from traditional realism is that they introduced experience or embodiment as a mediation between consciousness and reality, and thus a mediation between subject and object. The following statement shows the theoretical source of Lakoff/Johnson’s experientialism or embodied realism:

The embodied realism we are developing here is not created out of nothing. It is anticipated by two of our greatest philosophers of the embodied mind, John Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Despite their wide differences of temperament and style, both Dewey and Merleau-Ponty believed that philosophy must be informed by the best scientific understanding available, and they each made extensive use of the empirical psychology, neuroscience, and physiology of their day. They both argued that mind and body are not separate metaphysical entities, that experience is embodied, not ethereal, and that when we use the words mind and body we are imposing bounded conceptual structures artificially on the ongoing integrated process that constitutes our experience. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 97)
Indeed, it is an artificial division to separate the mind from the body, but a useful one for our understanding for both. This also shows that a theory of experience is necessary. Furthermore, we may find their basic views on embodiment and embodied realism through the following statement:

Realism is fundamentally about our success in functioning in the world. Someone who is ‘not realistic’ is someone who is ill-adapted, someone who is out of touch and out of harmony with the world. Realism is about being in touch with the world in ways that allow us to survive, to flourish, and to achieve our ends. But being in touch requires something that touches—a body. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 95)

This remark is only partially right, because, of all our interactions with the world, direct bodily touch is only part of it. However, for Lakoff/Johnson, our interactions with realities in the world are exclusively based on direct body experience. Moreover, if you measure realism through success, then the realistic mind is bonded with subjective value, for virtually no one can objectively define success.

Through introducing basic-level categorization, Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 30) believe that the experientialism or embodied realism is quite effective in solving the old problem in metaphysical realism:

Though the facts of basic-level categorization do not fit metaphysical realism, they do provide us with the basis for embodied realism, which is an improvement over metaphysical realism in that it provides a link between our ideas and the world, at least at the level that matters most for our survival. The facts of basic-level categorization also remind us that our bodies contribute to our sense of what is real.

There is only a slight improvement from the alleged metaphysical realism to Lakoff/Johnson’s embodied realism. In fact, even the so-called basic-level categories are subject to different interpretations in terms of their ideological implications. This means that they are less “universal” than Lakoff/Johnson think, and the aporia of the cognitive theory of metaphor lies right here. It tries to provide “a link between our ideas and the world”, and, in order to achieve that, it resolves to endless empirical studies similar with objectivism. However, the link provided in their theory is never reliable due to the utilitarian nature of human cognition (Keller 1998). Besides, direct bodily experience is only part of people’s understanding of the world. In other words, experientialism or embodied philosophy is not adequate for an effective mediation between ideas and reality, and thus is only an expedient solution. Regardless of these inherent problems in their theory, members of the cognitive school quickly turn to empirical studies:
What distinguishes the view of embodied realism we are proposing is the use we make of empirical evidence from recent cognitive neuroscience and embodied cognitive science. This empirical research makes it possible for us to explore in a suitably detailed way the workings of the embodied mind in its structuring of experience via neural cognition. It gives us ways to explain why we have the categories we do, why we have the concepts we have, and how our embodiment shapes our reasoning and the structure of understanding that forms the basis for what we take to be true. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 97-98)

Productive and prevailing as they are, the fatal deficiency is still there. The fact that people’s views and ideas differ is proof that our reasoning and the structure of our understanding is not shaped by our embodiment. Thus, a further question might be asked: Since in the non-experientialist sense objectivity is unattainable, how to rise above individual bias? Lakoff/Johnson deem the embodiment to share some common features so that agreements should be reached such as language and culture. However, they still need to answer another question: whether embodiment is individual or universal? The same mistake may be found in their discussion on primary metaphors: “… primary metaphors make possible the extension of these embodied concepts into abstract theoretical domains. The primary metaphors are anything but arbitrary social constructs, since they are highly constrained both by the nature of our bodies and brains and by the reality of our daily interactions.” (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 96) As shown in this statement, Lakoff/Johnson believe that primary metaphors are highly restricted by bodily experience and thus only apply to individuals. In fact, the primary metaphors are social constructs, and they are also subject to different interpretations and vary from culture to culture.

Due to its expedient nature of experientialism, Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory is thus not a promising theoretical enterprise. What makes their theory more unpromising is that it swings between subjectivism and objectivism without knowing why. This tendency is clearly revealed through their arguments against objectivism and subjectivism. For instance, while attacking the subjectivist positions, Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 224) ironically go back to the objectivist view that they have been criticizing:

These subjectivist positions all hinge on one basic assumption, namely, that experience has no natural structure and that, therefore, there can be no natural external constraints upon meaning and truth. Our reply follows directly from our
account of how our conceptual system is grounded. We have argued that our experience is structured holistically in terms of experiential gestalts. These gestalts have structure that is not arbitrary. Instead, the dimensions that characterize the structure of the gestalts emerge naturally from our experience.

If they believe that experience has natural structure and that there are “natural external constraints upon meaning and truth”, then the so-called non-arbitrary experiential gestalts are nearly a priori. Meanwhile, Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]) claim the centrality of a conceptual system in defining people’s everyday realities. By admitting this, they also imply another proposition: Not that our mind has manipulation over concepts, but instead, some concepts govern our mind. Therefore, those mind governing concepts for Lakoff/Johnson have, to some extent, taken the possession of their users. This kind of tendency is in every sense both objectivist and metaphysical. Based on this, Lakoff/Johnson make their famous claim that there are “metaphors we live by”. Interesting enough, the following remark of Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 221) has well explained why there is after all no metaphor that we live by:

There is a good reason why our conceptual systems have inconsistent metaphors for a single concept. The reason is that there is no one metaphor that will do. Each one gives a certain comprehension of one aspect of the concept and hides others. To operate only in terms of a consistent set of metaphors is to hide many aspects of reality. Successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a constant shifting of metaphors. The use of many metaphors that are inconsistent with one another seems necessary for us if we are to comprehend the details of our daily existence.

As the name of experientialism suggests, Lakoff/Johnson have developed the concept of “experience” to seek a more direct relation between our subjective mind and the objective world. They refute, at least on the surface level, both the objectivist and the subjectivist points of view and attempted to develop a middle course. They attempt to rebuild the relation between objectivity and subjectivity through experience. According to Lakoff/Johnson, concepts developed from individual’s somatic experience are so fundamental that they have monopoly over other concepts and can even govern people’s mind. Therefore, orientational metaphors like “HAPPY IS UP” are good example for understanding Lakoff/Johnson’s definition of “experience”:

HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN
I’m feeling up. That boosted my spirits. My spirits rose. You’re in high spirits. Thinking about her always gives me a lift. I’m feeling down. I’m depressed. He’s really low these days. I fell into a depression. My spirits sank.

Physical basis: Drooping posture typically goes along with sadness and depression, erect posture with a positive emotional state. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 15).

Here, the concept of “HAPPY IS UP” is untenable and the problem of orientational metaphors is quite obvious. Firstly, being happy and being in high spirits are actually very different concepts. Secondly, being in erect position is not necessarily positive. For example, when one is feeling crazy and angry, the blood pressure is up. Likewise, drooping posture does not always mean sadness. When one lies down, it can mean that the person is feeling peaceful. In a fast-tempo society, having a good sleep (lying down) is a happy thing for many people. Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]) also admit in their “afterword” that the distinction between orientational/ontological and structural metaphors is artificial: they are all structural. In this way, the so-called orientational/ontological metaphors as conceptual metaphors are thus dragged down to the much lower position.

Another problem with “experience” in the cognitive theory lies in that it cannot totally cover all the possible links between mind and reality. Needless to say, we do not have to physically experience everything in order to acquire certain knowledge on it, but how about situations that do not involve that kind of experience at all? After all, most of our imaginative constructs, metaphorical and metonymic, are not embodied. And just because a single person experiences something does not mean he can be guaranteed a correct knowledge about it. In other words, directly experiencing something does not equal correctness. If we admit, as acknowledged by Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]), that physical experience can only partially influence people’s metaphorical reasoning, then how can an embodied philosophy or experientialism be seen as a philosophy for the whole process of metaphorization? Such an inadequate view in experientialism has thus caused problems in its theory of language and meaning. Allen (2001: 288) also realized the deficiency in Lakoff/Johnson’s philosophy of language and made very insightful conclusion as follows: “…language [in the cognitive theory of metaphor] is constrained and informed by the relations that human beings (a) perceive in nature – particularly in relation to themselves; (b) have experience of in the world they inhabit; (c) conceive of in abstract and metaphysical domains.” In other words, language in the cognitive theory
of metaphor is very much constrained by direct bodily or physical experience, especially those that can be reflected in neural science.

After serious scrutiny, the present study finds out that, for Lakoff/Johnson, neural structure means “embodied” or “embodiment”. By direct embodiment, Lakoff/Johnson mean the establishment of neural connections, which is championed and explored in Narayanan’s neural theory of metaphor.

Narayanan’s neural theory of metaphor gives us an account of how primary metaphors are learned, an explanation of why we have the ones we have, and a neural mechanism for metaphorical inference. We have a system of primary metaphors simply because we have the bodies and brains we have and because we live in the world we live in, where intimacy does tend to correlate significantly with proximity, affection with warmth, and achieving purposes with reaching destinations. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 59)

As can be expected, the embodied philosophy largely relies on the experimental researches concentrating on the physical neuro reflections of metaphorical thinking done by neuroscientists. Physically speaking, therefore, the term “embodied” conceived by Lakoff/Johnson strictly refers to the activations of some cognitive related neuros which is revealed in the following remark by Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 46-47): “The ‘associations’ made during the period of conflation are realized neurally in simultaneous activations that result in permanent neural connections being made across the neural networks that define conceptual domains. These connections form the anatomical basis of source-to-target activations that constitute metaphorical entailments.” However, it is not new for us to know that there exist conceptual domains in mind through the operation of neuros, and that interactions between metaphorical tenor and vehicle will be finally realized biologically. It is true that, biologically, neural mechanism is in charge of most of our body and mind activities, but neural facts and reflections do not mean definitude, especially not when we are making discussions on the topic of meaning and metaphor. To put it differently, what Lakoff/Johnson have obtained from the “permanent” neural connections established and activated by metaphorical thinking is mere neural reflections rather than real information of metaphor. It shows how metaphorical thinking biologically works in our body and nothing more. Besides, Lakoff/Johnson also did not provide evidence to justify the permanence of these neural connections. Thus, what should be pointed out here is that, even if those connections stay permanently in people’s mind once established, it can only validate the existence of metaphorical thinking rather
than justifying the existence of conceptual metaphors. When we create new metaphors, novel connections related with them will also be established and when we use them they are activated. In other words, such kind of findings in neural science provide nothing new in our understanding of metaphor. However, Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 500) see the neural connections to be very crucial and even so fundamental that they may have monopoly over our competence in categorization:

Because we are neural beings, we categorize. Because neural systems optimize, we extend categories radially, adding minimal extensions to the central category structures that we already have. Because children’s earliest categories are perceptual-motor categories, we all have a central category of bounded physical objects that is extended as we grow older. Neural optimization extends the central subcategory of bounded physical objects to a radial category on the basis of existing conceptual metaphors and other neurally based cognitive mechanisms. The result is a radial category centered around bounded physical objects (persons, places, and things) and extended from this simple center in many ways.

Gradually, the experiential realism turns into neural determinism which considers the “permanent” neural connections an evidence for conceptual metaphors.

Our enormous metaphoric conceptual system is thus built up by a process of neural selection. Certain neural connections between the activated source- and target-domain networks are randomly established at first and then have their synaptic weights increased through their recurrent firing. The more times those connections are activated, the more the weights are increased, until permanent connections are forged. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 57)

The so-called “neural selection” is actually a biological reflection of the socio-historical selection of metaphor (symbolization of metaphors). After all, Lakoff/Johnson cannot explain how these physical elements (materials) are transformed into ideas and thought in mind. Moreover, neural selection by Lakoff/Johnson only demonstrates the biological result rather than the real process of symbolization. As a physical process, it is objective. The neural system is only a sub-faculty of our cognitive system, which cannot determine our mind. In fact, it is not very illuminating to merely place an adjective (neural) before a noun, thus “selection” becomes “neural selection”, “connection” becomes “neural connection”, “learning” becomes “neural learning”. As mentioned before, Lakoff/Johnson are describing the process of metaphorization as a biological reflection of the mind, but the existence of neural connections for metaphor cannot solve the problem of experience in embodied philosophy. The question is whether the so-called
“permanent” connections (suppose they do exist) for individuals can be seen as universal for most members in a cultural community? What if people forge different connections. As known to all, neural structures are objective phenomena. This is to say, being embodied means establishing neural structures in our body, and Lakoff/Johnson had no other way in justifying the term embodiment. However, if they totally base their argument on the objective structure, they establish no difference from the objectivism they criticize.

Based on the neural perspective, Lakoff/Johnson also believe that internal or embodied realism can bridge the gap opened by disembodied representational realism of Cartesian philosophy and thus have great advantage over the latter school of thought. The following is Lakoff/Johnson’s (1999: 90) criticism on disembodied reason:

Obviously, we accept (1) and (2) and we believe that (2) applies to the three findings of cognitive science we are discussing on the basis of converging evidence. But those findings themselves contradict (3). The doctrine of disembodied reason has, unfortunately, been applied to yield an untenable version of scientific realism: disembodied scientific realism. The evidence we will be looking at concerns the embodiment of mind and, as we shall see, allows us to keep a scientific realism in an embodied form, one that is cognitively and neurally realistic: an embodied scientific realism.

In fact, the same body does not guarantee the same results in all aspects. The so-called embodied scientific realism is virtually another form of objectivist view of meaning which is at odds with the internal realism or experientialism. However, to say that the human body is well structured within does not mean that we have to understand it as another form (embodied or internal) of realism. After all, the cognitive understanding of metaphor is merely one perspective of human understanding.

At the epistemological level, “experience” in the cognitive theory does have so much in common with the term “practice” in the classical Marxist theory of meaning that we may call it an embodied “practice”. Classical Marxist theorists adopted the concept of “practice” as mediation between subjects and thing-in-itself. However, their introduction of practice as a mediating thirdness turned out to be only a procrastination of, rather than a real solution to, this crucial issue. In the end, the results of practice still need to be subjectively evaluated. The same thing is for experiential realism. Who is there to evaluate the objectivity of individual experience? In this sense, criticisms on the
issue of practice in classical Marxist theory of meaning are also applicable to the concept of experience in the cognitive theory of metaphor.

To be more specific, people’s experiences differ. Your experience might be greatly different from mine, then how can we base our communication on each other’s limited experience? Here comes the crucial problem again: how can experientialists turn their individually acquired experience to be widely accepted knowledge? The idealized cognitive model (ICM) cannot solve this problem, neither can the presupposed gestalt. That’s why the cognitive theory of metaphor becomes a modified form of materialism and therefore is unable to move out of its impasse. Lakoff/Johnson’s philosophical failure shows that a tenable middle course is not easy to get, and their version of middle course still does not work.
Chapter Two: A Peircean Epistemology of Metaphor

As argued in the previous section, the impasse of metaphorical essentialism calls for a more tenable philosophical interpretation of metaphor. Meanwhile, we also find out that the problem of metaphor is eventually a philosophical issue. We find that the epistemology of metaphor in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory is quite untenable in that it cannot justify the existence of conceptual metaphors. Thus, in the searching for a better philosophical solution we turn to the Peircean philosophy of the sign. In this chapter, we attempt to find answers to the following question: what is metaphor. In other words, we question what “meta-” is for in the first chapter, and we are going to answer another question hinted in the title, i.e., what is metaphor.

2.1 An Unfinished Enterprise

The epistemology of metaphor is, in fact, an unfinished enterprise till today. In the present section, we choose three eras in the western history that can be considered as being crucial for establishing a sound epistemology of metaphor, and explore the reasons of their respective failure. The three periods are the Aristotelean era, Vico’s era, and the cognitive era. What makes this anatomy necessary and important is that the present studies of metaphor are paying too much attention to the issue of ontological determinations, and, in doing this, they have temporarily forgotten the baffling problem that besets us all along: there is still no consent on what on earth metaphor is. Proponents of the cognitive theory of metaphor, perhaps the most prevailing and dominant approach of metaphor study today, believe that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical and there are fundamental conceptual metaphors that govern our mind. Other scholars, like Keller (1999, 1998), Haser (2005), and Ding (2008, 2010) have cast serious doubts on the conceptual metaphor theory and the experientialist view. By going back to the aforementioned three eras, we can gain profound reflection on why the issue of metaphor is so complicated.

I would like to begin this section with a discussion on Aristotle’s classical notion of metaphor, i.e., the Aristotelean era of metaphor. Before Aristotle, people confused metaphor with other types of figurative languages, and metaphor also did not stand out of the old rhetoric term “trope”. Aristotle’s emphasis on metaphor in the Poetics and the Rhetoric effectively drew people’s attention at that time so that they began to notice the metaphorical meaning that arises from making comparison between two different things. It is from this perspective that we say Aristotle discovered metaphor. Ever since the
“discovery of metaphor”, the Aristotelean conception of metaphor has been open for interpretation. In over two thousand years of development, Aristotle’s metaphor has been interpreted differently by various theorists of different positions without reaching a consent. Aristotle’s notion can be used as an instrument of interpretation, while it also becomes a target of criticism. It is like that in a thousand scholars there are a thousand versions of the Aristotelean metaphor. It seems that the Aristotelean conception of metaphor is so inclusive that it has generated the whole western discourse of metaphor, and hence the mother of entire western theories of metaphor. One reason for the inclusiveness of his theory of metaphor lies in his understanding of metaphor in its broadest sense, which is, perhaps, also the most influential and most frequently mentioned legacy of his conception of metaphor. Indeed, metaphor in Aristotle “permeates all kinds of discourses as a template for understanding life in its many details, complexities, and vicissitudes” (Danesi 2004: 11). In short, we have in Aristotle’s theory of metaphor a broad meaning for metaphor which even includes metonymy.

Influential as it is, the Aristotelian conception of metaphor has also met great challenges in the last three decades. Gumpel (1984) made a comprehensive and fierce criticism on the Aristotelian tradition of metaphor, holding that “Aristotle’s principle was never free of problems” (Gumpel 1984: xi). The same scholar even put forward a non-Aristotelian perspective of metaphor. Although Aristotle understood metaphor in its broadest sense, he also, at the same time, “ingrained the strictly rhetorical view of metaphor in Western philosophical thinking by affirming that, as knowledge-productive as it was, the most common function of metaphor in human life was to spruce up more basic literal ways of speaking and thinking” (Danesi 2004: 12). Danesi (2004: 13) defined such perspective by Aristotle as the “literalist view of meaning”, and this viewpoint has been so influential that it has caused the philosophical ignorance or condemnation of metaphor in over two millennia. According to Danesi (2004), the Aristotelean conception of metaphor has had a rather negative influence on the western theory of metaphor.

On the contrary, Hanks and Giora (2012) averred that such attribution to Aristotle is based on misunderstanding of his works. In order to correct those misunderstandings, Hanks and Giora (2012) enumerated Aristotle’s major contributions to modern research on metaphor:

(1) Aristotle says that metaphors are common means of expression used by everybody in conversation (Rhet. Part 2). This is not a contradiction to his views in
Poetics (Part 22) that metaphors reveal the genius of the poet, since he (implicitly) distinguishes between poetic metaphors and metaphors that are suitable in prose and hence which derive from conversation (Rhet. Part 3); (2) Metaphors are related to perception and visual imaginary (Rhet. Part 2 and 10); (3) Metaphor has cognitive function and force. Metaphors, Aristotle says, bring about learning, because in order to understand a metaphor, the hearer has to find a relation between the metaphor and the thing which the metaphor refers to (Rhet. Part 10). (Hanks and Giora 2012: 18)

Due to those varied interpretations, theorists of metaphor are now facing very tough questions: How to measure Aristotle’s conception of metaphor? and Can we get a sound epistemology of metaphor in Aristotle? A thorough scrutiny is needed in order for us to make a better judgement.

As mentioned in chapter one, Aristotle viewed metaphor from two main perspectives: metaphors in everyday conversation and metaphors in poetry. He believed that metaphor can be used by everybody in ordinary language, for it helps to prevent the language from being mean. For Aristotle, metaphors are unusual expressions or strange (rare) words as opposed to “normal words”, as shown in the following statement:

The perfection of style is to be clear without being mean. The clearest style is that that which uses only current or proper words; at the same time it is mean – witness the poetry of Cleophon and of Sthenelus. That diction, on the other hand, is lofty and raised above the commonplace which employs unusual words. By unusual, I mean strange (or rare) words, metaphorical, lengthened – anything, in short, that differs from the normal idiom. Yet a style wholly composed of such words is either a riddle or a jargon; a riddle, if it consists of metaphors; a jargon, if it consists strange (or rare) words. (Hanks and Giora 2012: 20)

The word “riddle” used by Aristotle reminds us of the famous metaphorical riddle of Sphinx in which three life stages of human beings are metaphorized by morning, noon, and night of a day. Aristotle called such kind of metaphor “proportional metaphor”, and saw this kind as the most interesting one (Hanks and Giora 2012: 25). He thus regarded metaphor as a product of “proportional reasoning” (Danesi 2004: 12). Danesi (2004) uses the expression Old age is the evening of life to exemplify how a proportion is established in metaphorical thinking. As inferred by Danesi (2004), if A represents old age, B represents life, C represents evening, and D represents day, then the relationship in this metaphor can be reduced to “A is to B as C is to D”. Among the four items, the word “day” does not appear in the original expression. Thus, the more “logical” or reasonable version Old age of life is the evening of a day is transformed into Old age is the evening...
of life which becomes more imaginative and literary. The connection of a person’s life span to the length of a day is utilized in many cultures, as revealed in the aforementioned story of Sphinx’s riddle. Clearly, proportional reasoning by Aristotle is based on recognizing the similarity between objects of different ratios. In other words, it is also developed from abductive reasoning. However, what Aristotle did not realize is that proportional metaphors only form a limited portion of metaphor. Although proportional reasoning is also based on a comparison between two things, it failed in depicting the real underlying logic of metaphor. This is perhaps the main reason that Aristotle failed in providing a sound epistemology of metaphor. In fact, Aristotle’s view of metaphor is quite pragmatic. He does not see metaphor as a mere linguistic decoration or embellishment; rather, he believes that it has a purpose of persuasion (Hanks and Giora 2012) and thus performs a function of promoting effective communication. This is why, in the Rhetoric Book III, he focuses on the communicative function of metaphor, and sees metaphor as an effective style in speaking and writing. At the same time, he also emphasizes that metaphor should be “fitting”. Of all his expositions on metaphor, the rhetoric analysis seems to be at the central part, which also drew most attention of his successors. Neo-Aristotelean school still holds this tradition today. Aristotle also acknowledged, in the Rhetoric, metaphor’s role of providing “something fresh”:

Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh. When the poet calls “old age a withered stalk”, he conveys a new idea, a new fact, to us by means of the general notion of bloom, which is common to both things. (Hanks and Giora 2012: 25)

In addition to his more appreciated rhetoric view of metaphor, Aristotle also elaborated the relation between metaphor and poetry. He believed that the command of metaphor is a gifted talent, and thus “the greatest thing by far” (Hanks and Giora 2012: 21). Aristotle realized that metaphor helps poetry to avoid being banal and worn-out. Thus, his idea that the important function of metaphor lies in making lofty expression is consistent in his two perspectives. In other words, both metaphor in conversation and metaphor in poetry are significant in achieving the effect of being lofty and unusual. Such realization has laid a foundation for us to find out metaphor’s role in creating novel concepts and novel meaning. Moreover, in the Poetics, he contends that to make good metaphors is “the mark of genius” because it requires “an eye for resemblance” (Hanks and Giora 2012: 21). Many scholars argue that this remark is contradictory with his idea
of seeing metaphor as a common craft for all ordinary people. As argued by Hanks and Giora (2012), the contradiction is caused by his inconsistent views on metaphor. He observes that although everyone can use metaphor, the competence of using it well differs dramatically, especially in literary or poetic metaphors. Another conclusion he draws from this is that metaphor is the essence of poetry or the impulse of poetry, and there can be no poetry without metaphor. In fact, such perspective by Aristotle echoes a traditional view of the relation between metaphor and poetry in Chinese literary history, roughly at the same time of Aristotle. According to what is recorded in The Book of Rites (《礼记》/li ji/), ancient Chinese scholars believed that “one cannot compose poems without knowing how to metaphorize” ‘不学博依, 不能安诗’/bu xue bo yi, bu neng an shi/ (Cui 1997: 122). This is a piece of good evidence to show that western scholars and their eastern counterparts in Aristotle’s time have achieved a common understanding of metaphor, i.e., its indispensability in poetry.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that Aristotle’s classical notion of metaphor does have complicated effects on the western thought of metaphor as well as the development of metaphor theories afterwards. In fact, Danesi’s argument is not totally untenable, for, judging from Aristotle’s statements on metaphor, he does have a tendency of putting metaphor in the greater rhetoric background. However, due to the level of understanding of his time, Aristotle should not be blamed for not providing a sound epistemology of metaphor that may serve as a lighthouse for subsequent theorists. The point is that Aristotle has made lots of statements on metaphor, and many of them cannot fit into a coherent system. If we isolate his remarks from the socio-historical context of his time, we probably will get lost in his system. This explains why his idea has been interpreted so differently. Socio-historical conditions are another reason preventing Aristotle from having a much more thorough and profound understanding of metaphor. For the Aristotelean conception of metaphor as a whole, maybe our task today is not to refute it or make undue judgements from a twenty-first-century perspective, but to find out the exact socio-historical conditions under which those statements are made and why most of his successors, immediate or remote, tend to stress the rhetoric aspect of metaphor rather than other aspects.

The second era of metaphor theory began with Giambattista Vico, and the reason we believe in a Vico’s era of metaphor lies not in its popularity at the time Vico lived, but in the revolutionary ideas it brings about for understanding and interpreting metaphor.
and the profound influence it had on subsequent scholars, especially those after the twentieth century. The following comment on Vico made by his Italian compatriot Umberto Eco (1984: 107) can duly support our choice:

An overview of the history of metaphorology and of its epistemic breaks, however brief, must not leave out Vico, not least because of the fact that La Scienzo Nuova (and its chapter “Della logica poetica”) seems to put into question the existence of a cultural network, of semantic fields and universes, and of a preestablished process of semiosis, which should precede (on the basis of the foregoing observations) the production and interpretation of metaphors.

Over fifteen hundred years after “the discovery of metaphor” by Aristotle, people’s understanding of metaphor was still quite limited and confined to its rhetoric and literary functions. As discussed in the first chapter, most philosophers of this long period saw metaphor as defects of natural language, and some of them like Wilkins and Leibniz attempted to find ways to remedy the “defects” of metaphor (Hanks and Giora 2012: 3). Hanks and Giora (2012) contended that they have put metaphor in a wrong category. Such situation had not changed until the publication of Vico’s New Science. From the following remark, we may have a better understating of Vico’s contribution to the western theories of metaphor:

Before Vico, metaphor was viewed as a manifestation of analogy - an inductive form of reasoning whereby it is assumed that if two or more entities are similar in one or more respects, then a probability exists that they will be similar in other respects. For Vico, on the other hand, metaphor was hardly a manifestation of analogical reasoning; rather, it revealed how humans go about creating analogies. Paradoxically, and significantly, metaphor is so fundamental to how we form abstractions, such as analogies, that it is impossible to talk about it without resorting to metaphor. (Danesi 2004: 119)

To a great extent, it is Vico who unyoked metaphor from being confined to poetic and rhetoric fields. He proposed to treat the study of humanities in a complete new way, which could be called a novel science of human beings or new science, to employ his own words. In doing this, Vico (1948) called for a paradigm shift in philosophy from the study of the world of nature to the study of the world of civil society:

But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never-failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind.
Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent
all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He
alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations
or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could hope to know. This
aberration was a consequence of that infirmity of the human mind, noted in the
Axioms [236], by which, immersed and buried in the body, it naturally inclines to
take notice of bodily things, and finds the effort to attend to itself too laborious; just
as the bodily eye sees all objects outside itself but needs a mirror to see itself.” (Vico
1948: 331)

Through a careful study of the civil society with human beings as its central target, Vico
(1948) found out that the metaphorizing ability of human beings has developed since the
primitive time. By examining activities of the primitives, Vico discovered an important
axiom of human cognition: “Because of the indefinite nature of the human mind,
wherever it is lost in ignorance, man makes himself the measure of all things.” (Vico
1948: 54) In other words, the outside world is metaphorized with reference to our body,
as Vico (1948: 116) precisely argued in the following remark:

It is noteworthy that in all languages the greater part of the expressions relating to
inanimate things are formed by metaphor from the human body and its parts and
from the human senses and passions. Thus, head for top or beginning; eyes for the
looped heads of screws and for windows letting light into houses; mouth for any
opening; lip for the rim of a vase or of anything else; the tooth of a plow, a rake, a
saw, a comb; beard for rootlets; the mouth of a river; a neck of land; handful for a
small number; heart for center (the Latins used umbilicus, “navel,” in this sense);
foot for end; the flesh of fruits; a vein of water, rock or mineral; the blood of grapes
for wine; the bowels of the earth. Heaven or the sea smiles; the wind whistles; the
waves murmur; a body groans under a great weight. The farmers of Latium used to
say the fields were thirsty, bore fruit, were swollen with grain; and our own rustics
speak of plants making love, vines going mad, resinous trees weeping. Innumerable
other examples could be collected from all languages.

As shown above, we human beings have made of ourselves an entire world. In other
words, we take ourselves as the rule of the universe. In this sense, Vico (1948) believes
that the original human thinking is poetic, and our poetic logic underlies the whole
semiotizing process or semiosis. Vico (1948: 116) believes that metaphor, as the result
of poetic logic, is the most “luminous” and “necessary” type of tropes, and he has the
following to say:
All the first tropes are corollaries of this poetic logic. The most luminous and therefore the most necessary and frequent is metaphor. It is most praised when it gives sense and passion to insensate things, in accordance with the metaphysics above discussed, by which the first poets attributed to bodies the being of animate substances, with capacities measured by their own, namely sense and passion, and in this way made fables of them. Thus every metaphor so formed is a fable in brief. This gives a basis for judging the time when metaphors made their appearance in the languages. All the metaphors conveyed by likenesses taken from bodies to signify the operations of abstract minds must date from times when philosophies were taking shape. The proof of this is that in every language the terms needed for the refined arts and recondite sciences are of rustic origin.

Furthermore, Vico (1948: 132) observed that “in general metaphor makes up the great body of the language among all nations”. He thus explains:

There must in the nature of human things be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life, and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects. A proof of this is afforded by proverbs or maxims of vulgar wisdom, in which substantially the same meanings find as many diverse expressions as there are nations ancient and modern. (Vico 1948: 60)

Here, the “mental language common to all nations” by Vico refers to the ubiquitous poetic logic that makes metaphor possible. Danesi (2004: 5) had made a rather illuminating remark on Vico’s poetic logic and its relation with metaphor:

The faculty of the mind that guides our attempts to make sense of things was called poetic logic by the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico in his landmark treatise of 1725, The New Science (Bergin and Fisch 1984). Vico described poetic logic as a universal form of imaginative thinking that allows us to understand the world on our own terms. He maintained, however, that it is not possible to study poetic logic directly, since the mind cannot study itself! Nevertheless, he suggested that we could certainly gain a good understanding of what it reveals about human thinking by studying one of its most imaginative products – metaphor.

Microscopically, metaphor in Vico is structured in his “threefold form of memory, the harmonious working of memoria, fantasia, and ingegno” (Verene 1981: 174), in which metaphor is conceived as “imaginative universal” (Verene 1981: 173). Of the triad correlates, memoria refers to memory, fantasia includes “both the notions of ‘imagination’ and ‘fantasy’” (Danesi 1995: 63), and ingegno refers to “ingenuity or invention” (Danesi 1995: 63). Vico (1948) further depicted the three different aspects of
memory in this way: “memory when it remembers things, imagination when it alters or imitates them and invention when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship”. For these reasons the theological poets called Memory “the mother of the Muses”. In Vico’s framework, fantasia is the faculty – unique to the human species – that has made possible the mind’s ability to reflect on, and create, stimuli and forms not present in the immediate environment” (Danesi 1995: 63). Indeed, human beings are endowed with an ability of creating an imaginative space and telling a story about that created world, which, like a magnet, attracts people who believe it. Together, we make contracts with each other on a number of imagined concepts (like the belief of Utopia or communist society), legitimate them, and follow them. Such imagined concepts unify us together to make great achievements, hence the demonstration of imaginative power. Through this theory of imagination, Vico (1948) depicted how metaphor actually works in our mind. The following statement by Vico (1948: 66-67) further shows the necessity and importance of an imaginative universe for human cognition:

These three axioms [XLVH-XLIX] give us the origin of the poetic characters that constitute the essence of the fables. The first of the three shows the natural inclination of the vulgar to invent them, and to invent them appropriately. The second shows that the first men, the children as it were of the human race, not being able to form intelligible class-concepts of things, had a natural need to create poetic characters, that is, imaginative class-concepts or universals, by reducing to them as to certain models or ideal portraits all the particular species which resembled them. Because of the resemblance, the ancient fables could not but be created appropriately.

According to Verene (1981), the term ingegno in Vico refers to “the power to extend what is made to appear from sensation beyond the unit of its appearance and to have it enter into connection with all else that is made by the mind from sensation” (Verene 1981: 167). The three features of memory “operate simultaneously, as human beings constantly attempt to make sense of the world and to code it in some durable cognitive fashion” (Danesi 1995: 63). In Vico’s framework, the concept fantasia cannot be separated from the other two features.

The genius or ingegno required for finding what is common between things is possible only because of the primordial power of transference between particular and universal which is accomplished within fantasia, within the unit of the universale fantastico. Metaphor can be understood as likeness or similarity only if we ignore its role in relation to the is. To regard the constructive power of metaphor
as based on its analogical capacity is also to presuppose its primordial power to construct the *is*. (Verene 1981: 174)

Besides, Vico and his followers (Verene 1981) also found inadequacy in the notion of likeness or similarity in the comparison theory of metaphor developed since Aristotle, and he based his conception of metaphor on identity:

In a metaphor not deliberately formed as a logical proportionality, the two objects involved are no more like each other than is the subject like the predicate in the logical judgement. When we view a living metaphor as an object of analytic examination or employ it as a theoretical tool, it can be turned into an analogy, but the notion of analogy or similarity does not describe the nature of its being. (Verene 1981: 174-175)

In other words, Vico considers the meaning transference in metaphor as linked more to identity than to similarity. According to Verene (1981), Vico’s notion of metaphor has reversed the traditional understating of metaphor founded by Aristotle: “Vico’s conception of metaphor as based on identity and not on likeness between things reverses the understanding of metaphor which has developed since Aristotle. Metaphor conceived as the imaginative universal is also the touchstone between topics and tropes.” (Verene 1981: 175) Although Vico’s conception of metaphor, with the notion of poetic logic in particular, is “singular in the histories of philosophy and psychology” (Danesi 2004: 26), it was antipathetic with the mainstream philosophy in both seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Vico’s time, computationism began to take hold of the philosophy (Danesi 2004), which was incompatible with Vico’s idea of a “new science”. Although Vico’s theory of metaphor did not draw much attention of his contemporaries, it has been gaining more weight in the massive discussion on language and cognition since the 1980s (Verene 1981; Danesi 1995; Danesi 2004). The following quoted remark will therefore be agreed by many: “It is only in modern times, beginning with the etymological, rhetorical, historical analyses of Giambattista Vico, that many scholars have come to share the view that metaphor characterizes human thought and language in a truly fundamental way.” (Leary 1990: 3) Many cognitivists (Verene 1981) began to rethink the role of metaphor and they find in Vico great inspiration. We may further borrow Danesi’s (1995) comment on the situation of Vico’s academic enterprise today, “Vico’s plan for studying how human beings sense, think, learn, and know, remains virtually unknown to this day among ‘scientists of the mind’. ” (Danesi 1995: 1) It is in this sense
that we may say today’s research on metaphor “has yet to catch up to Vico, since it still lacks the notion of poetic logic to guide its mode of inquiry” (Danesi 2004: 5).

It was indeed a pity that Vico obtained little support from either his contemporaries or his immediate successors, but his illuminating notion of poetic logic and his theory of memory and imagination have laid a good foundation for us to get rid of the stereotyped framework for metaphor study. Vico studied the operation of human imagination and poetic logic, also the focal point of his new science, through investigating the semiotic artifacts to which the “primordial imagination” (Danesi 1995: 16) give birth. As contended by Nöth (1990), the theme of metaphor “lies at the root of semiotics, both historically and analytically”. Semiotic subjects like arbitrariness, motivation, and iconicity are all very important topics in contemporary theories of metaphor. When Vico put forward a subversive idea on metaphor in the age of Enlightenment, he also made, in the meantime, a fresh exposition on the fundamental aspect of semiotics. Thus, Vico’s *New Science* may be credited as a source of origin for both semiotics and modern theories of metaphor, and its author the forefather of the aforementioned two fields.

As mentioned earlier, the so-called “paradigm shift” in metaphor study from the late 1970s, with the burgeoning of the cognitive theory of metaphor in particular, failed in facilitating a sound epistemology of metaphor. It behooves us to retrace the path of the cognitive theory of metaphor back to its starting point so as to examine once again the directions once suggested at the chief crossroads. In other words, I try to mark the places where Lakoff/Johnson stood before the alternative paths they did not choose.

The period from the late 1970s, probably 1977 (Pollio et al. 1977), to 2003, was indeed a golden age for metaphor study. I argue that the era ended in the year 2003, which marks the publication of the second edition of *Metaphors We Live by*, typically because, philosophically speaking, from this year on Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor cease to develop and, at the same time, metaphor study afterwards becomes rather diversified. I call this period “the cognitive era of metaphor” because the movement was initiated by numerous researches in cognitive psychology and cognitive science. Indeed, experiments conducted by cognitive psychologists in late 1970s were really helpful in demonstrating the pervasiveness of metaphor in human speech and thought (Pollio et al. 1977; Pollio and Burns 1977; Pollio and Smith 1979; Connor and Kogan 1980; Noppen and Hols 1990). After that, many more psychologists and linguists
began to relate metaphor with mind and cognition. Some even equate metaphor study with cognitive science, or deem the former as a sub-discipline of the latter. What these people forgot is that metaphor is not identical with cognition but rather an indispensable mechanism for realizing it. This is to say, solving problems in cognition does not mean a better understanding of metaphor. For most of the time since 1980s, metaphor is also used as a tool for solving problems in other fields, like psychology and neuro-science, while its own ontological and epistemological problems are left unsolved. In other words, the so-called paradigm shift in the late 1970s is, actually, an unfinished project in terms of building a sound epistemology of metaphor, and we still need another paradigm shift in order to achieve this goal.

Moreover, although metaphor was a very popular target of study in 1980s, most of the scholars at that time did not realize that the cognitive psychological study of metaphor could be based on a much more profound phenomenological study of the sign. Lakoff/Johnson (1999) realized the need in philosophical establishment and co-authored a book entitled *Philosophy in the Flesh*, but their effort did not seem to make any difference. All they do in that book is to try to back up their former ideas on metaphor, i.e., experientialism and metaphorical essentialism in terms of conceptual metaphors. In their most famous and at the same time misleading book, *Metaphors We Live by*, they claim that conceptual metaphors are fundamental concepts we “live by”. However, after careful scrutiny, we come to the conclusion that conceptual metaphors are only meaningless meta-linguistic constructs, and Lakoff/Johnson’s interpretation of them reflects only one angle, among many others, that people take to conceptualize the outside world. In 1999, they put forward another new term to attract readers’ eyes: the embodied philosophy. However, I cannot find any difference between experientialism and the embodied philosophy. Strangely, Lakoff/Johnson also see no difference in the two terms, because they did not bother to replace the term experientialism with the new term “embodied philosophy”. Now that the cognitive aspect of metaphor has been explored extensively from nearly every possible way, the fundamental problem is still hanging there: what is metaphor and how did it originate, and why? The cognitive theory acknowledged the fundamental role of metaphor in human thinking, but did not explain why it is so fundamental. Lakoff/Johnson believe that conceptual metaphors are fundamental concepts in our mind and we thus cannot live without these concepts in mind. Such a theoretical position has recently been challenged by many scholars.
As I have only made a broad sketch of the cognitive theory of metaphor in the first chapter, the present section will focus on the three most glaring deficiencies in the theory: the theory of meaning it holds, the maximalist view it takes, and the conceptual metaphor as its staring point. To begin with, the theory of meaning Lakoff/Johnson held is as problematic as the objectivist view of meaning they have fiercely criticized. The German Scholar Rudi Keller (1999: 178) made a rather reasonable critique on this respect, which deserves a thorough look:

(i) Cognitive semantics’ theory of meaning is insufficient. In communicating, the speaker uses linguistic expressions, among other things, to give the addressee to understand what he means and thinks. If the meaning of linguistic signs are something that is supposed to help the addressee ascertain what is going on in the speaker’s head, then meaning itself cannot be in the speaker’s head too. If a street sign is to be of any use, it must precede the destination to which it points.

(ii) Cognitive semantics’ concept of the concept ‘concept’ is either unclear or simply trivial. Certainly it is plausible to assume that the expression bird corresponds to the concept ‘bird’. However, it is implausible to assume that there is a concept ‘bye bye’ which corresponds to the expression bye-bye – other than in the trivial sense that there must be something going through the speaker’s mind when he says bye-bye, and that this something is concept.

(iii) The argumentative structure of cognitive semantics is circular. Cognitive structures are deduced from linguistic analyses and then used as explanations for the same linguistic analyses from which they have been deduced.

(iv) Cognitive semantics cannot explain the generation and change of meaning. According to its theories, change in meaning would be the replacement of one concept by another. Why should a language community do such a thing, and who monitors the process?

All the above four tenets are rather illuminating for today’s theorists of metaphor study, especially for Lakoff/Johnson and their followers. Keller (1999) then proposed in his paper a list of ideas for improvement, which were neglected by Lakoff/Johnson.

Furthermore, the cognitive theory of metaphor received very serious criticism from cognitive psychologists like Glucksberg and McGlone (1999), who defined it as a maximalist view of metaphor as opposed their minimalist view. In their paper entitled “When love is not a journey: What metaphors mean”, Glucksberg and McGlone (1999: 1544-1545) cast serious doubts on Lakoff/Johnson’s idea on conceptual mappings:
According to this minimalist view, a metaphor vehicle may have different interpretations depending on the metaphor topic and on other contextual constraints. For example, the metaphor A lifetime is a day can be interpreted in at least two ways, depending upon the kind of thing that the vehicle a day is taken to symbolize. A day can symbolize a rather short time span, and so the lifetime-day metaphor can be taken to mean that life is short. Alternatively, the vehicle a day can symbolize stages of existence, such that birth is morning, adulthood is high noon, old age is late afternoon, and death, night. This latter interpretation illustrates an alternative to our minimalist view, the maximally rich view proposed by Lakoff and his colleagues (e.g., Lakoff/Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Turner, 1989). According to this view, metaphors are understood via systematic mappings between topic and vehicle concept domains. These mappings are presumed to be part of the human conceptual system. Whenever a metaphor is used, people automatically access the relevant conceptual mappings in order to arrive at the correct interpretation.

As argued above, the minimalist view seems to be a much more reasonable cognitive interpretation of metaphor than the cognitive theory. Moreover, Glucksberg and McGlone (1999: 1544-1545) further pinpointed the difference between their attributive categorization view and Lakoff/Johnson’s conceptual mapping view:

How do the minimalist and maximalist views differ? First, our minimalist view does not assume that rich conceptual mappings between specific source and target domains are explicitly represented as part of our conceptual structure. Lakoff’s maximalist view posits the existence of thousands of such mappings. Second, the minimalist view assumes that people actively construct interpretations of utterances in discourse, while the maximalist view assumes that most interpretations are retrieved from semantic memory. Third, the knowledge sources for the two views differ substantially. In the minimalist view, conventional attributive categories, e.g., butchers, may be retrieved from semantic memory, but different metaphor topics produce different and often novel instantiations of these categories. Furthermore, for novel metaphor vehicles people can construct novel attributive categories (cf. Barsalou, 1983, on construction of novel functional categories). For example, during the 1992 election campaign in the United States, George Bush could assert (with utter confidence that he would be understood) that an opposing candidate was doing a Clinton. From Lakoff’s point of view, such expressions could only be understood if there were a relevant and accessible conceptual metaphor in semantic memory.

Glucksberg and McGlone’s study did not stop at mere theoretical criticism, it was also based on relevant experiments they have conducted. In order to test Lakoff/Johnson’s hypothesis on the abstract correspondences between the source domain and the target
domain in LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor, Glucksberg and McGlone (1999: 1546) designed an experiment to collect interpretations of the three love-journey related metaphors, during which 12 undergraduates were asked to interpret and paraphrase each of the metaphors. The metaphorical expressions tested are: Our love is a bumpy rollercoaster ride; Our love is a journey to the bottom of the sea; and Our love has become a filing cabinet. The interpretations that they obtained for each of the metaphorical expressions are shown in the following Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Three love metaphors and their interpretations:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Our love is a bumpy rollercoaster ride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. We have our good days and bad days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Although we might have highs and lows in the relationship, we’re having fun while it lasts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Our love varies a great deal, from extremes of joy and happiness to extremes of pain and sadness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We have some really troublesome times, but they are countered by some terrific times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We have good times and bad times together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We are in a mood elevator that won’t let us out on any floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Our love is full of ups and downs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Our love is exciting, and not very stable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Our love is full of fights and bad times, but accompanied with frequent high, exhilarating times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. There are good times and times [sic] in our relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Our love has its ups and downs but is always exciting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Our love determines whether life at the moment is up or down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Our love is a voyage to the bottom of the sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Our relationship is not going to work – it’s going to kill us both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Our love presents new and exciting opportunities for us to discover ourselves and each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Our love is constantly revealing the hidden delights of an uncharted, unpredictable world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Through our love, our deepest emotional natures have been revealed and understood.

5. Our love is mysterious and dangerous.

6. We're drowning in each other’s problems.

7. We share experiences together that we have never had before.

8. Our love is exciting and dangerous.

9. Our love is a series of discoveries of the unknown.

10. Our love is dangerous and disastrous for us both.

11. We don’t know where our love is headed.

12. We don’t talk enough. We are always silent when we’re together.

C. Our love is a filing cabinet.

1. Our love is too organized and staid; we have no spontaneity or originality.

2. Our love is open for everyone to see - there are no secrets between us.

3. Our love is orderly and able to be taken out or put away as desired.

4. Our love holds many memories.

5. Our love contains a lot of emotions.

6. We make love like accountants; we’re just going through the motions.

7. We save all of our experiences together in our memory.

8. Our love is very organized and proper.

9. Our love is very straightforward and organized - we plan how much time to spend together, what to do, etc.

10. Our actions are perfunctory.

11. Our love contains everything that is important in our lives.

12. Our love is bland and business-like. (Glucksberg and McGlone 1999: 1547)

Evidently, the “journey-specific references are not explicitly present in the interpretations, nor is such material even implied” (Glucksberg and McGlone 1999: 1547). This finding proves that, at least for this specific metaphor, the abstract correspondence between two domains are unnecessary, and “the journey-mappings are not required for interpretation” (Glucksberg and McGlone 1999: 1547). According to Lakoff/Johnson, the cross-domain mapping is indispensable because it not only depicts
the process of metaphorization but also creates similarities. The following remark by them can showcase their idea on cross-domain mapping concerning the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY:

There are at least four arguments against the hypothesis that metaphor expresses literal similarity instead of being a cross-domain mapping. The first is the simplest. In many cases, there is just no preexisting similarity there. For example, there is no preexisting similarity between the inherent (skeletal) concept of love and the concept of a journey. However, the conventional Love Is A Journey metaphor creates a fleshed out Love Is A Journey concept, which of course has similarities to journeys—exactly the similarities expressed in the mapping, since the mapping creates the similarities. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 126)

In fact, similarities do exist between love and journey. For example, they both last for a certain period of time. A word is an encyclopedia that contains so many semantic markers that it can be related to almost anything, which also serves as the unlimited source for metaphorical association. Therefore, metaphor users do not need a mediated cognitive mechanism like cross-domain mapping. As shown above, the empirical study by Glucksberg and McGlone (1999) also demonstrated the meaninglessness and uselessness of the cross-domain mapping theory in the cognitive theory of metaphor, showing that the so-called cognitive mechanism behind metaphor is only Lakoff/Johnson’s untenable assumption. Again, such empirical results were overlooked by Lakoff/Johnson, and their followers continue to elaborate the “working” of such an unreal “mechanism”.

Last but not least, the existence of vehicular diversity and multivalency in metaphor “raises serious doubts about ‘conceptual metaphor’ as a plausible or efficient metalinguistic tool for studying metaphor” (Ding 2010: 95). Ding made the following remark on conceptual metaphor after refuting the “ARGUMENT IS WAR” metaphor:

The conclusion to be drawn here is that all the lexical items cited by Lakoff/Johnson as instances of the conceptual metaphor “ARGUMENT IS WAR” can actually be ascribed to many alternative conceptual metaphors. Given that the most words and expressions in a language can be analyzed into innumerous semantic markers, the number of potential metaphorical concepts that can be posited on the basis of similarity is almost unlimited. This makes our effort of trying to understand the metaphorical meaning of words and expressions through conceptual metaphors cognitively unrealistic and implausible. (Ding 2010: 100)
Ding further argued that “conceptual metaphors are rather unnecessary to our interpretation of figurative language despite their huge popularity with many contemporary scholars” (Ding 2010: 100). As suggested by Ding (2010), Lakoff/Johnson need to abandon the conceptual metaphor theory so as to understand what metaphor really is.

As shown above, Lakoff/Johnson seem to live in their own bubble, just as what Plato had accused the materialists of doing in *Sophist*es (quoted in Jämsä 2001: 495):

> The materialists pull everything down from the sky and out of the invisible world onto the earth as if they wanted to clench rocks and oak trees in their fists. They grasp them, and stubbornly maintain that the only objects that exists are those that are tangible and comprehensive. They believe that the physical existence of an object is existence itself, and look down smugly on other people – those who acknowledge another area of existence separate from the physical. But they are totally unwilling to listen to another point of view.

Different from the materialists criticized by Plato, Lakoff/Johnson intend to raise every conceptual metaphor to the sky and believe that conceptual metaphors championed by them are the only fundamental concepts in our mind. In fact, those seemingly “mountains of evidence” claimed by Lakoff/Johnson (2003: 251) are all well-selected in favor of their own points of view, while “a considerable number of critical voices” (Glucksberg and McGlone 1999; Keller 1999; Murphy 1996; Murphy 1997; McGlone 2001; Leezenberg 2001; Rakova 2002; Haser 2005; Ding 2008; Ding 2010) are filtered out. Such selective sort of defense is, in fact, self-defeating. As concluded by McGlone (2001: 105), Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor “has not fared well theoretically and empirically”.

Although Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor is considered by many as “a paradigm shift in understanding language and meaning” (Hanks and Giora, 2012: 1), their experientialism or embodied philosophy, which is still deeply rooted in the philosophy of the subject, did not provide a tenable answer for the enduring problem of metaphor left by Aristotle. In the development of their theory, Lakoff/Johnson were endowed with several opportunities to make a better choice for their theory of metaphor, and hence chances to establish a sound epistemology of metaphor fit for the contemporary study of language and mind. However, we have observed that every time when they stood at the crossroad for better alternatives, they adhered to their
metaphorical essentialism and experientialism, and, unfortunately, did not get out of its theoretical impasse.

2.2 Metaphor in Peircean Semiotics

In their preface to *Metaphors We Live by*, Lakoff/Johnson (2003 [1980]) contend that “most traditional philosophical views permit metaphor little, if any, role in understanding our world and ourselves” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003 [1980]: ix). The “most” here certainly should not include the theory of American philosopher and semiotician, Charles S. Peirce, who views iconic reasoning essential to our understanding of the world. In fact, Peirce is among a very few scholars of his time who believe that metaphor plays a significant role in human thought and cognition. He made it very clear a long time ago that our thinking is either indexical (metonymical) or iconic (metaphorical). Echoing Vico’s notion of “poetic logic” (Vico 1948; Danesi 2004; Ding 2010), this very idea long predates what Lakoff/Johnson have considered as their “most important claim”, i.e., “human thought processes are largely metaphorical” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003 [1980]: 6). Despite its importance, Peirce’s conception of metaphor as a theoretical tradition has been either neglected or misunderstood due to the lack of a thorough discussion on this topic in his writings. In this context, therefore, the present section aims to elaborate an epistemology of metaphor in the Peircean semiotic tradition that subsumes the respective theory of Umberto Eco and Ersu Ding.

2.2.1 From Phaneron to Metaphor

With the burgeoning of cognitive science and cognitive linguistics, metaphor has become an important object of study with the purpose of answering the question of how people perceive the outside world through reasoning. Looked at from the process of metaphorization, the study of metaphor is more a semiotic in the Piercean sense than a linguistic undertaking. As is observed by Anderson (1984), metaphor plays a very interesting role in Peirce’s semiotic framework. On the one hand, Peirce is quite aware of the significance of metaphor, while, on the other hand, he does not give a full account of it. Some scholars have serious doubts on whether there is a Peircean conception of metaphor due to his infrequent employment of the word “metaphor” in his writings (Haley 1988; Hausman 1996; Sørensen 2007). However, few of them have focused on the underlying logic depicted by the semiotic pioneer that makes metaphors possible. In fact, Peirce’s exposition on iconicity and iconic reasoning has laid a solid foundation upon which may be erected a fresh epistemology of metaphor fit for the contemporary
study of language and mind. In this sense, it is not just of historical interest (Anderson 1984) but also of unique theoretical value to investigate Peirce’s perspective on metaphor. As Haley has put it, Peircean semiotics can provide a potentially efficient tool for metaphor study, and the following remark by Haley (1988: 6) is essentially right:

Though Peirce apparently wrote precious little about metaphor per se, the field of metaphor furnishes an especially rich domain in which to prospect with Peirce’s tools, for perhaps no other aspect of language and of creative literature arouses such interest in meaning and such controversy over the prerogatives of interpretation as does poetic metaphor.

Therefore, one important aim of this section is to synthesize those brief remarks on metaphor which appear in different parts of Peirce’s writings so that a coherent system may be constructed.

Since the concept of metaphor in Peirce is rather complicated and not always altogether explicit, a step by step explanation seems to be not only useful but also necessary. Broadly speaking, metaphor in Peirce can be examined from two perspectives. Macroscopically, metaphor is an icon in general as opposed to index and symbol, whereas, microscopically, it is a subdivided hypoicon on the third level as opposed to image and diagram. Both perspectives indicate that metaphor in Peirce is by no means an isolated term; rather, it is deeply rooted in Peirce’s phenomenology and thus constitutes part of the whole theory of cognition and signification. For the sake of theoretical systematicity, our explanation shall begin with his triadic division of phenomena.

Peirce coined the word phaneron to refer to “all that is present to the mind in any sense or in any way whatsoever, regardless of whether it be fact or figment” (CP 8.213). In the science of Phaneroscopy that Peirce developed, phaneron is the focal point of study:

Phaneroscopy is the description of the phaneron; and by the phaneron I mean the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not. If you ask present when, and to whose mind, I reply that I leave these questions unanswered, never having entertained a doubt that those features of the phaneron that I have found in my mind are present at all times and to all minds. So far as I have developed this science of phaneroscopy, it is occupied with the formal elements of the phaneron. (CP 1.284)

In this way, Peirce incorporates into his phenomenology “all that can be possibly perceived or thought” (Gorlee 1987: 45). He then examined the phaneron and sorted out
“its elements according to the complexity of their structure” (CP 8.213), before he reached the three basic categories. According to Pierce, phenomena or phaneron can be divided into three systematically related categories: Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, and each of them reflects one mode of human experience (Gorlee 1987). We may find more information on Peirce’s initial idea on categorical analysis from the following remarks by Johansen (1993: 66): “The origin of Peirce’s categorical analysis was his study of Kant (cf. Murphey 1961: 55-97), and to a great extent his own division of the categories into Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness is an attempt to reduce Kant’s twelve categories.” According to Peirce’s definition, Firstness is “the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else” (CP 8.328). It is a possibility or potential, “a mere quality of feeling” (CP 5.71), an internal character of object in itself (CP 5.469), and hence a monadic element of the world. One example for the nature of Firstness is our passive consciousness of the fragrance of a flower without any recognition or analysis. Secondness is “the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third” (CP 8.328). Contrasting with Firstness, Secondness is dyadic, the actual, and “the conception of being relative to, the conception of reaction with, something else” (CP 6.32). It characterizes individual things and facts, and can be exemplified by force and resistance (Johansen 1993). Thirdness is “the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other” (CP 8.328). It is the idea of being a “Medium” (CP 5.66) between a Second and its First, i.e., a “Representation as an element of the Phenomenon” (CP 5.66). What makes this division so fundamental is that it serves as an elemental principle for developing other trichotomies in Peircean semiotics. The initial application of the principle appears in “On a New List of Categories” (CP 1.545-1.559; Hoopes 1991: 23-33), where Peirce first proposes, in place of Aristotle’s ten categories and Kant’s twelve, a novel list of three essential elements: Quality, Relation, and Representation (Fisch 1978; Hoopes 1991). In later writings, he modified this triadic list into “Quality, Reaction, and Mediation” (CP 4.3) for the purpose of accuracy. Peirce considered his new list of the fundamental categories of thought as “the gift I make to the world” (Hoopes 1991: 23) and “my one contribution to philosophy” (CP 8.213). The list shows how Peirce classifies the elements of thought and consciousness according to the complexity of their “formal structure” (CP 8.213). To be more specific, the embodiment of phaneron is either a quality, or concretely a quale; a reaction, or concretely a relate; or a mediation, or concretely representation (Johansen 1993). As a reflection in the mind,
the quale becomes a feeling, the relate turns into a sense of fact, and the representation a conception. The following table summarized by Johansen (1993: 68) clearly demonstrates Peirce’s idea on the three perspectives of studying elements of human experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Firstness</th>
<th>Secondness</th>
<th>Thirdness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Qualities</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Subjects</td>
<td>Quale</td>
<td>Relate</td>
<td>Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Mind</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Sense of fact</td>
<td>Conception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(immediate consciousness)</td>
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<td>(Mind strictly)</td>
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Table 1.

For Peirce, the embodiment of various human experience becomes human thought, and he believes that signs are representative vehicle of our thoughts and “all thought is in signs” (CP 5.253). Peirce thus explains: “Finally, no present actual thought (which is mere feeling) has any meaning, any intellectual value; for this lies not in what is actually thought, but in what this thought may be connected with in representation by subsequent thoughts; so that the meaning of a thought is altogether something virtual.” (CP 5.289)

Such phenomenological categorization is closely related to his well-known semiotic triad: representamen, object, and interpretant. As is pointed out by Peirce, an embodying quality (CP 1.551), or a quale, “refers to a ground” (CP 1.557), i.e., the ground of a sign; an embodiment of reaction, or a relate, “refers to ground and correlate” (CP 1.557), the correlate being the object of a sign; an embodying mediation, or a representation, “refers to ground, object, and interpretant” (CP 1.557). Thus, the monadic, dyadic, and triadic relationship of the sign is clearly shown. The term ground here deserves more of our attention. This concept is defined by Peirce as “a pure abstraction, reference to which constitutes a quality or general attribute” (CP 1.551). Although “ground” is not included in the semiotic triad, it is still very helpful for us to understand the triadic relationship of signification. According to Peirce, a representamen stands for its object, not in all respects, but in reference to a ground (CP 2.228). As an abstracted quality connecting a representamen to its object, the ground signifies the inherent characters or properties of the sign. However, due to its overlapping function with
interpretant in terms of mediating the sign and its object, the term plays no role in Piece’s later writings after “On a New List of Categories”. Indeed, the concept of interpretant signifies both internal and imputed qualities in the sign, and thus subsumes the concept of ground. The initial prominence but sudden disappearance of the term “ground” in Peirce’s writings also demonstrates the evolution of Peirce’s general concept of the sign from a four-term structure (representamen, ground, object, and interpretant) to the semiotic triad. What should be emphasized is the distinction between two kinds of sign-object relations made by Peirce according to different mediating qualities:

A quality may have a special determination which prevents its being prescinded from reference to a correlate. Hence there are two kinds of relation.

First. That of relates whose reference to a ground is a prescindible or internal quality.

Second. That of relates whose reference to a ground is an unprescindible or relative quality. (CP 1.558)

The criterion of classification here is whether the mediating quality can be prescinded from the sign and its object, i.e., whether the quality is inherent in them or not. Since the prescindible qualities are common inherent characters shared by the sign and its object, they are perceivable regardless of the sign-object relationship. The unprescindible qualities, on the other hand, are only perceivable if the relationship is established. Meanwhile, Peirce realizes that the “unprescindible or relative quality” (CP 1.558) also consists of two situations: the quality based on facts perceived by sign users and the imputed quality arbitrarily attributed by sign users. In other words, there are altogether three instead of two types of sign-object relations: a relation mediated by similarity, a relation based on contiguity, and a relation founded on conventionality (Johansen 1993). In light of the three relations, Peirce puts forwards his trichotomous division of signs into icon (likeness), index, and symbol:

It follows that there are three kinds of representations.

First. Those whose relation to their objects is a mere community in some quality, and these representations may be termed likenesses.

Second. Those whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact, and these may be termed indices or signs.

Third. Those the ground of whose relation to their objects is an imputed character, which are the same as general signs, and these may be termed symbols. (CP 1.558)
Thus, for Peirce, an iconic relationship between sign and object is founded on their inherent qualities, i.e., likeness or similarity; an indexical relationship between sign and object is mediated by their contiguity or proximity; a symbolized relationship between sign and object is based on convention or conventionality. In later writings, this trichotomous division is frequently emphasized by Peirce who also considers it as “the most fundamental [division of signs]” (CP 2.275). In the following frequently quoted remark, Peirce further defines this trichotomy:

There are three kinds of signs which are all indispensable in all reasoning; the first is the diagrammatic sign or icon, which exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse; the second is the index, which like a pronoun demonstrative or relative, forces the attention to the particular object intended without describing it; the third (or symbol) is the general name or description which signifies its object by means of an association of ideas or habitual connection between the name and the character signified. (CP 1.369; cf. CP 2.247–249; cf. CP 4.447–448)

Echoing the first sign-object relation, an icon represents its object by virtue of similar inherent qualities they share. For Peirce, icon “is very perfect in respect to signification” (NE 4: 242), for it brings “its interpreter face to face with the very character of signified” (NE 4: 242), and therefore is “mathematical sign par excellence” (NE 4: 242). A pure icon in Peirce refers to one’s immediate knowledge about characters in a sensible object (CP 4.447). It only exists in consciousness and thus conveys “no positive or factual information” (CP 4.447). Even an idea, for instance, cannot be a pure icon unless it is construed in the sense of a possibility (CP 2.276). Put in another way, a pure icon merely implies “something there” in the denotatum, be it real or figmentary, and no communication is included. With the embodiment of a certain quality, an actual functioning sign is, however, never pure (Johansen 1993). In actual situations, an embodied sign is often a mixture of iconic, indexical (indicative), and symbolic elements (CP 2.302). Peirce argues this point as follows: “One sign frequently involves all three modes of representation; and if the iconic element is altogether predominant in a sign, it will answer most purposes to call it an icon” (MS 491: 3). In other words, a sign is an icon simply because similarity in it is more predominant than contiguity and convention; a sign is an index simply because contiguity in it is more predominant than similarity and convention; a sign is a symbol simply because convention in it is more predominant than similarity and contiguity. Through elucidating the respective function or value of each
type of signs in the trichotomy, Peirce further emphasized the interdependent relation between the three:

The value of an icon consists in its exhibiting the features of a state of things regarded as if it were purely imaginary. The value of an index is that it assures us of positive fact. The value of a symbol is that it serves to make thought and conduct rational and enables us to predict the future. It is frequently desirable that a representamen should exercise one of those three functions to the exclusion of the other two, or two of them to the exclusion of the third; but the most perfect of signs are those in which the iconic, indicative, and symbolic characters are blended as equally as possible. (CP 4.448)

The Peircean scholar Max Fisch (1978: 44) describes this relationship fairly clearly:

These [Icons, indices, and symbols] are rather elements or aspects of semeioses that vary greatly in relative prominence or importance from semeiosis to semeiosis. We may therefore call a sign, for short, by the name of that element or aspect which is most prominent in it, or to which we direct attention, without thereby implying that it has no element or aspect of the other two kinds.

This statement further indicates that an actual sign may serve as any one of the three types of representation in different contexts rather than being a fixed type. In other words, despite their differences, icons, indices, and symbols are “not three mutually exclusive kinds of signs” (Fisch 1978: 44); rather, they are intrinsically transformable. Therefore, indices can be iconified, icons can be symbolized or lexicalized, and symbols can be further de-symbolized or re-iconified.

On top of this understanding, Ding (2010, 2014, 2015b, 2016) further points out that, among the transformable three, indexical signs seem to appear first and symbols last from the perspective of sign emergence and evolution, and he argues his point as follows:

From an evolutionary point of view, the appearance of symbols is the last of the three categories proposed by Peirce. Human beings seem to have first semiotized part of their natural and social surroundings as in the case of a particular bird-call being interpreted as an indexical sign of that bird’s presence. Indices can then be artificially produced for the purpose of communication as in the case of onomatopoeia, drawing or other imitative devices, giving rise to icons in their various forms. (Ding 2014: 126-127)

Thus, according to the sequence of sign evolution, index should come before icon, and a new evolutionary order of the three techniques should be: index, icon, and symbol. This viewpoint has insightfully developed Peirce’s theory of representation. Clearly shown,
the “three different techniques of sense making” (Ding 2010: 77) play vitally different roles in human cognition and communication. As mentioned earlier, an index represents a causal or contiguous relationship between a sign and its object. In this sense, a real index is not intentionally produced. It is thus safe to say that any form of deliberate production of indices will cause an iconification or symbolization of indices. In other words, there are two types of intentional production of indices: iconification by simulation and symbolization through staging (Keller 1998). It is in this way that an index evolves into an icon or a symbol. We thus need to hear what Ding (2016: 167-168) has to say on this issue:

In terms of the evolutionary order, the use of indexes preceded other types of signs and played an important role in the lives of pre-literate people. It is not hard to imagine that our illiterate ancestors were able to predict rain if they saw a heavy concentration of dark cloud above their heads; nor is it ridiculous to expect them to be able to tell the gender of a woman who had two big breasts above her belly. In the former situation, the dark cloud serves as an indexical sign of rain whereas big breasts function as one for womanhood in the latter. The use of indexical signs is not, of course, the monopoly of the human race and occurs quite frequently in other animals, high and low. Corpse-eating vultures, for example, are able to tell whether a mammal is already dead by its lack of movement; wild tigers can also know the presence of other animals in the vicinity through their particular smells.

Ding (2016: 168) also points out that the ubiquitous use of indexical signs by animals further proves that “Cassirer’s famous definition of man as an animal symbolicum (Cassirer 1956: 44) is not sufficiently accurate because other animals also have the ability to use ‘symbols,’ by which Cassirer means ‘signs.’” He then came to the conclusion that “indexical signs and human languages co-exist in literate human societies, ancient or modern” (Ding 2016: 168). Ding thus explains:

The ubiquitous presence of indexical signs indicates that both humans and other animals have the intellectual ability to deduce B from A and, not surprisingly, this ability has been put to good use for communication purposes, giving rise to so-called icons or iconic signs. To be more specific, if someone wishes to mention to another person an object or a state of things that is not directly accessible at the time of speaking, he/she is then motivated to produce something similar to a part of the intended object or state of things either in sound, or in shape, or in color so that his/her listener could make a proper deduction thereupon. What we see here is a process of “iconification” of index essential to the emergence and evolution of any human
language and knowing this process can certainly help us avoid many of the confusions that have occurred in sign classification. (Ding 2016: 169-170)

The evolution of index into icon can be further exemplified in people’s iconification of the sun-storm relationship. People observe that the sun will finally show up after bad weathers like a storm, a natural phenomenon that people observe. Over time, the phenomenon of “storm” becomes an indexical sign for the showing up of the sun. Moreover, most people prefer sunshine than storm, so they use the former to refer to hope or good wishes while use the latter to represent hardship or setback. And the expression “the sun will finally appear after storm” is also used metaphorically to refer to people’s wish that success will finally be achieved through overcoming hardships. Keller (1999) held the same idea with Ding on the part of iconification of indices, and we may have a better understanding of the process of iconification through one of his examples on this respect:

Let’s consider this everyday example: if I want to silently indicate to my companion during the course of a lecture that I find it deadly boring, I can do this by turning to her and simulating a somewhat exaggerated yawn. A slight deviation from an authentic yawn is necessary to make sure that it is not interpreted as a real one. the simulated yawn should be sufficiently salient to cause the addressee to judge it as an attempt at communication and search for an appropriate interpretation. … Through simulation, the symptom becomes an icon. It undergoes a process of iconification, and this for the following reasons: a real yawn can be a symptom of a storage of oxygen. A simulated yawn can never be a symptom of a storage of oxygen. Only real symptoms are symptoms. Imitated symptoms resemble symptoms and are thus icons of symptoms. The addressee of iconified symptoms must perform two successively activated interpretive techniques. Because of the yawn’s similarity to a real yawn, as well as its difference from a real yawn, she interprets it as an icon of a yawn; this, in turn, she interprets as an icon of a symptom of boredom, on the basis of her knowledge of the causal connection between yawning, fatigue and boredom.

(Keller 1999: 144-145)

Being in the middle part of sign evolution, icon serves as a mediation between indicative activities and symbolization. Peirce sees the first two techniques (index and icon) as evolving from two fundamental modes of abductive thought: indexical reasoning and iconic reasoning (Ding 2010). An iconic element alone is not sufficient to make up perception, since “an indexical element that represents the insistency of the object is needed” (Johansen 1993: 96). Thus, successful communications require a combination
of the two reasoning. To illustrate this, let us borrow an example from Rudi Keller’s *A Theory of Linguistic Signs*:

During a walk through the forest, I want to make my companion aware of a wood pigeon sitting on a branch, but without scaring her away (the pigeon, that is). I could do this by pointing towards the pigeon and imitating its cooing sound. From my pointing gesture and similarity of the sound I make to that of a pigeon, my companion will infer: “Aha, this guy probably wants to show me a pigeon.” (Keller 1998: 150)

During this communicative activity, iconicity in sound by itself cannot fix the pigeon. The companion hears the imitating sound, recognizes the gesturing hand, and sees a pigeon on the branch. It is not the cooing sound alone, with its mere iconic reasoning, i.e., association of similarity, but the gesture taken together with the companion’s indexical reasoning, i.e., experiential association of contiguity, which determines for him or her which pigeon is meant and where it is. Even after human beings have developed verbal language, they continue to make use of the two modes of reasoning which give rise to metonymy and metaphor. In other words, iconic reasoning and indexical reasoning are the underlying rules of metaphor and metonymy respectively. For Peirce, metaphor can be defined as the result of making links between things or states of affairs on the basis of similarity. As an indexical sign that bases its representation on proximity or causal relations, metonymy is often compared with metaphor by many linguists. Metaphor works by comparing two different entities, while metonymy works by using one element from a given topic to refer to another closely related element. Thus, a metaphor creates new links between otherwise distinct entities, whereas a metonymy only re-presents the existing links within them. In real language situations, the formation of metaphor is usually a combination of the two types of reasoning, as can be illustrated in the following anecdote in Chinese history. When the Ming Dynasty was first established in the mid-14th century, the government issued very rigid policies to govern its people. One of the most meritorious statesmen Liu Bowen did not agree with such means of governance and wanted to advise the Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang to be more tolerant to his people. He used the following expression in his letter to Emperor Zhu: “霜雪之后，必有阳春，今国威已立，宜少济以宽大。”/shuang xue zhi hou, bi you yang chun, jin guo wei yi li, yi shao ji yi kuan da/ (Zhang and Yu 2004: 2643) ‘After frost and snow, there shall be a warm spring. Now that the authority of our dynasty has been established nationwide, we should be a bit more tolerant in governance.’ (my translation)
There are two types of reasoning in this metaphorical expression. On the literal level, the expression contains indexical reasoning: warm spring always comes after cold winter (frost and snow). On the metaphorical level, frost and snow in winter refer to severe governance, while warm spring refers to tolerant governance. The indexical reasoning precedes the metaphorical reasoning, and the latter is based on the former: Spring always comes after winter, and, similarly, a tolerant governance should come after a severe one. Liu used this metaphorical technique to convey his idea to the Emperor because Emperor Zhu was a very brutal ruler and it would be quite risky for Liu to say something upfront. Since the metaphorical meaning is induced by a natural phenomenon which is also common sense to everybody, it is more likely that the Emperor will follow this advice.

Another important relationship that is very useful for metaphor study is that of icon and symbol. For Peirce, a symbol is “determined by its object in that the thought which is determined by the symbol represents the symbol to be determined by its object” (MS 612: 47). Unlike index and icon, symbol is a result of rule application. We may have a better understanding of the Peircean symbol from the following definition given by Ding (2014: 126):

By “symbol” Peirce means that group of signs whose interpretation does not rely on proximity or causality between things and events; nor does our interpretation depend on the various degrees of similarity that can be perceived between semiotic forms and their referents; instead, the association we make between a sign and its meaning is totally based on the social convention in which we operate.

This definition precisely elucidates the conventional nature of Peircean symbols whose reference to their objects is mediated by abstract thought that intersubjectively exists in the mind of members within a given speech community. Relative to index and icon, symbol, as is argued by Ding (2010, 2014, 2015b, 2016), is the last to appear. Implication of this idea can also be found in Peirce who contends that symbol develops out of other two type of signs, “particularly from icons” (CP 2.302). Elsewhere he also adds that symbol “always involves an index” (NE 4: 256) and originates from a certain form of iconic signs (CP 2.222). In addition to this, Ding (2014: 127) further argues that symbolization occurs when an iconic sign (metaphor) is overused:

However, repeated usage of iconic signs (aided by the gradual changes in the orthographic system as a whole) would eventually lead to the redundancy of those similarity-based “prompts” because the automatic association between the semiotic form and its corresponding meaning has become a rule of the entire sign community.
During the process of sign evolution, many once active metaphorical expressions are lexicalized through repeated usage and become symbols. This means that metaphor also evolves in language. The creation of a metaphor can be very easy and sometimes haphazard, but once it goes into the language it enters into the process of sign evolution. Many novel metaphors, especially the less used ones, will be forgotten, and those most frequently used are more likely to be lexicalized or symbolized. The process of symbolization or lexicalization will deprive most of the association between the former tenor and vehicle, which means that, when using symbolized metaphors, there will be no iconic association or imagination in the users’ mind. According to Ding (2014, 2016), Peirce’s concepts of “index”, “icon”, and “symbol” could be endowed with much greater explanatory power, if they are situated in the process of sign evolution where indexical and iconic signs eventually lose their original interpretive grounds and the association between the signifier and the signified of a sign becomes a matter of habit or convention. Thus, we can say that although Peirce himself does not deal with sign transformation in his writings, his trichotomous division of signs has enabled later generations of semioticians such as Umberto Eco and Ersu Ding to explore a possible theory of metaphor along the lines of indexical and iconic reasoning.

Such a theoretical position of sign evolution held by Peircean semiotic theorists forcefully challenges Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor which does not make any distinction between icons (metaphors) and symbols (lexical items), and presupposes a well-structured Gestalt that determines the formation of metaphors. In their cognitive theory, Lakoff/Johnson adopt a large number of dead metaphors to prove the existence of some abstract conceptual metaphors. In fact, Lakoff/Johnson are aware of this problem in their theory. In the features they enumerated for “traditional views of metaphor” or the so-called “objectivist account of meaning”, they incorporate the issue of symbolization into the list: “Tenet 4: Conventional metaphorical expressions in ordinary everyday language are ‘dead metaphors,’ that is, expressions that once were metaphorical, but have become frozen into literal expressions.” (Lakoff/Johnson, 1999: 124) However, there is nothing wrong with this so-called objectivist view of dead metaphor, on the contrary, it has a very good point on the issue of symbolization of metaphors. According to Peirce’s principle for sign classification, those signs that require iconic reasoning are metaphors, while those that do not have been lexicalized, hence dead. In other words, through symbolization or lexicalization, the once metaphorical meaning become a part of the denotation or Eco’s dictionary meaning of the expression. Clearly,
Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 211) do not take the phenomenon of sign evolution into account, which posed the most important deficiency in the cognitive theory of metaphor.

Words and expressions that we have taken as instances of metaphorical concepts (e.g., *digest* in ‘I can’t digest all those facts’) would be taken by objectivists as not being instances of live metaphor at all. For them the word *digest* would have two different and distinct literal (objective) meanings—*digest1* for food and *digest2* for ideas. On this account, there would be two words *digest* which are homonyms, like the two words bank (*bank of a river and bank where you put your money*).

Digest 1 and digest 2 are not two words, but two senses of the same word which point to its polysemous nature. Both digest 1 and digest 2 have become the dictionary senses of the word digest, as we can see from the four entries of the word “digest” in the Collins English Dictionary:

digest

1. V-T/V-I When food digests or when you digest it, it passes through your body to your stomach. Your stomach removes the substances that your body needs and gets rid of the rest.

2. V-T If you digest information, you think about it carefully so that you understand it.

3. V-T If you digest some unpleasant news, you think about it until you are able to accept it and know how to deal with it.

4. N-COUNT A digest is a collection of pieces of writing. They are published together in a shorter form than they were originally published.

As shown in the dictionary entry, the word “digest” has at least four basic meanings. You can digest food, you can digest information or idea, and you can even digest, which means “bear”, unpleasant news. As they have all become dictionary meanings, none of them should be considered as live metaphor anymore, and, when people use them, there will be no iconic reasoning or metaphorical association in their mind. Hence, there is no need for any interpretation based on the hypothesized mechanism of cross-domain mapping in the cognitive theory of metaphor, as can be fairly explained in the following remark:

An objectivist might grant that *digest an idea* was once a metaphor, but he would claim that it is no longer metaphorical. For him it is a “dead metaphor,” one that has
become conventionalized and has its own literal meaning. This is to say that there are two homonymous words *digest*. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 211-212)

Here, Lakoff/Johnson have made a category mistake: they label anyone who believes in the process of symbolization as objectivist. As a non-objectivist, however, Peirce would certainly agree with this “objectivist” view. Symbolization occurs when a metaphor is overused. Again, digest 1 and digest 2 should not be considered as two separate words, but two senses of the same word “digest”. Interestingly, the “objectivist” views on the issue of dead metaphor are all very tenable:

The objectivist would probably grant that *digest*1 and *digest*2 have similar meanings and that the similarity is the basis for the original metaphor. This, he would say, explains why the same word is used to express two different meanings; it was once a metaphor, it became a conventionalized part of the language; it died and became frozen, taking its old metaphorical meaning as a new literal meaning. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 212)

Again, there is nothing wrong with this explanation; rather it represents a sound understanding of dead metaphor and a tenable interpretation of sign evolution. Similarity is, of course, the very basis of metaphor, but, through the process of symbolization, people do not need to recall the similarities between the related topics. This shows that metaphorical meaning and literal meaning are transformable through the mechanism of symbolization and re-iconification. It is rather strange that Lakoff/Johnson cannot understand this point. In fact, the following statement by Lakoff/Johnson clearly demonstrates how a metaphorical meaning of the word “pedigree” was lexicalized in English language. Their explanation by tracing the metaphorical meaning of the word “pedigree” becomes a very good example of re-iconification of dead metaphors:

A dead metaphor is a linguistic expression that came into the language long ago as a product of a live conceptual metaphor. The conceptual mapping has long since ceased to exist, and the expression now has only its original target domain meaning. A good example is the word *pedigree*, which came from the French *ped de gris*, which means ‘foot of a grouse.’ It was based on an image metaphor in which the image of a grouse’s foot was mapped onto a family-tree diagram, which had the same general shape. The family-tree diagram was thereafter called a *ped de gris* - ‘a grouse’s foot’ - which came to be spelled ‘pedigree.’ Nowadays, the image mapping from a grouse’s foot to a family tree diagram has ceased to exist as a living part of our conceptual system. Moreover, English speakers no longer call a grouse’s foot a
ped de gris. Both the conceptual and linguistic aspects of the mapping are dead. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 124)

Without a proper perspective of sign evolution, Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 125) also believe that dead metaphor only refers to a small number of expressions:

The point is that the term dead metaphor applies to only a very narrow range of cases, like pedigree. Indeed, it takes some effort to come up with such cases. Cases like pedigree work differently from cases like comprehend, in which the conceptual metaphorical mapping is still alive, but the term has ceased to be a linguistic expression of that mapping. Pedigree is also quite different from conventional metaphorical expressions like not going anywhere, which instantiate the live Love Is A Journey mapping.

Again, the examples are irrelevant. It is not true that dead metaphor only has a very narrow range. In fact, most of the expressions given by Lakoff/Johnson for justifying a conceptual metaphor are, judging from the Peircean criterion, dead metaphors. It takes much effort to come up with such generalized conceptual metaphors, but effort is not the key point here. Coincidentally, Glucksberg and McGlone (1999) have proved through experiment that the “Love Is A Journey” interpretation is unnecessary for metaphor users and the relevant mapping also does not exist. Another false idea by Lakoff/Johnson is that they believe dead metaphors are isolated and unsystematic while live metaphors naturally form a coherent system, as demonstrated in their analysis of the dead metaphor “the foot of the mountain”:

Examples like the foot of the mountain are idiosyncratic, unsystematic, and isolated. They do not interact with other metaphors, play no particularly interesting role in our conceptual system, and hence are not metaphors that we live by. The only signs of life they have is that they can be extended in subcultures and that their unused portions serve as the basis for (relatively uninteresting) novel metaphors. If any metaphorical expressions deserve to be called “dead,” it is these, though they do have a bare spark of life, in that they are understood partly in terms of marginal metaphorical concepts like A MOUNTAIN IS A PERSON. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 55)

Our systemic critique in the last chapter has refuted any coherent system or systematicity for metaphor, be it dead or live. Instead, most metaphors have the aforementioned features (arbitrary and unsystematic) and our everyday life is closely connected with all of them as a whole.
The problem of dead metaphor can obviously receive a better solution in Peirce’s typology of the sign through the view of sign evolution. In Peircean semiotics, those dead metaphors such as “Your claims are indefensible” and “He attacked every weak point in my argument” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003 [1980]: 4) are in fact normal expressions that no longer require iconic reasoning. Therefore, when Lakoff/Johnson think they are discussing metaphors, they are actually talking about the Peircean symbols most of the time. What they have done is, at best, re-iconifying those lexical items to prove the existence of meta-linguistic constructs that they call conceptual metaphors such as “ARGUMENT IS WAR” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003 [1980]: 4). Signs seem to never evolve in their theory. Unlike Lakoff/Johnson, Peirce defined metaphor not as a proposition or a preexisting construct, but as an original iconic sign that represents a fresh sign relation and, hence, innovative thought. Compared with the essentialist view of the cognitive theory, this interpretive method on metaphor is much more convincing.

From the categorization of phaneron to the division of signs, Peirce demonstrates how human minds perceive, distinguish, and construe their experience to form an idea of the world they live in. The process reveals that all the three elements of human thought and experience should be embodied in and also mediated through a certain form of sign. In other words, each episode of human thought and experience, no matter how simple it might be, has to be understood in terms of another thing, i.e., the sign representing it. This clearly reflects the semiotic nature of human thought: always understanding one thing in terms of another.

2.2.2 Three Modes of Iconicity

If we admit the sign-mediated nature of human thought, then we may have special interests in seeking more detailed features of metaphor in Peirce through his subdivision of iconic signs. As is mentioned above, a pure icon is only a possibility and does not exist in the actual process of signification. Peirce terms the “substantive” (CP 2.276) iconic representamen “hypoicon” (CP 2.276), and he first provides his definition of metaphor through a further division of hypoicons into image, diagram, and metaphor.

Hypoicons may be roughly divided according to the mode of Firstness of which they partake. Those which partake of simple qualities, or First Firstnesses, are images; those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts, are diagrams; those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are metaphors. (CP 2.277)
Despite its obscurity, this is the only time when Peirce ever defines metaphor. Again, the
definition is given in a Peircean way by providing two other contrasting terms within one
tripartition. Image is argued by Peirce as the first Firstness in that the quality it resembles
is concrete and perceivable in the object. A man’s picture, for instance, depicts a certain
aspect of him that can be easily recognized by his acquaintance. Diagram is the second
Firstness in that two relata are identical in one respect, i.e., one structural relation. A
geometrical diagram is a good example here which represents its object through depicting
the formal structure in it. Metaphor is the third Firstness in that one relatum provides a
parallel quality to that of the other. In other words, metaphor seems to contain four items:
two relata, and the respective quality of each relatum (Anderson 1984). From image to
diagram and then to metaphor, iconicity between a representamen and its object becomes
more and more abstract, which accordingly involves three modes: iconicity in (simple)
quality, iconicity in (structural) relation, and iconicity in (parallel) representation or
parallelism. In other words, image represents iconicity in simple or concrete quality of a
sign, diagram represents a structural relation between a sign and its object, and metaphor
represents a parallel representation or parallelism. The three modes of iconicity can be
easily found in all types of iconic signs, which reflect the evolution of human mind from
perceiving simple qualities to abstract ones. Which mode becomes predominating in
actual process of signification is very important for us to decide whether an iconic sign
is an image, or a diagram, or a metaphor. Other theorists also realized the different
degrees of abstraction or “increased abstraction” (Givón 1985) in the three modes, as
argued by Givón (1985: 192) in the following remark:

Further, part of the argument has already been presented by Haiman (to appear) in
his suggestion that such a gradual scale indeed exists between imagic and
diagrammatic representation: “…although Peirce did not emphasize this point, it
should be clear that the distinction between an icon which is an image (like a
photograph), and one which is a diagram (like a stick figure), is also mainly a matter
of degree ….” … Extrapolating Haiman’s scale further from diagram to symbol is,
I think, a natural extension of the process of witnessed in the first portion of this
scale, namely the process of increased abstraction, generality simplification. Further,
it is actually possible to argue that Peirce himself went one step toward such
gradation by positing one more type of icon that is more abstract than the diagram:
the metaphor.

Although Peirce does not go much further in elucidating the relationships within
these three types of iconic signs, the way he divides them has provided us with a fresh
perspective for understanding metaphor. Among the three, metaphor is often more easily confused with diagram than with image. According to the brief definitions Peirce gives on metaphor and diagram, he tends to distinguish the two in terms of the mode of iconicity. Diagram depicts a strict isomorphic relation with its object, while metaphor is regarded as a “broad” \((CP\ 7.590)\) and “abstract” \((CP\ 7.590)\) comparison between two things. For a further development in this respect, Anderson (1984) attempts to distinguish them through two contrasting terms: isomorphism and isosensism. The iconicity in a diagram is named by Anderson (1984) as isomorphism, while the one in metaphor as isosensism. He thus contends that whether an iconic sign depicts isomorphic structure or not should be considered as a demarcation between diagram and metaphor. He exemplifies his point by arguing that the golf ball smiles should be subsumed in the category of diagram rather than metaphor in that the golf ball (object) has a slash in it whose form resembles that of a smile (diagram). We, however, cannot accept such classification by Anderson because a smiling face does not depict the actual form of a slash in the golf ball as what a map does to its corresponding territory; rather, it represents it (slash in golf ball) through providing an identical parallelism (furrow in smiling face). That is why Peirce calls metaphor a third Firstness: metaphorical iconicity is established when one parallel quality in the sign represents the other in the object. It is in this sense that we call the golf ball smiles a metaphor rather than a diagram.

Since all iconic signs are to a certain degree diagrammatical, the isomorphism by Anderson (1984) seems to be ubiquitous in all types of iconic signs. We can easily find an isomorphic structure between an image and its object. The lines and strokes in a realistic sketch precisely depict the formal structure of its object. Different from the one in an image, what an isomorphic form in a diagram signifies is a series of detailed relations, largely mathematical, inherent in its object. Compared with diagram, metaphor involves a higher degree of human imagination in both signifying and interpreting processes. A metaphor may also contain some diagrammatical elements, but the imaginary elements in it dominates. Therefore, the real demarcation between diagram and metaphor depends on whether during this period of time there are imaginary qualities imputed on the metaphorical tenor. Back to the example of the golf ball smiles, since a golf ball can never actually smile, “smiling” is an imaginary quality imputed on it. Thus we say the slash on a golf ball arouses the metaphor user’s imagination to connect it with the furrow of a smiling face. Such imputed quality often represents the creative aspect of metaphor. It is also in this sense that we say metaphor creates new meaning. Our
understanding of the term “imputed quality or property” may be enhanced by reviewing the following remark by Peirce:

A reference to a ground may also be such that it cannot be prescinded from a reference to an interpretant. In this case it may be termed an imputed quality. If the reference of a relate to its ground can be prescinded from reference to an interpretant, its relation to its correlate is a mere concurrence or community in the possession of a quality, and therefore the reference to a correlate can be prescinded from reference to an interpretant. It follows that there are three kinds of representations. (CP 1.558)

A very similar example can also be found in Chinese culture. As a tradition, Chinese housewives, especially in the northern parts of China, make steamed buns several days before the Spring Festival. If a bun dehisces on its surface, they will probably mock themselves by saying “the steamed bun is smiling”. Of course, no bun can ever smile, not even with dehiscence on the surface. Everyone knows that the dehiscence on the bun merely partially resembles rather than describes the furrows in a smiling face. In the example of a roadmap, on the contrary, the spatial relation of the corresponding territory are strictly described in the map, and there are no such imputing on the territory as that on the golf ball or the steamed bun.

Peirce has not made a fuller discussion on metaphor than on diagram or analogy. Anderson (1984) ascribes this to Peirce’s theoretical preference for science than art, for “in the growth of thought analogies are effective primarily for science and metaphors primarily (not exclusively) for art” (Anderson 1984: 455). Due to its strict isomorphism, diagrams are particularly suitable for mathematical representation, and it is also in this sense that Peirce calls the icon “mathematical sign par excellence” (NE 4: 242). For Peirce, diagrammatical thinking which is stricter and does not arouse imagination is the basic reasoning for scientific inquiry, whereas metaphorical thinking is the underlying logic for art creation.

2.3 Metaphor and the Peircean Abduction

Keeping himself away from the psychological dimension of human communication, Peirce mainly focused on the logical aspects of signification and semiosis. The term “abduction” or “hypothesis” is developed by Peirce to refer to one of the three means of human reasoning as opposed to the induction and deduction. Thus, deduction, induction, and abduction or hypothesis constitute the most important Peircean triad in logic. Philosophers like Russell all attribute the discovery of abductive reasoning to Peirce: “A completely different outlook from positivism informs the philosophy of C. S. Peirce
(1893-1914). Where Comte had discarded hypotheses as metaphysical, Peirce, on the contrary, was intent on showing that the framing of hypotheses is a vital activity with a logic of its own.” (Russell 1959: 276) Let us have a quick glimpse at Russell’s comments on Peirce’s unique contribution to logic:

In the discussion of the logic of hypotheses, Peirce made a fundamental contribution. It had been variously supposed by philosophers that hypotheses are the result either of deduction, as rationalists might incline to hold, or of induction, as the empiricists think. Peirce saw that neither of these views was adequate. Hypotheses are the outcome of a third and radically different logical process, which Peirce in his customary colorful style calls “abduction”. It amounts to tentatively adopting a hypothesis because it saves some particular appearance. That the appearance is saved is of course a matter of deduction, but not the acceptance of the hypothesis. (Russell 1959: 277)

First of all, let us have a thorough look at Peirce’s exposition on the difference between deduction and abduction or hypothesis:

In an argument, the premisses form a representation of the conclusion, because they indicate the interpretant of the argument, or representation representing it to represent its object. The premisses may afford a likeness, index, or symbol of the conclusion. In deductive argument, the conclusion is represented by the premisses as by a general sign under which it is contained. In hypotheses, something like the conclusion is proved, that is, the premisses form a likeness of the conclusion. Take, for example, the following argument:

M is, for instance, PI, PII, PIII, and PIV;

S is PI, PII, PIII, and PIV;

... S is M.

(CP 1.559)

In deduction, premises serve as a rule or convention for the conclusion, while in abduction the relation between premises and conclusion is their likeness. In other words, in abductive arguments, the premises are not the adequate condition for the conclusion. Therefore, if we use the formula Peirce adopted in the above argument to describe the deductive process, it will be like this:

S is M.

M is, for instance, PI, PII, PIII, and PIV:
Suppose there is an \( N \), and \( N \) is also PI, PII, PIII, and PIV. Deductively, we cannot say neither \( N \) is M nor \( N \) is S, for the premise S is M is not adequate for the conclusions and we do not know what new premises will be. Abductively, however, it is safe for us to say that \( N \) is M and \( N \) is S. In other words, in abduction, “PI, PII, PIII, and PIV” represent a likeness of M, and thus “the premises are or represent a likeness of the conclusion” (CP 1.559). Clearly, abductive reasoning is not governed by rule-based conventions but based on likeness. In this sense, abductive reasoning in Peirce can also be called association or associative inference. As Keller (1998: 151) puts it: “Association is a creative process without normativity. You cannot make a mistake while associating.” Similarly, Gellner (1988: 57) held that associative or abductive reasoning “is inherently free and undisciplined”. This is perhaps the most important distinction between abduction and deduction. Through deduction, we get new facts, while through abduction, we get new relations or connections. Then, we have a look at the distinction between induction and abduction:

Induction is where we generalize from a number of cases of which something is true, and infer that the same thing is true of a whole class. Or, where we find a certain thing to be true of a certain proportion of cases and infer that it is true of the same proportion of the whole class. Hypothesis is where we find some very curious circumstance, which would be explained by the supposition that it was a case of a certain general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition. Or, where we find that in certain respects two objects have a strong resemblance, and infer that they resemble one another strongly in other respects. (CP 2.624)

In inductive reasoning, we generalize conclusion based on true rather than similar cases, while in abductive reasoning we base the conclusion on a similar or supposed premise. To echo the above two formulas, Peirce depicted the process of inductive reasoning in the following formula:

SI, SII, SIII, and SIV are taken as samples of the collection \( M \);

SI, SII, SIII, and SIV are P:

\[ \therefore \text{All } M \text{ is } P. \] (CP 1.559)

Moreover, Peirce pinpointed that the real difference between induction and abduction lies in that the former is designed for making classification while the latter is designed for making interpretation:
The same thing is true of the distinction between induction and hypothesis. In the main, it is broad and decided. By induction, we conclude that facts, similar to observed facts, are true in cases not examined. By hypothesis, we conclude the existence of a fact quite different from anything observed, from which, according to known laws, something observed would necessarily result. The former, is reasoning from particulars to the general law; the latter, from effect to cause. The former classifies, the latter explains. (CP 2.636)

Therefore, for Peirce, interpretation is based on abductive reasoning. In other words, abductive reasoning is the most basic or primitive means by which we understand the outside world. In fact, human perception only reflects the partial instead of complete features of things, based on which we interpret and understand things. Because abductive reasoning is based on inadequate premises, the resemblance we get from it is only partial. This explains why metaphor is always based on partial similarities between two things. Thus, metaphorical meaning can also be seen as a “biased” or inadequate meaning. Metaphor or metaphorical thinking can, to some extent, be called a “biased” or inadequate human understanding. However, such “biased” or inadequate reasoning can be very creative, much more creative than the other types of “adequate” reasoning, for it can quickly make more connections between different things and create more possibilities. According to Peirce, even the process of mathematical reasoning cannot be isolated from metaphorical reasoning and stand totally on its own. In fact, all creations are based on abductive or metaphorical thinking, including scientific creations. In genome science, for example, in order to produce manmade creature, scientists choose a cell as a tenor and a gene as a vehicle. The combination of the two result in a different creature, and by doing this, people can control the process of creation. In the time when human beings cannot control the gene, creation of new species is subject to natural selection. The philosophy of natural science is also based on a kind of abductive linking. Similarity is the base of categorization. People categorize things according to different degrees of similarity they perceive. But, there are things they cannot directly perceive, for instance, genome. Genome technology tells us that similarity can not only be discovered, they can also be created, like cloned creatures. The ability of abductive reasoning enables scientists to have a synthetic view of species creation. For instance, the newly developed synthetic biology works on integrating different things to create not only new signs but also new meanings.
As mentioned earlier, the Peircean abduction is quite similar to Vico’s poetic logic, and Peirce went one step further than Vico to divide abduction into two types: indexical reasoning and iconic reasoning. My earlier elaboration on sign evolution has already shown that, as an iconic sign, the formation of metaphor actually needs a combination of the two types of reasoning. In other words, abductive reasoning is the fundamental drive for the formation of metonymy and metaphor. One crucial nature of Peircean abduction lies in that it is arbitrary \((CP\ 1.646)\), open-ended, and thus unpredictable. Lakoff/Johnson, however, failed to see this crucial point. As argued in the last chapter, Lakoff/Johnson made a very serious logical mistake when working out their conceptual metaphors, i.e., they use inductive results as the starting point of their deduction. After the construction of their cognitive theory, they bring those inductive results back for evidence. In fact, they have been trapped in a weird circle of interpretation that finally makes the cognitive theory unattractive. Much worse than their aforementioned logical mistake is their ignorance of abduction. Their strong belief in metaphorical essentialism shows that they have no knowledge about the underlying logic of metaphor, let alone its real operation in our entire conceptual world. This is almost fatal to their theory. If they had the chance to know the essence of Peirce’s philosophy, they might be able to make a better choice for the construction of their theory. Indeed, Peirce can provide a rather sound semiotic framework for understanding and interpreting metaphor. The American scholar Michael Haley (1999), who specialized in Peircean philosophy and semiotics, also realized this by contending that Lakoff/Johnson and their followers must “have neglected a veritable goldmine in neglecting Peirce” (Haley 1999: 421). In the present section, therefore, I am going to demonstrate the operation of abductive reasoning in metaphor through a detailed criticism of an important conceptual metaphor or orientational metaphor, MORE IS UP. By doing this, we can correct the distorted logic in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory and show how abductive reasoning really works in our conceptual world.

While putting forward the idea of metaphorical essentialism, Lakoff/Johnson did not forget to find evidence to back it up: they argue that there is physical basis for conceptual metaphors. Following their logic, it seems that those conceptual metaphors are based on direct physical experiences we get from life. However, the so-called “physical basis”, mainly for orientational metaphors, in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory is merely subjective deduction on the basis of their instincts or intuition, and
therefore are not able to justify the supremacy of these conceptual metaphors over others. MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN are a pair of Lakoff/Johnson’s important conceptual metaphors based on our sense of orientation. In Lakoff/Johnson’s framework, they are seen as a fundamental pair of concepts that govern a lot of other metaphors. The following is Lakoff/Johnson’s (2003[1980]: 15-16) own statement on it:

MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN

The number of books printed each year keeps going up. His draft number is high. My income rose last year. The amount of artistic activity in this state has gone down in the past year. The number of errors he made is incredibly low. His income fell last year. He is underage. If you’re too hot, turn the heat down.

Physical basis: If you add more of a substance or of physical objects to a container or pile, the level goes up.

To begin with, the physical basis for this pair of concepts is also quite problematic. Visually, the concept “more” or an increase in amount is not confined vertically in the state of piling up; rather, it might be substantiated in almost all directions. To be more specific, it can be upward (piling up), downward (the eighteenth layer of hell is at the bottom of the hell), inward (deep thinking is more thinking), outward, backward, and forward, all of which are equally possible to semiotize the abstract concept “more” and thus to produce a metaphor.

In fact, we can find a lot of evidence in our life to prove that the concept “more” is not necessarily understood in terms of “up”. For instance, more is also down because the more things you have, the heavier they become. When weighing something on a scale, the more things we put the scale, the lower the scale moves. In the harvesting season, we observe in the rice field that those rice ears that bear the most rice hang downward, while the ones with little rice stay up. The more rice they bear, the lower they sink. Ancient Chinese farmers also observed this, they thus compared the rice rears with most rice to knowledgeable gentlemen (with more knowledge) who are always very humble (walking with the head slightly down for showing respect to others), and compared the ears with little rice to those ignorant people (with little knowledge) who are usually very arrogant (walking with their heads up regardless of the conduct code for a gentleman). In other words, the more knowledge one has, the humbler he/she is. In this case, more is well metaphorized by being down, and less is understood by being up. When there is more evaporation, the water level goes down. Correspondingly, the less one weighs, the higher
he can jump. If you add more of a substance, the size become bigger. So why not MORE IS BIG? This means that the process of metaphorization is not structured by one fundamental physical basis. (And this also proves the subjective nature in confirming conceptual metaphors.) In a word, the abstract concept MORE IS UP should never be taken for granted.

In addition to the phenomena we observe, we can also find lots of linguistic examples in which the concept “more” is also metaphorized in terms of “down”. For instance, the phrase “use up” can also serve as a good counter-example for the conceptual metaphor MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN. When you use up something, the amount of it turns from less to zero. Thus, “less” (zero is an extreme of being less) is associated with “up” in this case. If concepts like “MORE IS UP” and “LESS IS DOWN” are so fundamental in English language and its users, then why people still use “up” instead of “down” to collocate the word “use” here? This casts serious doubts on the centrality and supremacy of the conceptual metaphors MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN even in the culture where English is the mother tongue, let alone other cultures.

Having proved the uselessness of the conceptual metaphors “MORE IS UP” and “LESS IS DOWN” in metaphor interpretation, let us examine other conceptual metaphors in the so-called “coherent system” held by Lakoff/Johnson. The first that appear in their system of metaphors are two pairs of concepts, “HAVING CONTROL or FORCE IS UP” and “BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL or FORCE IS DOWN”. Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 15) provided linguistic evidence for these metaphorical concepts and explained the physical basis for such kind of conceptualization:

**HAVING CONTROL or FORCE IS UP; BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL or FORCE IS DOWN**

I have control over her. I am on top of the situation. He’s in a superior position. He’s at the height of his power. He’s in the high command. He’s in the upper echelon. His power rose. He ranks above me in strength. He is under my control. He fell from power. His power is on the decline. He is my social inferior. He is low man on the totem pole.

Physical basis: Physical size typically correlates with physical strength, and the victor in a fight is typically on top.

In the real world, having force does not always mean having control. In traditional culture of Daoism, for example, pugilists of Tai Ji tend to weaken the attacking force by changing
its directions rather than facing it directly. Put differently, instead of meeting the fists head-on, pugilists of Tai Ji are more willing to leverage the force of their opponents through agile movements. This philosophical idea is represented in a Chinese idiom “四两拨千斤” /sì liǎng bō qiān jīn/ ‘to defeat a thousand-pound force with four ounces of strength’. The pugilists hold this idea typically because they view things as a hemisphere like the Tai Ji ball and deal with them. Thus, in real situations, the one who is forceful does not mean that he or she has the control over the force. In fact, this is more related to social ranking than to physical fight. Metaphorical vehicles come from all spheres of life, and can be associated with unlimited kinds of tenor under abductive reasoning. Again, to consider some metaphorical vehicles as primary and others as secondary lacks evidence.

The next two pairs of conceptual metaphors are “HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP” and “SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN”, and the explanation provided by Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 15) are quoted below:

HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP; SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN

He’s at the peak of health. Lazarus rose from the dead. He’s in top shape. As to his health, he’s way up there. He fell ill. He’s sinking fast. He came down with the flu. His health is declining. He dropped dead.

Physical basis: Serious illness forces us to lie down physically. When you’re dead, you are physically down.

In real situations, while we use “at the peak of health”, we also use “at the peak of one’s sickness or madness. In the latter case, do we still say “health is up”? The answer is obvious. Furthermore, in Chinese expressions like 染上疾病 /răn shàng jí bìng/ ‘infected with a disease’ and 体温下不来 /tì wēn xià bù lái/ ‘the body temperature remains high’, the word 上 /shàng/ ‘up’ refers to illness while the word 下 /xià/ ‘down’ refers to being healthy. In the expression 翘辫子 /qiāo biàn zi/, a sarcastic way of saying ‘die’, the word 翘 /qiāo/ also means erecting. And contrary to the concepts of LIFE IS UP and DEATH IS DOWN, the Chinese expressions 上西天 /shàng xī tiān/ ‘go up to the sky in the west’ (a religious expression of death) and 上天堂 /shàng tiān táng/ ‘go to heaven’ both contain the word 上 /shàng/ ‘up’. Furthermore, “go to heaven” 上天堂 /shàng tiān táng/ and “go to hell” 下地狱 /xià dì yu/ are very common expressions of death in both English and Chinese languages. All these examples prove that there is no absolute relation between death and
down. Similarly, there is also no absolute relation between life and up. The point is that when you are not dead, you also lie down a lot. The more rest one gets, the healthier one becomes.

Moreover, we also find great contradiction between MORE IS UP and HEALTH IS UP. Consider, if “MORE” is always up, then aged people are up simply because they have lived more years than young people. However, the fact is that, generally speaking, aged people are more possible to encounter health problems than their juniors. Furthermore, being healthy for most modern people means eat less rather than more food. Since the empty concept “HEALTH IS UP” cannot tell us which semantic features of the word health is compared with “UP”, it is very likely that we will be confused. In fact, the deficiency lies in that MORE IS UP and HEALTH IS UP are merely partially related. Health is up is consistent with the concept of MORE IS UP only if we understand this “more” in health as having more energy or strength in life. If, however, MORE here is understood as having more years or eating as much food as possible, there will be no consistency at all. This shows that the so-called coherent system is more relative than absolute. The fact that, sometimes, abstract concepts like “MORE” and “HEALTH” may be semiotized by our spatial intuitions should be understood through a more dynamic cultural framework than a universalized conceptual framework. Thus, the greatest weak point of Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory become quite obvious through such kind of anatomy: they tend to take partial and temporary relations between things as absolute permanent relations. They thus go further to define these partial and temporary relations based on similarity as the essence of metaphor. Direct bodily experience is only one means of metaphorical association, and definitely should not be considered as a driving source for metaphorical thinking. It is therefore not surprising that they finally lead their school of thought to a theoretical impasse and do not know how to get out of it.

The next concept pattern Lakoff/Johnson put forward is “CONSCIOUS IS UP” and “UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN”, and their justification for these conceptual metaphors are shown as follows:

CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN

Get up. Wake up. I’m up already. He rises early in the morning. He fell asleep. He dropped off to sleep. He’s under hypnosis. He sank into a coma.
Physical basis: Humans and most other mammals sleep lying down and stand up when they awaken. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 15).

This explanation is questionable because the whole physical basis is more related to sleep rather than to consciousness. There is evident switch of concept here in their argument. What is more, such concepts are not fundamental because unconsciousness can also be up. In English language, people say “When one dies, one’s soul goes up.”, and there is also an idiom in Chinese, saying “灵魂出窍” /ling hun chu qiao/ ‘the soul comes out of the body’. This idea is further enhanced in Chinese people’s mind by the classic fiction *Journey to the West*, where the soul of the Monkey King frequently flies out of the body to call for help. This is possible because abductive reasoning is not confined to things or events that happen in real life, it also gets materials through imagination.

Another important pair of concepts is “GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN”, as is argued by Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 16) in the following paragraphs:

GOOD IS UP; BAD IS DOWN

Things are looking up. We hit a peak last year, but it’s been downhill ever since.

Things are at an all-time low. He does high-quality work.

Physical basis for personal well-being: Happiness, health, life, and control—the things that principally characterize what is good for a person—are all up.

Both the accounts and the physical basis are untenable, because bad can also be interpreted as being up. For instance, if someone becomes crazy, he or she would be up a lot (hypertension), but this does not mean it is good. And as argued before, lying down in rest is usually good for health. Furthermore, in the following sentence from Martin Luther King’s famous speech “I Have a Dream”, he compares “despair” to “mountain” and “hope” to “stone”: “With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.” Normally, “despair” is not considered as being good, and mountain is erect and therefore is up. Compared with a mountain, a stone is physically downward, minute, and unimpressive in sight. Of course, the metaphors here are not suggesting that despair is good and hope is bad, although sometimes they can also be interpreted in this way; rather, hope as a stone is promising, and despair as a mountain is up like a block in front of any road to good prospects. In this metaphorical context, therefore, good is not up and bad is not down. This case is thus a good example that refutes the conceptual metaphors GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN. Moreover, different religions may have very different views on orientation. For instance, Buddhism has a
very different orientation view from both Daoism and Christianity. Both Daoist and
Christians believe that the best afterlife for us is to go to heaven, and heaven is “up” there.
However, for Buddhists, the best choice is to go to the Western Paradise or the Pure Land.
Clearly, in Buddhism, Heaven means “west”, while in Daoism and Christianity, Heaven
means “up” over our head. Since Heaven means good, we may also find a GOOD IS
WEST metaphor in Buddhism in light of Lakoff/Johnson’s logic.

Another pair of concepts Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]: 16) put forward as
orientational metaphors is FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP, and their
accounts for them are stated as follows:

FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP (and AHEAD)

All up coming events are listed in the paper. What’s coming up this week? I’m afraid
of what’s up ahead of us. What’s up?

Physical basis: Normally our eyes look in the direction in which we typically move
(ahead, forward). As an object approaches a person (or the person approaches the
object), the object appears larger. Since the ground is perceived as being fixed, the
top of the object appears to be moving upward in the person’s field of vision.

If the physical basis stated here is the ultimate cause for the abovementioned metaphor,
why don’t we have FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE LARGE or
FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE BIG? That fact is that, according the
experiential situation mentioned above, we are more likely to metaphorize the
foreseeable future events in terms of “largeness” rather than in terms “up”. Here, let us
take one step back and think about this issue in a inversed way: Even if the metaphorical
concept FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP as a conceptual metaphor is
really tenable, it also contradicts Lakoff/Johnson’s another metaphor UNKNOWN IS UP
as is argued in the following paragraph:

The role of the experiential basis is important in understanding the workings of
metaphors that do not fit together because they are based on different kinds of
experience. Take, for example, a metaphor like UNKNOWN IS UP; KNOWN IS
DOWN. Examples are “That’s up in the air” and “The matter is settled.” This
metaphor has an experiential basis very much like that of UNDERSTANDING IS
GRASPING, as in “I couldn’t grasp his explanation.” With physical objects, if you
can grasp something and hold it in your hands, you can look it over carefully and
get a reasonably good understanding of it. It’s easier to grasp something and look at
it carefully if it’s on the ground in a fixed location than if it’s floating through the
air (like a leaf or a piece of paper). Thus UNKNOWN IS UP; KNOWN IS DOWN IS coherent with UNDERSTANDING IS GRASPING.

But UNKNOWN IS UP is not coherent with metaphors like GOOD IS UP and FINISHED IS UP (as in “I’m finishing up”). One would expect FINISHED to be paired with KNOWN and UNFINISHED to be paired with UNKNOWN. But, so far as verticality metaphors are concerned, this is not the case. The reason is that UNKNOWN IS UP has a very different experiential basis than FINISHED IS UP.

(Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 20-21)

In fact, there is no coherence between those conceptual metaphors proposed by Lakoff/Johnson. Lakoff/Johnson claim that there is different experiential basis between UNKNOWN IS UP and FINISHED IS UP, because, in their system, FINISHED IS UP also contradicts UNKNOWN IS UP. Clearly shown in their above statement, Lakoff/Johnson used only one phrase “finishing up” to justify the concept FINISHED IS UP. Following their reasoning, can we say that STARTED IS UP is also a conceptual metaphor simply because there is also a phrase called “starting up”? The contradiction here is evident enough. From this case, we know that the Lakoff/Johnson’s criterion for conceptual metaphors is so loose that nearly each verb-preposition phrase can generate a metaphorical concept and finally the number of the abstracted concepts is likely to exceed the number of actual phrases. In this sense, what is the significance of these conceptual metaphors?

As anatomized above, there are no absolute concepts in these “orientational metaphors”, and there is no “internal systematicity to each spatialization metaphor” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 17). Those physically based or culturally based metaphors are randomly assigned rather than appear in “a coherent system” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 17). In addition to the great doubt cast on the cognitive theory of metaphor by philosophers or theorists like Haley (1999) and Haser (2005), there is also empirical evidence from various linguistic dimensions done by corpus linguists. While they serve as adequate evidence for proving the meaninglessness of conceptual metaphors, they also justify the true nature of abductive reasoning that makes metaphors possible. Most recently, for instance, David Hoover (2016) conducted a positive study to test the prevalence of some metaphorical collocations held by Lakoff/Johnson with the help of huge natural language corpora. Hoover’s study also shows that conceptual metaphors MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN are not as basic and fundamental as is assumed by Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]). To be more specific, Hoover (2016: 3) examines the
prevalence of MORE IS UP in Mark Davies’s 450 million words Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008), and the result is quite interesting:

Perhaps surprisingly, more, less, increase, and decrease do not collocate significantly with up and down, in COCA. In fact, all of these collocations have negative mutual information scores, showing that more, less, increase, and decrease are actually found less frequently than would be expected by chance within nine words left or right of up and down.

Note: The mutual information score measures how frequently two words appear near each other, taking into account how frequently this would happen by chance, based on the frequencies of the words and the size of the corpus.

These collocations for the MORE IS UP metaphor proposed by Lakoff/Johnson have shown lower mutual information scores, many of them negative, in Davies’s historically-based Corpus of Historical American English (Davies 2010), implying that “it is unlikely that the low scores are a result of language changes in the last thirty-five years” (Hoover 2016: 4). In other words, results of these data analysis show that the basic expressions in Lakoff/Johnson’s MORE IS UP metaphor appeared in English language merely scarcely even in the time when their Metaphors We Live by was first published in the early 1980s. Therefore, the result serves as very good evidence to prove that the idea of conceptual metaphor is based on very untenable assumption rather than careful justification. In fact, the Peircean scholar Michael Haley (1999: 427-428) had already made a quite thorough and illuminating comment on this major conceptual metaphor MORE IS UP:

The reason they are not satisfying is that such explanations do not really grapple with the underlying psychological and ontological mechanisms of the mind-space metaphor; rather, they deal with some of the conventional uses to which this metaphor is put in our culture. To speak of feeling happy as feeling “up,” for instance, is merely one conventionalized use of the cognitive metaphorical structure that allows us to use orientation in space as an analogy for emotional states. That same metaphorical structure is what permits exactly the opposite (and less conventional) use: My happiness, please note, may also be deep, which means reaching or extending down in space, rather than up. Up is not always good, either; that’s merely a hackneyed, conventional use of the spatial metaphor. The same metaphorical structure of mind-space that allows good to be thought of as “up” also allows any idea or phenomenon before the mind to be “up” – as when we say that crime is up, discontent is rising, or fear and uncertainty have reached a peak.
To be sure, these metaphorical possibilities are provided for under Lakoff/Johnson’s MORE IS UP conceptual metaphor. More of what is up? Well, more of anything—wealth or poverty, happiness or happiness, crime or virtue. And what is the explanation for this? “If you add more of a substance or of physical objects to a container or pile,” say Lakoff and Johnson, “the level goes up” (1980: 16). True, in many instances, but what if I add more cars to a lane of traffic? The increase is horizontal, not vertical. Borrowing this particular spatial axis for metaphor, I may find it more natural to say that my grief has no end, instead of saying that it has no ceiling or lid. And what if I add more air to a balloon? The growth is in all directions simultaneously. Borrowing from this particular law of physical space to create a metaphor, I might choose to say that my grief is swelling instead of rising. Thus, while the Lakoff/Johnson explanation may help us to understand why MORE is usually or conventionally UP, this explanation avoids the far more interesting question where metaphor is concerned: Not why is MORE usually UP (and sometimes outward or even downward), but why should any dimension of physical space, along any axis, provide such a persistent, intuitive, and universally natural metaphor in human thought for cognizing abstract phenomena—like grief or happiness—which (presumably) cannot themselves be literally quantified or assigned a position, let alone a dimension, in physical space?

Haley’s argument here is quite reasonable. Indeed, our task is not to account for the meaningless concepts as MORE IS UP and HAPPY IS UP, but to find out the underlying mechanism for cognizing abstract phenomena such as happiness or grief in terms of a position. As mentioned earlier, in real situations, “more” or the increase in amount can be achieved both vertically and horizontally. In Haley’s example, the increase of cars in number is shown horizontally, and thus is visually expanding rather than erecting (up). This shows that the physical instincts or intuition of the outside world are also diversely and multi-valently semiotized in our language. Ample examples have been adopted in this section to prove the futility of these concepts when they are adopted to account for metaphorical expressions as abductive results. In fact, our instincts or intuition are quite relative than absolute. These orientational and ontological concepts might be meaningful from the perspective of psychology, but will meet great challenge when explaining results of abductive reasoning like metaphor. This explains why conceptual metaphors like MORE IS UP or GOOD IS UP are so fiercely challenged and criticized by researchers when they are adopted as conceptual framework for analyzing metaphorical expressions in real cultural situations.
In a nutshell, Lakoff/Johnson made great effort to seek stable structures in metaphor, but stableness in metaphor is quite temporary. The concepts that they deem as stable are actually gained from re-iconification of the Peircean symbols which are indeed much more stable in language system than real metaphors. From this perspective, their work is nothing but concept induction by means of abstracting lexical items in language. It is worth noting that such kind of work has great difference from tracing the metaphorical patterns in a culture, because the latter is a form of interpretation in which we may find real life while the former is mere lifeless abstraction. One important reason for the failure of the conceptual metaphor theory is that it did not grasp the abductive impulse of metaphor.
Chapter Three: Beyond the Ontology of Metaphor

In the previous chapter, we proposed a Peircean epistemology of metaphor in light of the phenomenological analysis of the sign. Through the analysis, we have shown that Peircean semiotics can indeed provide a sound framework of analysis for the understanding and interpretation of metaphor. In his trichotomous division of the sign into index, icon, and symbol and a further division of the iconic signs, we have found a better way of categorizing and defining metaphors. Through the operation of abductive reasoning, with iconic reasoning in particular, we have found the underlying logic of metaphorization. These insights we get from the Peircean semiotics help to establish a sound epistemology of metaphor. However, due to the lack of a full and thorough discussion on metaphor in Peirce’s existing works, the thought of Peirce alone is still inadequate for a more ambitious framework of metaphor interpretation. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the epistemology of metaphor is an unfinished project, and our efforts should not stop at exploring Peirce’s thought but should incorporate insights from scholars of the same tradition so as to obtain an integrated framework for metaphor interpretation. Based on his theory of the sign, semioticians after Peirce, like Ersu Ding and Umberto Eco, have further developed his theory on metaphor and iconicity. Through his concept of arbitrary iconicity, for example, Ersu Ding stresses the arbitrary nature of metaphorization and tries to shift our attention away from Lakoff/Johnson’s abstract epistemological Gestalt to the specific cultural contexts in which metaphors occur. He also emphasizes the subjective nature of metaphor. Umberto Eco, on the other hand, sees interpretation of signs as an open-ended process that involves knowledge of all kinds. Encyclopedic knowledge, in other words, serves as unlimited source for metaphorical association. For Eco, metaphor should be interpreted in the cultural framework based on a specific cultural community. These ideas are in line with Peirce’s theoretical framework where the meaning of a metaphor depends on an interpreter or metaphor user in a particular socio-historical context. Both Ding and Eco suggest that we go beyond the ontology of metaphor for a better understanding of its operation. Based on the above theories, the present chapter proposes a cultural space for dynamic interpretation of metaphor on the part of metaphor users. I will also introduce the theory of intersubjective communication from Habermas as a philosophical solution for interpersonal understanding of metaphorical meaning. Structurally, the present chapter will include five sections. In the first section, I will discuss the subjective nature of metaphor from
the perspective of Peircean semiotics. In the second section, I will elaborate on Ersu Ding’s theory of metaphor with a special concentration on his concept of “arbitrary iconicity”. In the third section, I will elucidate Umberto Eco’s metaphorology through the relation between metaphor and culture and Eco’s key concept of encyclopedia. In the fourth section, I will discuss the relation between metaphor and intersubjectivity through a theory of intersubjective communication in Habermas as opposed to Lakoff/Johnson’s experientialism or embodied philosophy in the cognitive theory of metaphor. Finally, in the last section, I will examine the relation between metaphor and ideology.

3.1 The Subjective Nature of Metaphor

As mentioned earlier, it is the imputed imaginary quality on the object that makes metaphor different from other modes of iconicity. The “imputedness” here also indicates the inadequacy of distinguishing the three types of iconic signs merely from the perspective of similarity. It is true that similarity is the ground of the relation between an icon and its object, yet similarity alone is insufficient to form an actual iconic sign for to Peirce everything is similar to each other in certain respects (CP 2.276; Johansen 1993). Therefore, similarity should be specified in order to express clear meaning, which presupposes human factors. The following interpretation by Johansen on Nelson Goodman’s example for unspecified similarities is quite illuminating:

In “Seven Strictures on Similarity” (1970) Nelson Goodman gives the following example of what difficulties might be involved in using unspecified similarity as a criterion of classification. Goodman presents the following three figures (Fig. 19).

![Fig. 19]

Goodman’s point is that figure two is not topologically equivalent to figure one, but to figure three (Goodman 1972: 439). If we are less interested in geometrical topology than, for instance, in deciphering a handwritten manuscript, we would probably take figures one and two to be replicas of the legisign ‘B’, rather than figures two and three to be replicas of the legisign ‘O’ (Goodman would prefer to say ‘replicas of each other,’ but to discuss this would take us too far afield). Goodman’s example proves unequivocally that similarity, which as in Peirce is understood as the possession of common characteristics, is always similarity for a purpose. (Johansen 1993: 95-96)

For Peirce, similarity or iconicity also presuppose perception as a human factor:
Peirce stresses the relationship between iconic signs on the one hand and perception and experiential observation on the other. Not only are icons (i.e., iconic signs) said to be “percepts minus the insistency and percussivity of percepts” (Ms. 293, 1906: 9), but Peirce also identifies with an iconic sign the idea excited by an external reacting upon the brain (2.276). Although iconicity alone is certainly insufficient to make up perception, since an indexical element that represents the insistency of the object is needed, and although iconic signs need not be bound to actual perception, since they can be representations of memory or fantasies, iconicity and perception presuppose each other. (Johansen 1993: 96)

This significance of human perception and its specific operation is further elaborated by Ersu Ding (2014: 126) in the following insightful statement:

…the formation of signs depends on human beings’ ability to perceive connections between disparate phenomena around them. To borrow an example from Thomas Sebeok (1994: 4), when a dog stares at a person, growling, barking, head held high and neck arched, lips contracted vertically and teeth bared, ears erected and turned forward, he or she normally takes evasive action. The person involved does so because such expressions of a dog usually lead to an immediate attack on other animals or humans in the vicinity. In other words, the growling, barking, teeth-baring, and ear-erecting activities of a dog have been interpreted as a sign of danger, or more specifically, as an indexical sign where one thing points to another and therefore stands for another.

Moreover, by including the term of “interpretant” in his semiotic triad, Peirce emphasizes human factors in the signifying process. This concept originated from Peirce’s Lowell Lecture VII in the year 1866:

Indeed, the process of getting an equivalent for a term, is an identification of two terms previously diverse. It is in fact, the process of nutrition of terms by which they get all their life and vigor and by which they put forth an energy almost creative since it has the effect of reducing the chaos of ignorance to the cosmos of science. Each of these equivalents is the explication of what there is wrapt up in the primary - they are the surrogates, the interpreters of the original term. They are new bodies, animated by that same soul. I call them the interpretants of the term. And the quantity of these interpretants, I term the information or implication of the term. (WP 464-465)

As can be seen, the term interpretant presuppose a sign user. Although, for Peirce, there are distinctions between interpretant and meaning (CP 1.339; Johansen 1993), the term interpretant is closely related to meaning interpretation of a sign. The meaning of
linguistic signs is, for Peirce, dependent on “our tendencies to weld together qualities and our aptitudes to see resemblances, or, to use the received phrase, upon associations by similarity” (CP 3.419). The concepts of “tendency” and “aptitude” behind similarity also involve that of a human purpose. Indeed, the purpose of sign users is often decisive in sign interpretation, and Johansen (1993: 96) is essentially right in pointing out that similarity “is always similarity for a purpose”. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in actual signifying processes, the three kinds of representations are mutually transformable with the change of different interpretants, i.e., according to different purposes of sign users. In other words, whether a sign is an icon, or an index, or a symbol depends upon the interpretation of sign users. A woman’s photo, for instance, can be her icon, but for someone unfamiliar with her the photo might be an index indicating a camera. A physiognomist, on the other hand, will focus on the lady’s facial features in order to analyze her personality, during which the same photo serves as a symbol. In the eyes of the photographer who took the photo, it might go beyond its immediate object and represent a piece of art that shows a certain aspect of human beauty. As remarked by Peirce, “nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (CP 2.308). Indeed, we may also say that nothing is an icon unless it is interpreted as such, and thus nothing is a metaphor unless it is interpreted as a metaphor.

In addition to similarity or iconicity, Peirce is fully aware of the subjective nature of metaphor. Realizing the subjective nature of metaphor will be very crucial for us to establish a sound interpretive framework for metaphor. The fact that Lakoff/Johnson did not pay enough attention to this has had a very negative influence on our understanding of metaphor. Not only the meaning of metaphor, but also the meaning of all signs is largely dependent on human interpretation. Ellis (1997: 115) is right when he criticized the tendency of confining literary analysis to a limited number of conceptual framework: “Human life is a complex and diverse phenomenon. The number of factors and values at work in any human situation is always so large that no single factor or concept is likely to give one an adequate understanding of it.” The same is true for metaphor interpretation. Behind metaphor, there is human perception and human purpose. Given the complexity and diversity of things, events, and life situations, any single conceptual framework, like conceptual metaphors, used for the analysis of metaphor is insufficient because of its narrowness in nature. The lyric of a Chinese song, 高级动物 /gāojí dòngwù/ “Superior Animal”, by a famous Chinese rock star, 窦唯 /dǒu wéi/, vividly depicts the contradictory
and complicated nature of humankind through enumerating 32 individual adjectives, and it goes like this:

‘boring’, 变态 / bian tai / ‘abnormal’, 冒险 / mao xian / ‘adventurous’, 好色 / hao se /
cheng / ‘sincere’, 金钱 / jin qian / ‘moneyed’. (my translation)

The seemingly random enumeration in the lyric shows that there is no fixed order concerning our personalities. We should not even try to use one word or a single concept to summarize the character or phycological process of a person. Due to our diversified dispositions, we are born to define the world from various perspectives rather than from merely one angle through the operation of abductive reasoning. Moreover, we often project on things around us the contradictory and complicated qualities we discover in ourselves. Thus, we find different qualities in things through perception, and things around us are multi-faceted because our mind are multi-faceted, or because we endow those kinds of qualities to them. Similarly, during the process of metaphorization, we inject our emotions, feelings, and sensations into the metaphor we produce.

To take the formation of a literary metaphor in Hemingway’s The Old Man and the Sea as an example. In this novella, the images of lions appear five times among which the old man dreams of lions three times and thinks of lions twice. More importantly, lions appear every time the old man is about to go fishing in the sea and therefore needs spiritual encouragement. Whenever the old man needs a spiritual vehicle for his ideal and dream, the lions always show up. Such contiguous arrangement may arouse readers’ imagination so much that they can easily compare the old man with lions. The proximity of the two items, the lion and the old man, leads people to make comparison between the two, and then a metaphorical meaning arises. The author, however, had never made any direct metaphorical linkage, such as “the old man is a lion” or “the old man is courageous
as a lion”, between the two. It is, in fact, the repeated appearance of lions in crucial parts of the novella that helps readers link the lion-image with the protagonist. Thus, the lion may become a metaphorical representation of the old man. Of course, lions represent the old man not in all aspects but in some. Since the publication of this novella, many literary critics have attempted to account for the metaphorical meaning of the lion metaphor. In other words, they wanted to find out in which aspect or aspects the old man resembles lions. To some extent, the metaphorical meaning of “the old man is a lion” is very much open for interpretation. Over the years, different literary critics have offered various versions of interpretation. They examined the similarities between the lion and the old man from both physical and spiritual dimensions. Many argued that the lion represents the tough-guy image of the old man (Nie 2009), and that the old man resembles lions in courageousness and fearlessness. Of course, this interpretation does not come out of thin air. The old man’s courage is repeatedly depicted in many places of the work, through the boy’s praising words, his retrospection of early years, and vivid descriptions of his fighting on the sea, etc. Some scholars, however, have different ideas on the metaphorical meaning here. Nie (2009), for instance, proposed an ethical reading of this character, indicating that the image of lion represents the ethics of the animal world, the jungle law, the old man abides by. Nie (2009) held that, in nature, lion is on the top of the food chain, just like the shark in the sea. By associating the old man with the lion, the writer implies the old man’s intention to follow the jungle law and be a lion in the sea. Different from the former version of interpretation that focused on the lion’s feature of “courageousness and fearlessness”, Nie’s (2009) interpretation concentrated on the lion’s feature of “the vindicator of the jungle law” or “animal on the top of the food chain”. Thus, the two versions of interpretation are based on different perspectives of the interpreters.

Qian Zhongshu, a well-known contemporary Chinese scholar, also emphasized the subjective nature of metaphor and put forward a theory of “two handles of metaphor”:

A particular object or image, when employed as a metaphor, may be used positively as praise or negatively as censure, or it may be expressive of delight or revulsion, the connotation changing this way and that. Students of rhetoric and stylistics may want to take note of this. One of the Stoic philosophers observed, ‘Everything has two handles,’ and people take hold of whichever suits their needs. Taking a clue from this, and mindful of early Chinese uses of the same phrase (to designate rewards and punishments, two devices used by the ruler to maintain order), I might call the concept I wish to discuss ‘the two handles of metaphor.’ (Qian 1998: 122)
The import of this notion lies in its dialectic view on people’s diverse appropriations of things as metaphorical vehicles. On example provided by Qian on this point is people’s different interpretations of the same object in *The Book of Changes*. For the metaphor of “a sack tied up” under the entry of 坤/kun/, both Xunzi and *The Han Dynasty History* take it to be censorious and unfavorable, while Huo Xing adopted it as an auspicious expression (Qian 1998: 122). Another example can be found in the contradictory semantic features of the Chinese word 水/shui/ ‘water’. In Chinese language, we have 柔情似水/rou qing si shui/ ‘as tender and soft as water’, but we also have 水火无情/shui huo wu qing/ ‘fire and water have no mercy’. In other words, water can be tender and merciless at the same time. Moreover, in *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-Tzu sees in “water” the virtue of supreme good 上善若水/shang shan ruo shui/ (Lao-Tzu 1993: 8). Indeed, which sememe of the word “water” is put in the foreground depends on the metaphor user’s particular interpretation of a tenor. As averred by Ding (2007: 132), “the choice of a particular aspect of the vehicle as the meaning focus is closely linked to the aesthetic inclination of the metaphor user”. People, for instance, can observe various functions or traits in dogs, like minding the house, guarding property, fidelity, and being eatable. As a result, they become semantic features of a cultural unit called “dog”, from which we may choose to make metaphors according to different language situations. Thus, dogs can be metaphorized either positively or negatively. Take Chinese people’s opinion on dog and the use of dog in Chinese language for example. In Chinese society, people have complicated feelings on dogs, some of which are rather contradictory. On the one hand, we praise dogs for their loyalty, while, at the same time, we also disdain them for having no guts and do whatever they are told to do (Yi 2005: 227). The newly coined word 汪星人/wang xing ren/ extends people’s affection for dogs. Meanwhile, we also notice that there are many idioms in which dogs are used negatively as censure, such as 狗眼看人低/gou yan kan ren di/ ‘dog eyes see people low’ (the metaphorical use of the phrase “act like a snob”), 狼心狗肺/lang xin gou fei/ ‘rapacious as a wolf and savage as a cur’, 狗嘴吐不出象牙/gou zui tu bu chu xiang ya/ ‘you can never get ivory from a dog’s mouth’, 丧家之犬/sang jia zhi quan/ ‘stray cur’, 狗急跳墙/gou ji tiao qiang/ ‘a cornered dog will do something desperate’, 落水狗/luo shui gou/ ‘dog in the water’, 鸡鸣狗盗/ji ming gou dao/ ‘(ability to) crow like a cock and snatch like a dog’, 狐朋狗友/hu peng gou you/ ‘evil associates like foxes and dogs’. In modern Chinese
language, most idioms about “dog” 狗 /gou/ have a derogatory sense. Such complicated connotation of the animal dog is caused by diversified interpretations by language users. In other words, the semantic features of dog are diverse rather than unitary or monoacidic.

For the same thing or object, people of different times might also have different views, sometimes quite contradictory views (Qian 1998). For example, people in different historical periods see the bird raven (See Figure 1) quite differently. In Han dynasty, people saw it as a blessing or auspicious bird, while modern people see the bird as something that can bring bad luck. In ancient times, primitive Chinese worshiped ravens, for they believed ravens are the sunbird in mythology.

![Figure 1 Raven](image)

Another example can be found in the meaning change of the Chinese word 小姐 /xiao jie/ ‘Miss’ or ‘lady’. Historically, the word 小姐 /xiao jie/ has a derogatory sense. In the age of Song and Yuan Dynasties in China, the word 小姐 /xiao jie/ meant prostitutes or girls of mean parentage, while, during the period of the Republic of China or Min Guo (1912-1949), the word was used positively to refer to a daughter from an eminent family. In contemporary China, however, the old meaning of 小姐 /xiao jie/ in Song Dynasty was restored, because people use the word as a euphemism of sex workers in society. It should be pointed out that this usage is confined to the mainland China, while, in Taiwan and Hong Kong, people today still use the meaning that was pervasive in the Republican or Min Guo period. Therefore, the meaning change of 小姐 /xiao jie/ is actually dependent on a social convention sanctioned by members of the Chinese community. This further reveals that the evolution of word meaning is based on socio-historical contexts which vary from time to time. The historical disparity in people’s views on the same thing is thus formed. One important result of our different views and
perceptions on things is that, when we make metaphors, we highlight “one or several aspects of the vehicle that resemble or correspond to those in the target” (Ding 2007: 129). In other words, similarities in metaphor are only partial. Qian Zhongshu had made a concise but rather insightful remark on this point (Quoted from Ding 2007: 129): “When two things are similar, one is used as a metaphor for the other. However, the similarity between them is partial rather than complete. If they were completely alike, they would be two instances of the same thing; and if they were the same, there would be no need for metaphor.”

In fact, Lakoff/Johnson have also realized the importance of the subjects’ purposes and interests in human cognition (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 26), although such viewpoint, to some extent, contradicts their major philosophical position on metaphor: “Cognitive science and neuroscience suggest that the world as we know it contains no primary qualities in Locke’s sense, because the qualities of things as we can experience and comprehend them depend crucially on our neural makeup, our bodily interactions with them, and our purposes and interests.” Here, “our purposes and interests” reveal the subjective nature of metaphor.

When developing their theory, Lakoff/Johnson criticized both objectivist view of metaphor and subjectivist view of metaphor. It should be noted that emphasizing the subjective nature of metaphorization does not mean that we hold a subjectivist view. We stress the role of metaphor users because oftentimes it is ignored by many researchers, especially the cognitive linguists. It is true that meaning is where the subject meets the object, but it is also a result of intersubjective agreement. A study of metaphor will never be complete if we do not go beyond the ontological aspects of metaphor.

3.2 Ersu Ding’s Metaphor Theory

The metaphor theory proposed by Ersu Ding (2014, 2016) is based on his close scrutiny of sign relations and classification, mainly from the Peircean semiotic perspective. As we have already mentioned in chapter two, Ersu Ding further developed Peirce’s typology of the sign through elucidating the process of sign evolution and proposing a fresh concept of arbitrary iconicity. On sign classification, he has laid much importance on Peirce’s trichotomous division of the sign into icon, index, and symbol, which according to Peirce, is also the most important division of signs. Ding (2016: 167) has the following to say on this respect:
Peirce’s system of sign classification is on the whole rather cumbersome and for that reason has been largely ignored by semiotic scholars who are not Peirce specialists. The only exception to this state of limbo is his last trichotomy, which contains some very good insights and has had a huge influence on subsequent efforts at classifying signs. In fact, when scholars engage in sign classification today, they mostly adopt Peirce’s theoretical framework of dividing signs into three categories of icon, index, and symbol.

Despite its great influence, Ding (2016) found out that this classic Peircean trichotomy has a deficiency concerning the sequence of appearance of the tree correlates. In Peirce’s categorical analysis of the sign, icon was always discussed before index. Most scholars (Huang and Chen 2004; Zhao 2011) today tend to follow Peirce’s original sequence of discussion and talk about them in the sequence of icon, index, and symbol. Ding, however, puts forward an evolutionary order of the sign: index, icon, and symbol. This idea resonates with Rudi Keller’s categorical analysis of symptom, icon, and symbol. For Keller (1999), symptom, the Peircean index, can be imitated to form icons and thus precedes the latter in the process of sign evolution. As we have argued in the last chapter, the view of sign evolution is very crucial for us to develop a sound epistemology of metaphor in which indexical signs are iconified to form icons (metaphor) and iconic signs (metaphors) are lexicalized to form symbols. As we also elaborated in chapter two, this view of sign evolution casts serious doubts on Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor in which metaphors are confused with lexical items (symbols). Thus, through rethinking the relationship between Peirce’s trichotomous division into index, icon, and symbol, Ersu Ding’s theory of sign evolution has made a great leap on the theory of the sign in the Peircean tradition.

“Arbitrary iconicity” is a very important term in Ersu Ding’s theory of metaphor and meaning. The issue of arbitrariness is, actually, an old question in linguistics and philosophy, and the tension between arbitrariness and motivatedness has been always one of the focuses of many linguists and philosophers. Peirce once said: “All human thought and opinion contains an arbitrary, accidental element, dependent on the limitations in circumstance, power and bent of individual; an element of error, in short.” (CP 8.12) Ersu Ding discussed the issue in relation to the first principle of linguistic sign, i.e., the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified championed by the Swiss linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure. According to Ding (2014: 121), Saussure’s problem lies in that he is “too quick to dismiss the importance of the iconic
relationship between signs and things – a methodological move that has since caused a lot of controversy in the field of linguistics, particularly in China where the official language (Mandarin) is known for its prominent feature of iconicity at all levels”. Saussure’s problem might have been caused by his emphasis on European alphabetic languages. For him (Ding 2014), iconicity only exists in a very limited number of linguistic phenomena like onomatopoeia and interjections, and can thus be ignored, or at least seen as irrelevant to the main task of language study. In his seminal essay “Ubiquitous but arbitrary iconicity,” Ding (2014: 121) makes the following remark:

After nearly a century of continuous debate, the majority of scholars today agree with Saussure’s view that the linguistic sign is arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic relationship between words and things or states of affairs, but his dismissal of iconicity as insignificant is open to criticism on several accounts. First, cross-language variations of onomatopoeia and interjections cannot take away the fact that there exist ubiquitous iconic connections between words and things, be they in the form of “tick tock,” “katchin katchin” or “dī dā.” Second, the phenomenon of iconicity far exceeds the mere categories of onomatopoeia and interjections and plays a much greater role in language than Saussure gives it credit for. In addition to the phonetically motivated signs that Saussure mentions, there are also iconic expressions at other levels of language, particularly in the area of lexical connotation where similarity-based metaphors (alongside metonymies which are based on spatial, temporal as well as logical contiguity) serve not only as an effective means of communication but also as a major engine for language change.

Ding (2014) then employed ample examples from pictophonetic languages including Chinese language and Egyptian language, which include “phonaesthetic iconicity” and “pictographic iconicity” or “image iconicity”, to demonstrate the ubiquity of iconicity in linguistic signs. Now, here comes a very crucial question: Does ubiquitous iconicity in language contradicts the arbitrary nature of linguistic sign? Ding’s answer is no. On the contrary, he believes that arbitrariness and motivatedness co-exists in language, which means that “iconic signs are also arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic or essential link between an icon and its referent” (Ding 2014: 127). Ding further pointed out that motivatedness in pictophonetic characters is not based on an absolute relation, but varies a great deal from one culture to another.

It also should be pointed out that most of Chinese characters were icons only at the initial stage when they were formed. Through more than two thousand years of development, those Chinese iconic characters have been symbolized as a result of sign
evolution, so much so that when people use them today, there are no iconic association in the mind. In other words, modern Chinese characters are also Peircean symbols just as alphabetic words in western languages. We shall hear what Ding (2014: 125) has to say on this respect:

This is not to say that Chinese is an iconic language as opposed to English or French, which are not. On the contrary, the interpretative movement from modern Chinese characters to their corresponding meanings is no longer based on the similarity between their forms and extralinguistic objects or situations but rather on the linguistic convention that has been established among its users. It is only after the conscious and professional efforts of the linguist that the iconicity hidden underneath those characters is revealed.

Back to the question of arbitrariness in icons. The most salient feature of iconic signs is, perhaps, motivation, i.e., the similarity between iconic representamen and the object it refers to. While accepting the prominent motivatedness in icons, we may also realize, at the same time, that the relationship between the signifier and signified of an icon, or between iconic representamen and interpretant, is not an intrinsic one. We shall hear from Ding (2014: 127) again:

Last but not least, we have seen from the process of sign evolution discussed above that the concept of arbitrariness has less to do with whether or not a sign is motivated (symbolization of icons and re-iconification of symbols have made these two categories mutually transformable) than with how a segment of the natural or social world can be semiotized differently in unrelated sign systems. This is to say that iconic signs are also arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic or essential link between an icon and its referent.

Unlike the aspect of likeness in icon which is quite evident, the arbitrary aspect in icon is much more latent. The pervasive arbitrariness in iconic signs reveals the subjective nature of iconic representation, which means that the role of human subjects is always vital for any signifying process. Ding’s study of pictophonetic characters in different linguistic systems clearly demonstrates that which specific quality of an iconic character is chosen to represent the entire object differs from language to language and from culture to culture. One case of transliteration can exemplify arbitrary iconicity: the English word “cool” is translated into the Chinese word “酷” /ku/. The translation is based on the same pronunciation between the two words, i.e., the similarity between /ku:l/ in English and /ku/ in Chinese. However, there are other words that have the same pronunciation as
“cool”, such as 库 /ku/, 裤 /ku/, and 纽 /ku/, which are also homophones of “cool”. Just like other Chinese homophones of cool, the word 酷 /ku/, although polysemous, has completely different meanings (like cruel and harsh) with that of “cool” in English. The fact that people choose 酷 /ku/, rather than 库 /ku/, 裤 /ku/, or 纽 /ku/, to represent the meaning of the English word “cool” might be based on some individualized or cultural considerations which is never known to us, but it all the same reveals the arbitrary nature of the iconic representation.

The same rule applies to metaphor. The arbitrariness of iconic representation enables metaphor users to have freedom in selecting vehicles, hence opportunities for meaning creation. Thus, through his concept of arbitrary iconicity, Ersu Ding (2010, 2014) stresses in true Peircean spirit the subjective nature of metaphorization and tries to shift our attention away from Lakoff/Johnson’s abstract epistemological Gestalt to the specific cultural contexts in which metaphors occur. Recognizing the arbitrariness in iconicity can certainly help us achieve a better understanding of metaphor: Despite the similarity they share, the link between a tenor and a chosen metaphorical vehicle is still arbitrary. Therefore, we may put forward the concept of “arbitrary metaphoricity” to specifically refer to the arbitrariness in metaphor. After presenting some metaphorical equivalents that coincidently exist in both Chinese and English languages, Ding (2010: 104) makes an important statement on arbitrary metaphoricity:

The important point to be emphasized here is that these metaphorical expressions are not concrete manifestations of some pre-existing universal conceptual metaphors; rather, they are the results of arbitrary pairing of a metaphorical signifier with a metaphorical signified that happen to be identical or similar across two languages. It is astonishing how Saussure’s principle of linguistic arbitrariness has taken root in our mind when we discuss the relationship between a signifier and a signified at the literal level but is completely forgotten when we talk about the link between a signifier and a signified at the metaphorical level.

In addition to this, even within one language, a metaphorical vehicle is often employed to represent different tenors that sometimes contain opposite meanings. Ding (2008, 2010) adopts the term “vehicular multivalency” to refer to the polysemous nature of metaphorical vehicles, casting doubt on the cognitive theory of metaphor. Ding (2008, 2010) further developed the notion of “Two Handles and Several Sides of metaphor” ‘两柄多边论’ /liang bing duo bian lun/ by Qian Zhongshu, the late well-known Chinese scholar whose original statement on metaphor is given below:

126
Metaphors may have two handles, but they also have several sides. Now, a certain thing may be one, but its qualities and capabilities are likely to be many. Consequently, the one thing is not restricted to one use or one effect. Those who employ a figure of speech may do so with different aspects in mind or with a different feature in view, so that even when the denotatum is the same the significatum will vary. That is why a single image may fulfill several different purposes or meanings even while it remains the same. (Qian 1998: 125)


Another example of vehicular multivalency in which one metaphorical vehicle can be adopted to metaphorize multiple kinds of tenors can be found in the following table:

Table 2. Examples of water-related metaphors (Quoted in Feng 2002: 309, Ding’s translation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Vehicle</th>
<th>Ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The friendship of a gentleman is insipid as water. (Zhuangzi)</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>being clean and not sticky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender feelings are like water; good times are like a dream. (Qingguan, Song Dynasty)</td>
<td>affection, love</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>being inseparable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The long night is like deep water. (Qingguan, Song Dynasty)</td>
<td>Long night</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>being long and deep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a matter of common regret that human mind is not calm as water and great waves could suddenly arise for no good reasons. (Liu Yuxi, Tang Dynasty)</td>
<td>Human mind</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>being calm and level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He kept looking anxiously until the glistening autumn waters dried up. (Wang Shifu, Yuan Dynasty)</td>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>having sparkles and being crystal clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watery moonlight fell upon the black coat. (Lu Xun)</td>
<td>Moonlight</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>being cold and bright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nearly cloudless blue sky was water-like. (Liu Yong, Song Dynasty)</td>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>being transparent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The bamboo mat looks like water and the mosquito net looks like smoke. (Su Shi, Song Dynasty)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bamboo mat</th>
<th>water</th>
<th>undulating and creating ripples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Although silent, the strong cavalry looks like water. (Lu You, Song Dynasty)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>columns of horses and soldiers</th>
<th>water</th>
<th>moving rapidly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Should I be asked how much anguish I have found, strange! It is like flowing water, eastward bound. (Li Yu, the Five Dynasties)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>anxiety and distress</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>going a long distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Qian’s notion of “two handles” of metaphor vividly demonstrates the diversity of metaphorical vehicles: vehicular diversity and vehicular multivalency which refers to the phenomenon that a single tenor can have multiple vehicles respectively representing one of its semantic features. This notion can be exemplified by the way people metaphorize the word “life”. For Lakoff/Johnson (2003[1980]), LIFE IS A STORY and LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME are conceptual metaphors that have priority over other metaphorical expressions related with the topic of life. For real language users, however, life as topic can be associated to “innumerous other vehicles” (Ding 2007: 124), and metaphorical vehicles like “story” and “gambling game” are merely two very ordinary vehicles of life. Thus, we frequently hear people talk about life through the metaphorical expressions listed below:

- life IS drama
- life IS book
- life IS poetry
- life IS tea
- life IS water
- life IS lamp
- life IS porcelain
- life IS bridge
- life IS flax
- life IS flower
- life IS smoke
The enumeration can go on and on with nearly no constraints, demonstrating the countless number of potential vehicles for the tenor “life”. In fact, the phenomenon of “vehicular diversity” is prevalent in almost all topics in our daily communication. Let us take the everlasting topic of marriage for another example. In real life situations, marriage is also frequently discussed by many, and the metaphor we use to describe it can be well related with but not necessarily confined to the following vehicles:
– a magician (who turns a freezing house into a warm home)

– Santa Claus (who brings to the couple nice gifts in the form of children)

– a judge (who while giving one partner life imprisonment makes the other a permanent warden)

– a politician (who sometime resorts to lying in order to keep a respectable facade)

– a miser (who refuses to share any leftover of affection with a third party)

– a beautician (who is capable of bringing youthful radiance back onto a time-worn face) – a poet (except that his sentimental subject matters have become daily chores)

– an actor (who always savors his own sadness and joy through other people’s stories)

– a Confucian businessman (who inevitably engages in some selfish dealings behind the facade of respectability)

– a thief (who steals every bit of love from the couple)

– a philosopher (who often analyze himself like this: 99% of what flows in my body is the blood of a devil and the rest is the tears of an angel)

– a pair of shoes (and only the feet that wear them know whether or not they are comfortable)

– a book (that always begins with beautiful poems but fades into insipid prose thereafter) – monochromatic; if it is red, green is not tolerated; if it is yellow, blue cannot exist

– a lottery ticket (with which the man bets on satisfaction and the woman on happiness)

– a besieged fortress; (those who are outside it want to get in and those who are inside want to get out)

– a zipper (which always obtains harmony through friction)

– a river (where there are beautiful waves that you can see as well as huge whirlpools that you cannot see) (Ji 2002: 15, Ding’s translation

As contended by Ding (2007: 128), one advantage of vehicular diversity lies in that “it enables a language community to look at things or states of affair from multiple perspectives”.

Even in the list of conceptual metaphor patterns proposed by Lakoff/Johnson, one metaphorical tenor may have diverse vehicles and one vehicle may also represent different tenors, proving the existence of vehicular diversity and multivalency in
metaphor. For instance, as a metaphorical vehicle in orientational metaphors, “up” can be employed to describe many tenors such as “happy”, “good”, “unknown”, “more”, “finished”, and “rational” among which no coherence in meaning can be found.

As mentioned earlier, the fact of arbitrary metaphoricity hit the conceptual metaphor theory right on the head. Lakoff/Johnson believe that the iconic relation between Love and Journey is fundamental in the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, which is not true. In real language situations, the right side of the equation may be replaced by a nearly unlimited number of other things, events, or life situations, such as “<drama>, <a book>, <poetry>, <a song>, <tea>, <water>, <a lamp>, <porcelain>, <a bridge>, <flax>, <flower>, <smoke>, <a dream>, <fantasy>, <a bubble>, <a shadow>, <a picture>, <a riddle>, <fog>, <huge waves>, <wine>, <electricity>, <wind>, <fire>, <a poker game>, <a chess game>, <a dinner party>, <stars and constellations>, <duckweed>, <stock market>, <dust>, <long-distance running>, <a bus ride>, <morning dew>, <flower in a mirror>, <moon reflection in the water>” (Ding 2010: 93), and so on. One of Bei Dao’s poem may further prove our point here. In the poem entitled A Bouquet, the Chinese poet depicted “love” through a number of metaphorical vehicles: <a bay>, <a sail>, <the two faithful ends of a rope>, <a fountain, a wind>, <a shrill childhood cry>, <a picture frame>, <a window>, <a field covered with wild flowers>, <a breath>, <a bed>, <a night that keeps the stars company>, <a calendar>, <a compass>, <a ray of light that slips through the gloom>, <a resume>, <a bookmark>, <a preface that comes at the end>, <a gauze curtain>, <a mist>, <a lamp shining into my drams>, <a bamboo flute>, <a wordless song>, <a closed eyelid carved in stone>, <a chasm>, <a pool>, <an abyss plunging down>, <a balustrade>, <a wall>, <an eternal pattern on a shield>. (Bei Dao 1986: 36-37, my translation) As shown in the above examples, love can be metaphoizaed by almost everything beyond the scope of any conceptual metaphor Lakoff/Johnson propose. Once again, arbitrary metaphoricity reveals the superfluousness of Lakoff/Johnson’s conceptual metaphors.

As mentioned in the previous section, things might be interpreted differently from culture to culture and from region to region (Qian 1998; Ding 2010). And the same thing might be interpreted quite differently in different historical periods. All these contribute to our diversified views on things and give rise to vehicular diversity and multivalency in metaphor, which validates the theory of arbitrary metaphoricity and arbitrary iconicity. Although the linkage between a metaphorical signifier and a metaphorical signified is
arbitrary in nature, the whole process of metaphorization reveals the value orientation of
the group of people who use them (Ding 2009; Ding 2010). Most of the time, connections
between a tenor and a vehicle represent collective memory of a group of sign users, and
that is why Ding (2010) suggests that we should reconnect the relation between metaphor
and culture. In one of his articles entitled “Metaphor and Culture”, Ding (2009; 2010)
made a comprehensive examination of metaphorical patterns in the Chinese culture,
indicating a promising direction for the future study of metaphor.

In addition to the concept of arbitrary iconicity, Ding (2016: 168) further put
forward the concept of arbitrary indexicality in his newly published article “Rethinking
the Peircean trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol”.

Whatever circumstance they are in, indexical signs are born out of their users’
interpretations or judgments of the relationship between things or events. If event A
frequently occurs prior to event B, one could interpret the former as an indexical
sign of the latter as in the case of dark cloud leading to rain. One could also perform
his/her deduction inversely in which case B becomes an indexical sign of A. For
example, because fire often precedes smoke in time, if one sees smoke in a certain
place, he/she could conclude from this that there was a fire in the same location
earlier. Many semioticians view such a relationship as one of cause and effect, which
is not exactly the case because a dark cloud does not always lead to rain and smoke
is not necessarily caused by a preceding fire.

Another example may be found in the indexical signs of a ship. The keel is usually
adopted by English users to represent a ship as is shown in “a thousand keels approached
the shore”. In other words, keel as a part is an index of ship as a whole. Meanwhile,
English speakers also use “sail” to represent ship, as reflected in the phrase “in sail” or
“set sail”. In Chinese, “sail” is also more often used to represent ship as is revealed in the
expression “千帆竞渡” /qian fan jing du/ ‘A thousand sails are competing in the boat
race’. Obviously, which exact part might be adopted to serve as an index of the whole is
also arbitrary. In ancient time, people used horses as an important means of transportation.
Those who rode strong horses and wore light fur were considered as being rich and noble.
Confucius used “肥马轻裘” /fei ma qing qiu/ ‘on strong horses and in light fur’ to
describe one of his disciples. Such expression is frequently adopted by many other people,
especially the literati. Gradually, strong horse and light fur are symbolized and become
an idiom in Chinese. People in the 21st century do not use horses as their major means
of transportation. Instead, they use cars. Luxurious cars thus replace strong horses in
representing great fortune. If Confucius lives in 21st century, it is very likely that he will use fancy car instead of strong horse to represent richness and luxury. Ding (2016: 168-169) himself has given us a rather extreme example of arbitrary indexicality:

An extreme example of the arbitrariness of indexicality comes from the dynastic histories of ancient China where, even though the emperor held supreme power, his courtiers could still exert some moral influence over him through a semiotic theory of “telepathy between humans and nature” (天人感应). According to such a theory, if an emperor misconducts himself, he would lose the Mandate of Heaven, resulting in huge and frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and droughts (Fairbank and Goldman 2006: 48). For us moderns, there is no testable causal connection between the moral conduct of a person and the natural phenomena that transpire afterwards, but that did not prevent ancient Chinese scholars from interpreting the latter as indexical signs of the former. The story proves once again that indexical signs are the results of making arbitrary connections between things and events by sign users and not all connections are equally convincing in terms of general acceptability.

Another good example for arbitrary indexicality can be found in the formation of the Chinese Zodiac (See Figure 2). The Chinese Zodiac is a classification scheme that assigns an animal to each year in a repeating 12-year cycle. It derives from the Ancient Five Elements Theory, and every sign in Chinese culture is composed by the five elements.

![Figure 2. The Chinese Zodiac](image)

The pairing between each animal and its denotatum, the earthly branch, is shown as follows:
Some people assume that the formation of the Chinese Zodiac is based on a certain similarity between each animal and its corresponding earthly branch. However, according to the existing literature, we cannot find any reliable evidence that can justify an iconic relation between them. In fact, the formation of the Chinese Zodiac is not based on similarity but contiguity. Thus, the relation between the chosen animal and its corresponding earthly branch is indexical. At the initial stage of the formation of Zodiac, ancient fortune-tellers randomly picked 12 animals they were familiar with to represent each of the earthly branch in a 12-year circle. They are picked because all of them were very closely related to farming activities in an agricultural culture. The only imaginative animal, Dragon or Long, is, in fact, also relative to farming, for Dragon is in charge of rain in Chinese mythology. Perhaps, that is the reason why fish was not picked, since fish is mainly rooted in oceanic culture. However, there is no reason to explain why other animals, like duck and donkey, of the farming culture were not chosen as a symbol. In this sense, it is safe to say that, although the relation between each animal and the earthly branch it represents is generally based on contiguity, the relation between each pair is still not intrinsic but arbitrary. In other words, each animal can be replaced by many other ones in our life, and the choosing of them is rather haphazard. After its formation, people begin to discover similarities between the two items in each pair. Our feelings on each
of the 12 animals might differ very much from one another, but, in each year, we can always find some way to interpret the sign positively. One important reason might be that zodiac animal also represent Chinese people’s year of birth, and, when we celebrate our year of birth, our affection is also transferred to the animal representing the year. In fact, given the numerous semantic features we can discover in things, it is not at all difficult for us to find positive features in each animal and relate them with the values we treasure. Gradually, some similarities between the animal and its denotatum become more and more stable, and these indices are thus iconified in Chinese culture. Take the first animal “rat” for example. In real life, they are often believed to be very disgusting animals. As a zodiac sign, however, rat receives praise from Chinese people. It is true that rats steal food, but they store some food for future consumption and thus are viewed as good at managing fortunes. In this way, Chinese people connect rats with the value of fortune. Another feature people get from rats is that they reproduce fast. In China, we deem it a happy thing to have many children and grandchildren. Indeed, we human beings are very good at creating a self-consistent bubble to live in. We can always find a reason to like something, or to hate something, thanks to our ability in abductive reasoning. We never live by any conceptual metaphors. If there is something we live by, it should be the abductive reasoning that underlies the whole process. Similarly, indexical vehicles adopted in the Chinese 八卦 /ba gua/ ‘the Eight Diagrams’ (eight combinations of three whole or broken lines formerly used in divination) in The Book of Changes are also as arbitrary as the indexical relations in Chinese Zodiac.

In a nutshell, the facts of arbitrary iconicity, arbitrary metaphoricity, and arbitrary indexicality further prove that the motivations in icons and indices are not based on absolute relations, and the fact that these indices and iconic signs are motivated “does not in the least contradict the general principle of the arbitrariness of signs” (Ding 2014: 134); rather arbitrariness and motivatedness coexist in our language and sign system.

3.3 Umberto Eco’s Metaphorology

The Italian scholar Umberto Eco is an eminent theorist of semiotics who aims to establish a general and rigorous theory able to explain the mechanisms of signification. Like Ersu Ding, Umberto Eco also holds a Peircean view on metaphor. And from the following short remark by him, we can grasp his general idea in this respect:

The “most luminous and therefore the most necessary and frequent” (Vico) of all tropes, the metaphor, defies every encyclopedic entry. It has been the object of
philosophical, linguistic, aesthetic, and psychological reflection since the beginning
of time. (Eco 1984: 86)

For Eco, the study of metaphor is an interdisciplinary enterprise that embraces nearly all
subjects in the field of humanities. Habitually, he (Eco 1984: 88) would like to call the
enterprise of metaphor study “metaphorology”, and his comments or criticism on the
western discourse of metaphor in general was quite illuminating:

Not the least of the contradictions encountered in a metaphorology is that, of the
thousands and thousands of pages written about the metaphor, few add anything of
substance to the first two or three fundamental concepts stated by Aristotle. In effect,
very little has been said about a phenomenon concerning which, it seems, there is
everything to say. The chronicle of the discussion on metaphors is the chronicle of
a series of variations on a few tautologies, perhaps on a single one: “A metaphor is
that artifice which permits one to speak metaphorically.” Some of these variations,
however, constitute an ‘epistemic break’, allowing the concepts to drift toward new
territories – ever so slightly, but just enough. It is with these variations that we shall
be concerned.

For Eco, most theorists of metaphorology are only repeating or at best making footnotes
on major concepts or problems raised by Aristotle, while few of them make real insights
into the core issue of metaphor. Eco (1984) made such comments on the basis of a careful
scrutiny of the western discourse of metaphor developed from Aristotle to Vico, with an
attempt to grasp the real impulse of metaphor. While making the above remark, Eco was
also quite aware of the theoretical dilemma the western academia is confronting:

Every discourse on metaphor originates in a radical choice: either (a) language is by
nature, and originally, metaphorical, and the mechanism of metaphor establishes
linguistic activity, every rule or convention arising thereafter in order to discipline,
to reduce (and impoverish) the metaphorizing potential that defines man as a
symbolic animal: or (b) language (and every other semiotic system) is a rule-
governed mechanism, a predictive machine that says which phrases can be generated
and which not, and which from those able to be generated are ‘good’ or ‘correct’, or
endowed with sense; a machine with regard to which the metaphor constitutes a
breakdown, a malfunction, an unaccountable outcome, but at the same time the drive
toward linguistic renewal. (Eco 1984: 88)

The two radical views on language and metaphor depict the tension between literal
meaning and metaphorical meaning. However, the point is that both views in the above
statement saw metaphor from inside of the language system, and none of them was able to see metaphor from outside. Eco (1976: 61) thus argues in his theory of codes:

> Within the theory of codes it is unnecessary to resort to the notion of extension, nor to that of possible worlds; the codes, insofar as they are accepted by a society, set up a ‘cultural’ world which is neither actual nor possible in the ontological sense; its existence is linked to a cultural order, which is the way in which a society thinks, speaks and, while speaking, explains the ‘purport’ of thought through other thoughts.

In order to get out of the dilemma perplexing western discourse of metaphor, Eco suggested that we have an external view to see metaphor from a cultural context in which encyclopedia knowledge of members of the culture community plays a vital role for metaphor production. By doing this, he also emphasized the subjective nature of metaphor. In other words, Umberto Eco (1976, 1984) aimed to establish a cultural framework for metaphor study. As an interactionalist, he criticized the traditional ontological view of metaphor who confined their discussion on ontological similarity in metaphor, and contended, like Ersu Ding, that we should go beyond the ontology of metaphor to meet the cultural dimension of metaphor. His point in this respect was well summarized by Bent Sørensen (2011: 152-153):

> Eco stresses that similarity has nothing to do with presumed ontological relations or the structure of reality itself. Similarity is coherent, not motivated, and depends only on a set of rules and conventions of a symbolic character. Or in other words, similarity is determined culturally – with close affinity to the nominalistic thesis. Consequently, if we want to be able to analyze and understand the concept of similarity we must not make any recourse to the world of objects and things; similarity is a purely semiotical matter according to Eco. This is also in consistence with the fact that Eco does not grant the referent any place in his definition of the sign; he even speaks of the “referential fallacy”, that is, the erroneous assumption that the content of an expression has anything to do with a corresponding referent. Eco does not want to deny the existence of objects in an extra-semiotic world, but what he wants is to avoid making an ontological commitment of any sort.

Evidently, for Eco, similarity is a cultural product, and thus the only effective way of examining it is in the cultural framework. Of course, Eco’s awareness of metaphor in culture did not come out of thin air; rather, it was a result of integrating different conceptions and theories of other thinkers, especially notions of Vico and Peirce. In fact, Eco based his theory of meaning and a general theory of the sign mainly on the Peircean semiotics, and many of Eco’s important concepts are, in fact, developed from the two
key Peircean concepts of “interpretant” and the “unlimited semiosis”. There is no exception for his metaphorology, and we explain them one by one in this section.

To begin with, Eco developed a cultural framework for metaphor interpretation from the Peircean concepts of “interpretant” and “community”. The term “interpretant” in Peirce consists of not only the immediate receiver (including self-interpretation by the sign producer) of the sign but also any possible interpreter in the process of unlimited semiosis. As we have discussed in section one of this chapter, interpretant presupposes human factors or sign users. Interpretant refers to the idea and information people get from a sign on the basis of not only individual knowledge but also common knowledge of a group in a society. In other words, the term interpretant is socio-culturally defined. In addition to interpretant, Peirce adopts the philosophical term “community” (CP 2.654; CP 5.311; CP 8.101; cf. Liszka 1996: 83-88) to refer to the actual space where reality is acknowledged and where people of the same culture reach agreement through negotiation and communication with the help of signs. We shall have a look at what Peirce has to say on this respect:

The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge. … And so those two series of cognition -- the real and the unreal -- consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to re-affirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied. (CP 5.311)

For Peirce, a community is where knowledge increases and mutual agreements among members are made. The following exposition about the conditions of the Peircean “community” by Liszka (1996: 83) may help us to achieve a better understanding of the somewhat abstract concept by Peirce:

In one sense, then, a community requires that its members be capable of coming into an immediate or mediate intellectual relation; in other words, the first formal condition of having a community is that its members are capable of mediate or sign-interpreting capacity to some degree. Second, there must be some connection or relation, especially a communicative one, between such sign users. Third, this passage suggests that this connection or relation must be established as “ours” in some sense, that is, there must be some identification with this relation on the part of those so related. The first condition allows the possibility of the second, since
signs enable us to transform objects or events into meanings, which in turn allow the possibility of something being shared and shared in a communicative fashion. The second condition allows for the possibility of the third, since identifying shared meanings as “ours” assumes that there is, first of all, something that can be shared.

For Peirce, a sign is not an isolated term; rather, it is situated in the process of unlimited semiosis. Similarly, a sign-interpreting agency or a sign user is always “intrinsically related to other sign users. Sign and community are inherently correlative.” (Liszka 1996: 84) In a secular sense, therefore, the Peircean community refers to the cultural community for sign users.

Vico’s concept of common sense is also important for the development of Eco’s cultural framework. For Vico (1948: 57), common sense is “judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the whole human race”. Vico’s common sense also serves as the source of metaphorical thinking and understanding. The following remark elucidates the position of common sense in Vico’s theory of memory and imagination:

A topos in Vico’s sense is brought about by a metaphor conceived as an imaginative universal. Sensory topics are the primordial places, or loci, of the human mind. They make up its common sense, its sensus communis. In the Study Methods Vico says that the young must be educated in memory and imagination so that they can acquire common sense. Without common sense there is no basis for the mind to bring forth the basis of arguments. (Verene 1981: 175)

Eco (1984) also understood Vico’s theory of metaphor from a cultural perspective, and he made a rather concise but accurate comment on his compatriot:

… Vico’s semiotic resembles, more than an aesthetics of ineffable creativity, a cultural anthropology that recognizes the categorical indices on which metaphors are based, indices whose historical conditions, birth, and variety it researches even as it explores the variety of brave deeds, of medallions, and of fables. (Eco 1984: 108)

Based on the theories of Vico and Peirce, Eco (1984) further established his own theory of meaning: a theory of encyclopedia. He sees interpretation of signs as an open-ended process that involves knowledge of all kinds. Following Peirce, he contends that the semiotic triad is a recursive process that gives rise to a sequence of sign functions and involves our encyclopedic knowledge. Such shared encyclopedic knowledge formed
during the process of semiosis resembles the aforementioned “common sense” in Vico (1948). Eco (1984: 68) thus elaborated the concept “encyclopedia” as follows:

If a dictionary is a disguised encyclopedia, then the only possible representation of the content of a given lexical item cannot be provided except in terms of an encyclopedia. If the so-called universals or metatheoretical constructs that work as markers within a dictionary-like representation are mere linguistic labels that cover more synthetic properties, an encyclopedia-like representation assumes that the representation of the content takes place only by means of interpretants in a process of unlimited semiosis. These interpretants being in their turn interpretable, there is no bidimensional tree able to represent the global semantic competence of a given culture.

As elaborated in the above statement, the semiotic encyclopedia is situated in the unlimited semiosis in the Peircean sense. In fact, encyclopedia is developed from various forms of interpretant in the process of semiosis. Therefore, it is necessary for us to take a close look at this key term in Peircean semiotics.

Peirce developed the term “semeiosis” (original spelling by Peirce) from a Greek treatise of the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus in which “semeiosis” was frequently referred to (Fisch 1978: 40-41). The word “semeiosis” is a derivation from the Greek verb “semeio” which means “to mark”, and the Greek suffix “-sis” means “act, action, activity, or process of” (Fisch 1978: 41); thus, the derivation refers to any form of activity, conduct, or process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. Put very briefly, semeiosis is sign action, sign process, or sign-interpretation. Peirce understands semeiosis in Philodemus’ treatise from either of the two aspects: “(1) from the side of the sign, as sign action, the functioning of a sign, or (2) from the side of the interpretant, as sign-interpreting or inferring from signs.” (Fisch 1978: 41) Peircean semiotics entails the two aspects in one same semeiosis: “To act as a sign is to determine an interpretant.” (Fisch 1978: 41) Although Peirce prefers the word “semeiosis”, his successors like Eco also use the word “semiosis” to designate the same concept. According to Peirce, semiosis is “an action, or influence, which is, or involves, an operation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into an action between pairs” (CP 5.484). What to Peirce is most important is that semiosis contains logical processes of inferences. Johansen (1993) has provided us with an insightful summary in terms of the whole process: “Since each sign interprets the previous sign, each is at the same time an interpretant of the sign prior to it
and a sign interpreted by a subsequent sign.” (Johansen 1993: 80) To put it another way, the knowledge we gain from understanding the meaning of a certain thing or the significance of an event can serve as the experience or preunderstanding of our subsequent activities. Such unlimited semiosis is the very mechanism that processes meaning, concepts, knowledge, and experience at the same time so as to demonstrate the actual process of our understanding.

The process of semiosis begins the time we perceive the world, and, as defined by Peirce, it results in the growth of knowledge. Put differently, through his theory of semiosis, Peirce aims to elucidate the process of human communication and knowledge growth (Johansen 1993). By contending “a sign is something by knowing which we know something more” (CP 8.332), Peirce describes sign as the only medium through which we can get new knowledge. In other words, the way we gain new knowledge is fundamentally semiotic, or to be more exact, iconic (metaphorical). Thus, for Eco, one important function of metaphor is that it adds fresh meaning and new knowledge to our life, and he called this the cognitive value of metaphor.

And, finally, we must ask whether the metaphor is an expressive mode with cognitive value. As an ornament, the metaphor is of no interest to us, because, if it says more pleasantly that which can be said otherwise, then it could be explained wholly within the scope of a semantics of denotation. We are interested in the metaphor as an additive, not substitutive, instrument of knowledge. (Eco 1984: 89)

Through the concept of encyclopedia, Eco demonstrated how various kinds of interpretants in the unlimited semiosis actually work. Indeed, the notion of encyclopedia represents “the global semantic competence of a given culture”, and it is thus “multidimensional” rather than “bidimensional” (Eco 1984: 68). As a core concept in Eco’s theory of meaning, encyclopedia is defined as being opposed to the other concept “dictionary”. Eco (2014: 3) further elaborated the distinction between dictionary meaning and encyclopedia meaning.

In defining a term (and its corresponding concept), the dictionary model is expected to take into account only those properties necessary and sufficient to distinguish that particular concept from others; in other words, it ought to contain only those properties defined by Kant as analytical (analytical being that a priori judgment in which the concept functioning as predicate can be deduced from the definition of the subject). Thus the analytical properties of dog would be ANIMAL, MAMMAL, and CANINE (on the basis of which a dog is distinguishable from a cat, and it is
logically incorrect and semantically inaccurate to say of something that it is a dog but it is not an animal). This definition does not assign to the dog the properties of barking or being domesticated: these are not necessary properties (because there may be dogs incapable of barking and/or hostile to man) and are not part of our knowledge of a language but of our knowledge of the world. They are therefore matter for the encyclopedia.

As shown in the above statement, unlike the fairly restricted dictionary meaning, encyclopedia in Eco represents “the sum total of knowledge” (Eco 2014: 22) we possess about the world. It should be pointed out that Eco’s semiotic conception of encyclopedia and dictionary are different from the encyclopedia and dictionary “in the flesh”, i.e., the ones in our library or bookshelf, in that, oftentimes, dictionary “in the flesh” is not composed according to the dictionary model. Through the concepts of dictionary and encyclopedia, Eco stresses two different models of semantic representation. The notions have been adopted by various disciplines (like semiotics, psychology, linguistics, the cognitive sciences, and the philosophy of language) “to identify two models of semantic representation, models that in turn refer back to a general representation of knowledge and/or the world” (Eco 2014: 3).

Eco (2014) employed the concept “tree” to represent his notion of dictionary and the concept “labyrinth” to represent his notion of encyclopedia. He described the network of the “labyrinth” as a multidimensional polygon. For Eco (1984: 81), “the best image” of the net of encyclopedia or the “labyrinth” is a rhizome (See Figure 3).

![Figure 3. The Rhizome](image)

The philosophical concept of rhizome was first defined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their collaborated book *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).
Based on Deleuze and Guattari’s exposition, Eco (1984: 81-82) further specified the features of a rhizome:

The characteristics of a rhizomatic structure are the following: (a) Every point of the rhizome can and must be connected with every other point. (b) There are no points or positions in a rhizome; there are only lines … (c) A rhizome can be broken off at any point and reconnected following one of its own lines. (d) The rhizome is antigenealogical. (e) The rhizome has its own outside with which it makes another rhizome; therefore, a rhizomatic whole has neither outside nor inside. (f) A rhizome is not a calque but an open chart which can be connected with something else in all of its dimensions; it is dismountable, reversible, and susceptible to continual modifications. (g) A network of trees which open in every direction can create a rhizome … (h) No one can provide a global description of the whole rhizome; not only because the rhizome is multidimensionally complicated, but also because its structure changes through the time; moreover, in a structure in which every node can be connected with every other node, there is also the possibility of contradictory inferences: if $p$, then any possible consequence of $p$ is possible, including the one that, instead of leading to new consequences, leads again to $p$, so that it is true at the same time both that if $p$, then $q$ and that if $p$, then non-$q$. (i) A structure that cannot be described globally can only be described as a potential sum of local descriptions. (j) In a structure without outside, the describers can look at it only by the inside.…

Evidently, a rhizome is open-ended, and we may never hope to predict what the next connection will be. The construction of a rhizome thus provides a space for abductive reasoning. The meaning in our mind comes from our conceptualization of a thing, an event, or particular segment of our life experience in the world. Semantic features thus constitute our knowledge of the meaning of the world. As part of the encyclopedia, semantic features of a thing, an event, or life situations in our mind are not well-structured but rhizomatically linked with each other. The following remark by Ding (2014: 127) in this respect is very illuminating:

Even at the most basic level where a semiotic form is supposed to be a direct mimicry of the extra-semiotic object it denotes, icons vary a great deal from one culture to another. Like a word in language, an object or life situation is always part of a larger structure showing various relations to the others and it can also be analyzed into innumerable semantic features that are rhizomic in nature. Which of these features are chosen to represent the object or life situation as a whole depends very much on what Umberto Eco calls the “recognition codes” of a particular culture (1976: 206).
The above remark insightfully depicted the actual process of metaphorization. Moreover, it also indicates Eco’s cultural view of metaphor. Indeed, Eco’s insightful exposition on the structure of human culture in a form of the encyclopedia deserves a thorough perusal:

The universe of semiosis, that is, the universe of human culture, must be conceived as structured like a labyrinth of the third type: (a) It is structured according to a network of interpretants. (b) It is virtually infinite because it takes into account multiple interpretations realized by different cultures: a given expression can be interpreted as many times, and in as many ways, as it has been actually interpreted in a given cultural framework: it is infinite because every discourse about the encyclopedia casts in doubts the previous structure of the encyclopedia itself. (c) It does not register only ‘truths’ but, rather, what has been said about the truth or what has been believed to be true as well as what has been believed to be false or imaginary or legendary, provided that a given culture had elaborated some discourse about some subject matter; the encyclopedia does not register only the ‘historical’ truth that Napoleon died on Saint Helena but also the ‘literary’ truth that Juliet died in Verona. (d) Such a semantic encyclopedia is never accomplished and exists only as a regulative idea; it is only on the basis of such a regulative idea that one is able actually to isolate a given portion of the social encyclopedia so far as it appears useful in order to interpret certain portions of actual discourses (and texts). (e) Such a notion of encyclopedia does not deny the existence of structured knowledge; it only suggests that such a knowledge cannot be recognized and organized as a global system; it provides only ‘local’ and transitory systems of knowledge, which can be contradicted by alternative and equally ‘local’ cultural organizations; every attempt to recognize these local organizations as unique and ‘global’ – ignoring their partiality – produces an ideological bias. (Eco 1984: 83-84)

For Eco, our sum total of knowledge about the world is an encyclopedia that contains so many semantic features that it can be related to almost anything, which accordingly serves as the unlimited source for metaphorical association. To exemplify this, let us come back to the lion metaphor in The Old Man and the Sea we illustrated earlier. We may find that both the formation and the interpretation of the lion metaphor need our encyclopedia knowledge. Hemingway’s encyclopedia knowledge of the lion gave rise to the frequent appearances of the word “lion” in the novel, while any other writer, who has the experience and knowledge different from Hemingway, might use another cultural unit such as “tiger” or the Chinese “Long” to substitute “lion” in the novel. On the other hand, semantic features of “lion” in readers’ mind are the source of metaphorical interpretation. Thus, we can say that the meaning of metaphor is based on encyclopedia
knowledge of interpreting subjects rather than any preexisting concepts. Eco (1984: 127) thus has the following to say:

The success of a metaphor is a function of the sociocultural format of the interpreting subjects’ encyclopedia. In this perspective, metaphors are produced solely on the basis of a rich cultural framework, on the basis, that is, of a universe of content that is already organized into networks of interpretants, which decide (semiotically) the identities and differences of properties. At the same time, content universe, whose format postulates itself not as rigidly hierarchized but, rather, according to Model Q, alone derives from the metaphorical production and interpretation the opportunity to restructure itself into new nodes of similarity and dissimilarity.

For Eco, the meaning of a metaphor should be interpreted in the cultural framework based on a specific cultural community rather than in a presupposed hierarchical structure. Let us come back to the metaphor of the steamed bun is smiling we illustrated earlier in chapter two to explain Eco’s framework of metaphor interpretation. Chinese people tend to avoid saying words like “break” or “rupture” during the joyous occasions in hope of a good fortune. Thus, instead of saying “the bun is broken”, housewives in northern China say: “the bun is smiling”. Such euphemistic usage is obviously a metaphor. One crucial reason for the formation of this particular metaphor lies in the traditional culture of saying auspicious words during happy events in China which inspires people to use their association and imagination rather than describe the fact as it is (As a matter of fact, too much soda is the main cause of the dehiscence.). The same cultural habit works in another similar situation. As a tradition, Chinese dumplings are prepared on the New Year’s Day. During cooking, some dumplings might rupture in the boiling water, and, seeing this, housewives often use the phrase 拚了 /zheng le/ as a euphemism for 破了 /po le/ ‘ruptured’ to describe the broken dumplings, which metaphorically means “(the dumplings) have earned money”. The connection here lies in that the Chinese word 拚 /zheng/ contains the dual meanings of “to earn money” and “to rupture”, whereas the Chinese word 破 /po/ only has one meaning of “to rupture”. In other words, Chinese people are more willing to link the broken dumplings with the word 拚 /zheng/ instead of the word 破 /po/ for auspicious associations like getting rich. Thus, calling the broken dumplings 拚了 /zheng le/ is a metaphor for making a fortune in the coming year.

Understanding the role of culture in metaphor formation and change is essential for us to understand the nature of metaphor. To take the formation of the hare-moon
metaphor in Chinese culture for example. Chinese people often use 嫦娥 /chang’e/ ‘Chang’e’ or 玉兔 /yu tu/ ‘the Jade Hare’ to metaphorize the moon. In fact, the two vehicles are more likely to have been derived from the same story of Chang’e. According to the ancient Chinese mythology, the body of Chang’e had undergone tremendous changes during the process of her flying to the moon, and she finally became an ugly toad. By logic, it is the toad that should be adopted as the metaphorical vehicle of the moon, not the hare. However, toad is ugly and disgusting, and thus not an auspicious animal in the Chinese culture. (In fact, the English word “toad” also has a meaning of being disgusting as is recorded in the phrase “as ugly as a toad”.) For this reason, people are reluctant to use the toad vehicle to talk about the moon. Meanwhile, the Jade Hare had a vulgar name: 膽兔 /dan tu/, which has a similar pronunciation with the Chinese phrase 蟾蜍 /chan chu/, i.e., they are homophones especially in the ancient Chinese. Due to Chinese people’ affection for the lovely appearance of hare, they gradually abandoned the former toad vehicle and began to use the hare vehicle more frequently. Overtime, People add the word Jade to the hare vehicle to form an even more auspicious metaphorical vehicle of the moon – the Jade Hare. Evidently, cultural factors play a vital role in the formation of the Jade Hare vehicle of the moon.

In fact, many metaphorical patterns in Chinese culture are formed through combination of homophones, for Chinese language is rich in homophone or near homophones. Examples for this phenomenon include, to name just a few, 蝙 /fu/ ‘bat’ and 福 /fu/ ‘luck’; 魚 /yu/ ‘fish’ and 余 /yu/ ‘surplus’; 雞 /ji/ ‘rooster’ and 吉 /ji/ ‘auspicious’; 麿 /lu/ ‘deer’ and 禄 /lu/ ‘official’s emolument’ (Ding 2010: 114). Eco explains this phenomenon fairly clearly:

In truth, though, the force of the pun (and of every successful and inventive metaphor) consists in the fact that prior to it no one had grasped the resemblance. Prior to ‘Jungfraud’ there was no reason to suspect a relationship between Freud, psychoanalysis, fraud, lie, and lapsus (linguae or calami). The resemblance becomes necessary only after the contiguity is realized. Actually (FW itself is the proof), it is enough to find the means of rendering two terms phonetically contiguous for the resemblance to impose itself; at best, the similitude of signifiers (at least in the place of encounter) is that which precedes, and the similitude of signifieds is a consequence of it. (Quoted in Innis 1985: 256)
Take the pair of蝠 /fu/ ‘bat’ and福 /fu/ ‘luck’ for example. The value福 /fu/ ‘luck’ in China is pursued by many. Since it has the same pronunciation with the word蝠 /fu/ which is the Chinese character of “bat”, Chinese people often use the image of bat metaphorically as a sign of福 /fu/ . The image of福 /fu/ can be found on the doors of many Chinese family during the Spring Festival, and it is usually placed reversely because the Chinese character for “reverse”倒/dao/ is a homophone of the Chinese word for “come”到/dao/. Thus, the reversed image of福 /fu/ signifies “good luck is coming”. Since the similarity here is based on physical sound (word pronunciation), metaphors of this kind are language specific and thus culture specific. Indeed, culture plays a vital role in the formation of metaphor. It will be very hard for the American or British people to make a connection between luck and bats. For Chinese people, however, this connection is one of the most active metaphorical patterns. Some metaphorical patterns are based on physical form, which means that two sides are brought together by the resemblance of physical form. For instance, the mandarin ducks are always in pairs when they show up, and Chinese people have grasped this point and use it to represent couples or lovers. In addition to similarity, contiguity is also very important for such kind of metaphor. As is concluded by Ding (2010: 107), these culture-specific metaphorical expressions “originate in the unique social customs of their users”. Indeed, cultural factors are so vital in the formation of a metaphor that in many cases they can be called motivation of metaphor production. As a result of this motivation, a broader space of comparison and imagination is created in the process of metaphorization. Therefore, interpretation of such metaphors should be brought back to the specific cultural context where they are produced.

In addition to emphasizing Eco’s cultural framework for metaphor interpretation, we should at the same time realize one result of cultural diversity: people of different cultures may view things differently. In Aristotle’s famous metaphor “life is a stage”, life is compared to a stage where people perform. Danesi (2004: 11-12) made a rather convincing remark on this specific metaphor by Aristotle, which can also shed new light on the relation between metaphor and culture:

Needless to say, Aristotle’s metaphor is understandable only to someone who is familiar with stages. What if this were not the case? The power of poetic logic lies in the fact that it allows people to come up with a metaphorical expression to render the same concept intelligible. Indeed, life could be compared to virtually anything
that would make sense in a specific cultural context, provided that it is exemplary of life in some way. So, for example, a statement such as life is a river coined in a culture where rivers play an important role in sustaining life would be “poetically logical” and, thus, highly effective in getting the job of explaining what life means done.

In fact, many of the metaphors and metonymies we use are culture-specific. As averred by Ding (2010), metaphor conveys special meanings of a specific cultural tradition, and this cultural uniqueness is first and foremost connected to metaphor users’ specific social and living habits. The detailed cultural differences between westerners and easterners are also reflected by the different vehicles they respectively choose. Furthermore, vehicles of metaphor may come from historical classics and works in literary tradition, like historical biography, ancient mythology, and other literary works, which have caused even more obstacles in understanding metaphors cross-culturally.

Thus, due to differences in culture and social customs, people across cultures and languages often have difficulty in understanding each other’s metaphorical expressions:

…there are a fair number of metaphors where the connection between the vehicle and the tenor is made not on the basis of a common background shared by people across different languages but rather through some special knowledge about some unique aspects of the culture in which they appear. Specifically, some metaphors are difficult to understand because the vehicles used to illustrate the tenors belong exclusively to a particular way of living as manifested in social customs and textual traditions. (Ding 2010: 107)

“More often than not”, as is further revealed by Ding (2010: 104), “the same life situation is metaphorically semiotized in different ways across languages and cultures.” This point may be exemplified by the bamboo metaphor in China. Since the center of the bamboo (its heart) is hollow, Chinese people often link it to a Chinese phrase 虚心 /xu xin/ ‘modesty’ (Ding 2010). In other words, the bamboo is often used by Chinese people, especially the literati, to refer to humility. People from other cultures, however, may have difficulties understanding the related metaphors, and many of them are more likely to see the hollowness in bamboo as a mere physical phenomenon. The following statement on metaphorical non-coincidence across cultures by Ding (2010: 107) is essentially right:

The reasons for such metaphorical disparity across languages are many, but the most important one derives from the fact that there are numerous cultural units available to the metaphor user, each of which consist of a huge bundle of semantic components
that can be used to illuminate various aspects of social life. Which cultural unit is eventually chosen to serve as a metaphorical vehicle for a particular life situation is decided arbitrarily and therefore unpredictable.

Besides the metaphorical meaning of hollowness, bamboo as a cultural unit contains many other semantic components. The structure of this plant, for example, “is such that it breaks rather than bends, which makes it a perfect vehicle for the upright character of the Confucian scholar” (Ding 2010: 130). It needs to be pointed out that such “huge bundle of semantic components” in one cultural unit exist not in a hierarchical structure but in the shape of a rhizome, and which component will be triggered for metaphorical association depends to a great extent on the purpose of metaphor users. For this reason, we can say that the relationship between metaphor and culture is “mostly haphazard and therefore unpredictable” (Ding 2010: 112). And which aspects of things and phenomena are highlighted in the process of metaphorical conceptualization reflect the collective value orientations of the metaphor users in a certain cultural community (Ding 2010).

What should be pointed out here is that, in the age of globalization, an increasing number of metaphors arise from cultural exchanges. In contemporary English, for instance, announcing one’s homosexual tendency to the public is called “coming out” or “coming out of the closet”, and those who do not want their homosexual tendency to be known by others are called “closeted”. This metaphorical meaning of the word “closet” evolves from the English expression “skeleton in the closet”, in which “closet” means something that can hide secrets. In the traditional Chinese culture, on the other hand, the word “closet” ‘柜’ /gui/ also refers to the place where the future husband hides. The meaning develops from a traditional Chinese drama called 柜中缘 /gui zhong yuan/ ‘Romance in the Closet’, in which a young man hides in the closet of a young girl’s boudoir during his runaway from calamity. The drama ends with the young man luckily and happily marrying the young girl. Gradually, the word 柜 /gui/ ‘closet’ in Chinese obtains a metaphorical meaning of something that can bring lovers together. Evidently, there are some differences between the Chinese word 柜 /gui/ and the English word closet with respect to their metaphorical meanings. In the contemporary Chinese, however, the word 出柜 /chu gui/, literally ‘getting out of a closet’, also contains the metaphorical meaning of announcing one’s homosexual tendency to the public. Evidently, this new semantic feature of the Chinese word “柜” /gui/ is borrowed from the English language through cultural exchange. As a result, many Chinese young people today relate the
expression 柜中情 /gui zhong qing/ ‘romance in the closet’ to homosexual affairs rather than “heavenly marriage”. In fact, the traditional meaning is nearly forgotten by youngsters because most Chinese youngsters prefer movies and TV series to traditional Chinese drama, and, consequently, the association between 柜 /gui/ ‘closet’ and the traditional drama 《柜中缘》 /gui zhong yuan/ ‘Romance in the closet’ is scarcely triggered. This is proof that culture based metaphors will be forgotten by users with the decline of the culture or subculture they are rooted in. Furthermore, this example also shows that metaphor can be influenced by cultural exchange, especially in the era of globalization, and local culture is facing great challenge from cultural globalization. Expressions like “coming out” in English or “出柜” /chu gui/ in Chinese has become the language of our “global village”. Another pervasive metaphorical meaning of the Chinese 柜 /gui/ ‘closet’ comes from its homophonic counterpart: 贵 /gui/ ‘noble’ or ‘honorable’. Because of the similarity in pronunciation, 柜 /gui/ is often associated with “nobleness” or “honorable”. For instance, in the old days, Chinese parents would present their marrying daughter closets or wardrobes as her dowry, and, by doing this, they wanted to express their good wishes for their daughter to lead a noble life after getting married. Moreover, the Chinese phrase 柜子 /gui zi/ ‘closet’ or ‘wardrobes’, is a homophone of 贵子 /gui zi/ ‘noble son’, and bringing new closets or wardrobes in the room also has a metaphorical meaning of bringing new life to the newly founded family. The above two metaphorical meanings of 柜 /gui/ further enhanced its position as a positive or auspicious vehicle of marriage in Chinese culture. This is proof that people are good at extending their wishes with special objects in their life. Through repeated usage, the metaphorical meaning of these objects become relatively stable in a culture. The old meanings, such as “nobleness” and “noble son”, coexist with newly added meanings like “coming out” in the same cultural unit 柜 /gui/ ‘closet’. Which semantic feature will be chosen to represent a specific a thing, an event, or a life situation in metaphor, is dependent on real communicative contexts. This demonstrates the dynamic influence of culture on metaphor, and metaphorical meanings are mutable rather than static in a cultural framework.

It should be further noted that the same cultural community may have multifarious links for one metaphorical tenor. For instance, ancient Chinese people use oil lamps and they thus consider the burning of oil as the passage of time. Time is thus seen from the
angle of oil consumption: the consuming of oil is related to the consuming of time. But to mean “surviving hard times”, people may use the word 熬 /ao/ ‘to boil, to endure’ which derived from boiling the oil in a pot. We also use 点灯熬油 /dian deng ao you/ ‘lighting the oil lamp’ to express “staying up late”. Likewise, in the English language, people use “burning the midnight oil”. During the same period in ancient China, people also adopted gold as a metaphorical vehicle of time, which is reflected in the following phrase: 一寸光阴一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴 /yi cun guang yin yi cun jin, cun jin nan mai cun guang yin/ ‘an inch of time equals an inch of gold, and gold cannot buy time’. Therefore, the same “time” can be compared to “oil” and “gold”, and they are both vivid reflections of real life situations in language that reveals poetic wisdom. Obviously, living environment and cultural contexts are to some extent the soil of metaphor production, which have a much greater impact on metaphor than abstract metaphorical concepts and schemas in the cognitive theory. This is also a good example to explain why we do not live by any particular metaphor or particular sets of metaphors.

In fact, the difference between Eco and Ding’s cultural view on metaphor and Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor lies in that the latter bases its argumentation on mutable intuition and untenable assumptions. Although Lakoff/Johnson also talk about metaphor in cultures, they actually based their arguments on individual’s intuition and postulation rather than the real culture of a community. The following argument by them well exemplifies their tendency of transforming individual’s speculation into culture norms: “Try to imagine a culture where arguments are not viewed in terms of war, where no one wins or loses, where there is no sense of attacking or defending, gaining or losing ground.” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 4-5). As discussed in chapter one, this is a rather meaningless supposition. To our knowledge, there is no culture that cannot view argument as war. If they cannot prove the existence of such a culture, then their argument should be considered invalid. Second, argument can also be viewed from perspectives other than war even in the Western culture. The point is that you can never predict, let alone decide, what fresh vehicle will be adopted to represent the tenor in the next minute. When Lakoff/Johnson are making decisions on a particular metaphorical linking for “members” in a “culture” that only exists in their mind, the a priori and determinist nature of their theory becomes obvious. Cultural factors are reflected in real language use rather than the linguist’s mere imagination. Lakoff/Johnson’s fault also lies in their misunderstanding of culture. They did not see
culture as something based on a contract among members in a community; rather, they
deam it as something that can be randomly supposed. By doing this, they actually left
out the communal feature of culture. A cultural view of metaphor should base its
arguments on real language materials from people of all walks of life.

Compared with Eco’s notion of encyclopedia in metaphor, conceptual metaphors
in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory are more of dictionary-like representations. As
metaphorical potentials, semantic features of objects or life situations are for Peirce
rhizomatically linked on the basis of encyclopedic knowledge shared by members of a
particular culture. If you trigger one link of semantic features, you trigger the rhizomatic
network of metaphorical association, for which Eco’s encyclopedic knowledge provides
unlimited sources. Therefore, similarities in metaphor are not created but discovered.
New or creative metaphors are often produced by a particular user of a particular cultural
community under a particular communicative situation. It is in this sense that Eco (1984)
believes no algorithm ever exists for metaphor and computer instructions cannot produce
metaphors as human minds do. Indeed, metaphor is subject to no mathematical principle
and therefore unpredictable. Dependent on the logic of similarity, metaphor creates new
symbols and novel concepts, thus serving as an important vehicle for ever-changing
communicative situations.

3.4 Metaphor and Intersubjective Communication

In the previous two sections of this chapter, we explored through the theories of two
scholars the socio-cultural nature of metaphor. In doing this, we go beyond the ontology
of metaphorical expressions to acquire a dynamic perspective on metaphor interpretation.
What we should not forget is that metaphor is a type of language whose basic function is
for communication. This means we should also investigate why people can understand
each other’s metaphor.

For this, we can turn to the theory of communicative action championed by the
German thinker and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1987a, 1987b). In his book The
Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas talks about a kind of intersubjective
rationality that is inherent in our communicative activities:

If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially
coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination has to be established
through communication – and in certain central spheres through communication
aimed at reaching agreement – then the reproduction of the species also requires
satisfying the conditions of a rationality that is inherent in communicative action.
(Habermas 1984: 397)

In his critique of the philosophy of the subject or the subject-centered reason, Habermas (1987b: 296-297) further argued that a model of mutual understanding may remedy the deficiency of Foucault’s radical critique of human sciences based on the philosophy of subject:

If we can presuppose for a moment the model of action oriented to reach understanding that I have developed elsewhere, the objectifying attitude in which the knowing subject regards itself as it would entities in the external world is no longer privileged. Fundamental to the paradigm of mutual understanding is, rather, the performative attitude of participants in interaction, who coordinate their plans for action by coming to an understanding about something in the world. When ego carries out a speech act and alter takes up a position with regard to it, the two parties enter into an interpersonal relationship. The latter is structured by the system of reciprocally interlocked perspectives among speakers, hearers, and non-participants, who happen to be present at the time. On the level of grammar, this corresponds to the system of personal pronouns. Whoever has been trained in this system has learned how, in the performance attitude, to take up and to transform into one another the perspectives of the first, second, and third persons.

Habermas’s theory of intersubjective communication is deemed as a modified version of Kantian Transcendentalism that aims to “establish the scope and validity of the different spheres of rationality through a reflection on the condition of the possibility of the types of communicative action” (Whitebook 1997: 173). Habermas argues that the human sciences’ attempt to escape from the contradictory self-thematization makes them “deeply ensnared in the self-reification of scientism” (Habermas 1987b: 294). Foucault’s critique of the philosophy of the subject through his theory of power attempted to “rise above those pseudo-sciences to a mere rigorous objectivity, and in doing so it gets caught all the more hopelessly in the trap of a presentist historiography, which sees itself compelled to a relativist self-denial and can give no account of the normative foundations of its own rhetoric” (Habermas 1987b: 294). In order to solve this problem, Habermas proposed a communicative model of action, which is very crucial for participants of a speech community to reach mutual agreements through a linguistic mediation. In other words, since the “the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness is exhausted” (Habermas, 1987b: 296), Habermas suggested a paradigm shift from the philosophy of consciousness to the paradigm of mutual understanding. As an analogy to the cognitive
a priori of Lukacs’s “form of objectivity” within the framework of the philosophy of the subject, Habermas (1987a: 187) introduced the concept of “a form of understating”:

After the change of paradigm introduced by the theory of communication, the formal properties of the intersubjectivity of possible understanding can take the place of the conditions of the objectivity of possible experience. A form of mutual understanding represents a compromise between the general structures of communicative action and reproductive constraints unavailable as themes within a given lifeworld.

The following review on Habermas’s idea on paradigm shift by Thomas McCarthy is concise but quite accurate:

The key to Habermas’s approach is his rejection of the “paradigm of consciousness” and its associated “philosophy of the subject” in favor of the through-and-through intersubjectivist paradigm of “communicative action.” This is what he sees as the road open but not taken at the crucial junctures in the philosophical discourse of modernity. (Habermas 1987b: x)

Besides a paradigm shift from the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas also suggested a paradigm shift from “the knowledge of objects” to “the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech and action” (Habermas 1987b: 295-296). A more detailed discussion on intersubjective model of communication can be found in the following remarks:

Now this attitude of participants in linguistically mediated interaction makes possible a different relationship of the subject to itself from the sort of objectifying attitude that an observer assumes toward entities in the external world. The transcendental-empirical doubling of the relation to self is only unavoidable so long as there is no alternative to this observer-perspective; only then does the subject have to view itself as the dominating counterpart to the world as a whole or as an entity appearing within it. No mediation is possible between the extramundane stance of the transcendental I and the intramundane stance of the empirical I. As soon as linguistically generated intersubjectivity gains primacy, this alternative no longer applies. Then ego stands within an interpersonal relationship that allows him to relate to himself as a participant in an interaction from the perspective of alter. And indeed this reflection undertaken from the perspective of the participant escapes the kind of objectification inevitable from the reflexively applied perspective of the observer. Everything gets frozen into an object under the gaze of the third person, whether directed inwardly or outwardly. The first person, who turns back upon himself in a performative attitude from the angle of vision of the second person, can recapitulate [nachvollziehen] the acts it just carried out. In place of reflectively
objectified knowledge – the knowledge proper to self-consciousness – we have a recapitulating reconstruction of knowledge already employed. (Habermas 1987b: 297)

As revealed in the above argument, the process of recapitulating reconstruction explains why people always understand new things on the basis of their old knowledge. This also indicates the process of the unlimited semiosis in human thought and communication. Therefore, it is safe to say that Habermas’s justification for intersubjective interaction or interpersonal communication through language has laid a solid foundation for a theory of intersubjective communication. Indeed, when “linguistically generated intersubjectivity gains primacy” (Habermas 1987b: 297), the problem will be solved as to the understanding between individual experiences. In this way, Habermas’s model of intersubjective communication can settle the problem in transcendental philosophy as depicted in the following statement:

What earlier was relegated to transcendental philosophy, namely the intuitive analysis of self-consciousness, now gets adapted to the circle of reconstructive sciences that try to make explicit, from the perspective of those participating in discourses and interactions, and by means of analyzing successful or distorted utterances, the pretheoretical grasp of rules on the part of competently speaking, acting, and knowing subjects. Because such reconstructive attempts are no longer aimed at a realm of the intelligible beyond that of appearances, but at the actually exercised rule-knowledge that is deposited in correctly generated utterances, the ontological separation between the transcendental and the empirical is no longer applicable. As can be shown in connection with Jean Piaget’s genetic structuralism, reconstructive and empirical assumptions can be brought together in one and the same theory. In this way, the spell of an unresolved back-and-force between two aspects of self-thematization that are as inevitable as they are incompatible is broken. Consequently, we do not need hybrid theories any more to close the gap between the transcendental and the empirical. (Habermas 1987b: 297-298)

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Lakoff/Johnson’s embodied philosophy in cognitive theory of metaphor stopped at the question of how to bridge the gap between the transcendental and the empirical, leaving an ontological separation between the two. The lost link in Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor is the exact linguistically generated intersubjectivity put forward by Habermas. In fact, Lakoff/Johnson made a lot of discussions on embodied reason and transcendent reason, and they believed that these two approaches can never be compatible. They failed to not
realize that intersubjectivity is attainable through linguistic mediation, and accordingly an intersubjective reason can transcend individual’s utterance. The process of symbolization is also a very typical result of linguistically generated intersubjective reason. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, after the process of symbolization, indices and icons become the Peircean symbols or conventional language expressions. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1959: 14) understood this process as signing a social contact by members of a speech community:

Language is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts. It can be localized in the limited segments of the speaking-circuit where an auditory image becomes associated with a concept. It is the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community.

This social contract is also based on linguistically generated intersubjective reason. As argued above, we can find the idea of intersubjectivity in the co-founders of western semiotics. Lakoff/Johnson, however, never realized the possibility of an intersubjective reason mediated by language; rather, they defined reason as being crucially shaped by human bodies: “In summary, reason is not, in any way, a transcendent feature of the universe or of disembodied mind. Instead, it is shaped crucially by the peculiarities of our human bodies, by the remarkable details of the neural structure of our brains, and by the specifics of our everyday functioning in the world.” (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 4) This remark by them is rather questionable. If reason cannot be transcendent, then how can people reach agreements in the first place? In fact, experiences, especially direct bodily experiences, are still quite individual rather than shared. In Habermas, the subject is a participant of interpersonal communication, while in Lakoff/Johnson, the subject is an individual practitioner who bases his or her understanding on isolated experience. The following remark on transcendence and intersubjective reason by Thomas McCarthy is essentially right:

The undeniable ‘immanence’ of the standards we use to draw these distinctions – their embeddedness in concrete languages, cultures, practices – should not blind us to the equally undeniable ‘transcendence’ of the claims they represent – their openness to critique and revision and their internal relation to intersubjective recognition brought about by the ‘force’ of reasons. The ideas of reason, truth, justice also serve as ideals with reference to which we can criticize the traditions we inherit; though never divorced from social practices of justification, they can never be reduced to any given set of such practices. The challenge, then, is to rethink the
idea of reason, in line with our essential finitude – that is, with the historical, social, embodied, practical, desirous, assertive nature of the knowing and acting subject – and to recast accordingly our received humanistic ideals. (Habermas 1987b: x)

Different from an intersubjective view, however, Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 497) defined embodied concepts in the following statement:

Concepts arise from, and are understood through, the body, the brain, and experience in the world. Concepts get their meaning through embodiment, especially via perceptual and motor capacities. Directly embodied concepts include basic-level concepts, spatial-relations concepts, bodily action concepts (e.g., hand movement), aspect (that is, the general structure of actions and events), color, and others.

Of all the three aspects that Lakoff/Johnson believe a concept arises from, none of them indicate an intersubjective or communicative channel, i.e., the means to mediate the transcendental and the empirical. They did not explain how people understand each other’s individual embodied concepts. Again, the gap between the transcendent and the empirical is still large. In fact, the proportion of meaning or semantic features we get from perception and embodiment is far less than the whole meaning we have on things. We get other proportions of meaning on things from the context of language use, which also contribute to our encyclopedia knowledge about things as elaborated in the previous section. Besides, the concept “reason” or “embodied reason” in the embodied philosophy is also of no difference from traditional views of reason, as may be revealed in the following remark by Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 128): “Reason and conceptual structure are shaped by our bodies, brains, and modes of functioning in the world. Reason and concepts are therefore not transcendent, that is, not utterly independent of the body.” In fact, philosophers have been saying all along that whatever understanding of the world is made from the human perspective, and there is of no difference in the so-called embodied view. That we believe reason and concepts are based on body and mind does not mean that they cannot be transcendent. They can be transcendent if they are intersubjectively established. In other words, intersubjective reason transcends individuals’ bodily experience.

Moreover, the linguistically generated intersubjectivity or linguistically mediated intersubjective reason is also very important for us to understand truth and its relation with metaphor. In other words, it may provide better solutions for the following two questions: How can we define truth? and Can metaphors convey truth? In fact, the relation between metaphor and truth is a rather old question. The traditional view of truth
in philosophy treats metaphorical expressions as “false and uninterpretable unless they are recast explicitly or implicitly into similes” (Glucksberg and McGlone 1999: 1541). For instance, the expression “John is a pig” will be considered as literally false, but if it is transformed into the simile “John is like a pig”, then it is true (Hanks and Giora 2012: 74). Also, it seems for many that metaphorical meaning is not very stable and thus cannot represent truth. It is so if you define truth as a fundamental and absolute one. However, an intersubjective view of meaning does not define truth in that way. We believe that truth is also a product of human reasoning and it is intersubjectively established. Since we believe in an intersubjective reason among members of a speech community, truth is also based on this linguistically generated intersubjectivity. Such an intersubjective view is compatible with Eco and Ding’s idea of seeing metaphor in culture, and they both believe that metaphor can convey truth on the basis of linguistically generated intersubjectivity. This is also what Lakoff/Johnson cannot provide for metaphor study through their experientialism or the embodied philosophy. In fact, Lakoff/Johnson may find better solutions for many problems in the cognitive theory of metaphor, if they believe in an intersubjective reason. One of the most important questions is related with truth. With the development of human cognition, we find that many so-called truths we held before are actually wrong ideas. Take our understanding of color for example. Recent research shows that color does not exist in the natural world (Lakoff/Johnson 1999). Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 23) also take the issue of color as an example to talk about truth:

What could be simpler or more obvious than colors? The sky is blue. Fresh grass is green. Blood is red. The sun and moon are yellow. We see colors as inhering in things. Blue is in the sky, green in the grass, red in the blood, yellow in the sun. We see color, and yet it is false, as false as another thing we see, the moving sun rising past the edge of the stationary earth. Just as astronomy tells us that the earth moves around the sun, not the sun around a stationary earth, so cognitive science tells us that colors do not exist in the external world. Given the world, our bodies and brains have evolved to create color.

This shows that human cognition is confined by the limitations of our organic faculties, and our bodily experience is not reliable. Ancient people may believe that color inherently exists in things, just as they believe that the sun moves around the earth. Their consents on the above believes are also gained by interpersonal interactions and negotiations on the basis of the level of cognition at that time. In fact, very few people
today see colors as inherent in things. Moreover, it is not totally false to say that the sun is rising past the edge of the stationary earth if we put the statement in a “non-scientific” context, like in a poem. This further reveals the fact that we should go beyond the ontology of things to meet truth at an intersubjective level. Back to the question of color. When people believe in the objective ontology of color, it actually does not have one. Research shows that the world is not what we see through our eyes, and our eyes are very much like a looking glass. Maybe the world is more realistic in the eyes of those with achromatopia, but we still believe in color and talk about color. Why? Because it is a contract made by the great majority of community members. Thus, intersubjective reason enables us to achieve effective communication between each other.

Similar to the above idea of objectivity, Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 106) also expressed their idea on truth and understanding:

In our earlier writings (Al, Lakoff and Johnson 1980; A4, Lakoff 1987), we recognized this dilemma and saw that it could be avoided by taking into account the role of embodied understanding. There is no truth for us without understanding. Any truth must be in a humanly conceptualized and understandable form if it is to be a truth for us. If it’s not a truth for us, how can we make sense of its being a truth at all?

Except for their tenable argument on the relation between truth and understanding, we, however, cast doubt on their term “embodied understanding”, for we do not know that kind of understanding can be unembodied. After all, all forms of understanding are biologically generated from the brain. Perhaps, they use the term to refer to direct bodily experience, like they have expressed elsewhere. In doing this, however, they have also isolated brain or mind from body. Moreover, the above account by them also reveals that their version of embodied realism suggests nothing new and innovative for generating a new perspective of truth. In fact, what Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 107) can offer from their framework of embodied realism is an embodied truth: “Embodied truth is also not purely subjective truth. Embodiment keeps it from being purely subjective. Because we all have pretty much the same embodied basic-level and spatial-relations concepts, there will be an enormous range of shared ‘truths’, as in such clear cases as when the cat is or isn’t on the mat.” In fact, embodied truth means very limited truth. Even if embodiment can guarantee a shared truth, what about the unshared part? This means that embodiment also needs intersubjectivity. As mentioned before, embodied experience is communicative through intersubjectively established mechanism, i.e., the language system.
The following remark by Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 120) also shows that an “embodied interpretation” of truth is not enough:

This folk theory is by no means all wrong. For basic-level concepts, the commonsense theory is fundamentally right. Given the centrality of basic-level concepts in our embodied understanding and their prevalence in our mundane experience, the commonsense theory does make sense. This is an embodied interpretation of the commonsense theory. It is not the usual interpretation. The commonsense theory is usually interpreted as an objectivist theory, in which the body and embodied understanding do not enter in at all.

As argued above, truth is unattainable if everybody bases their understanding merely on bodily truth and never communicate or negotiate with each other. Lakoff/Johnson (1999, 2003[1980]) also criticized the conception of truth in alleged objectivism. Instead of showing what went wrong in the objectivist truth, they simply substituted the objectivist view with an experientialist view, as revealed in Haser’s following remark:

A theory which promises to invalidate objectivism should not simply supersede the objectivist conception of truth with an experientialist sense. In that case, objectivists and experientialists are talking about different things (different senses of truth) – which blocks from the start any attempt to argue that objectivists are mistaken in believing in absolute truth. Objectivists may even concur that “experientialist truth” is relative to conceptual systems, that is, to conceptual systems in the experientialist sense. (Haser 2005: 83)

In very few places where Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 93) talk about intersubjectivity, the following remark indicates their ignorance of a linguistically generated intersubjectivity:

Disembodied scientific realism creates an unbridgeable ontological chasm between “objects,” which are “out there,” and subjectivity, which is “in here.” Once the separation is made, there are then only two possible, and equally erroneous, conceptions of objectivity: Objectivity is either given by the “things themselves” (the objects) or by the intersubjective structures of consciousness shared by all people (the subjects).

The first is erroneous because the subject-object split is a mistake; there are no objects-with-descriptions-and-categorizations existing in themselves. The second is erroneous because mere intersubjectivity, if it is nothing more than social or communal agreement, leaves out our contact with the world. The alternative we propose, embodied realism, relies on the fact that we are coupled to the world
through our embodied interactions. Our directly embodied concepts (e.g., basic-level concepts, aspectual concepts, and spatial-relations concepts) can reliably fit those embodied interactions and the understandings of the world that arise from them.

Intersubjectivity does not have to leave out humans’ contact with the world. In fact, it is about the human contact with the world. Furthermore, the above quotation smacks of the classic correspondence theory which they have criticized fiercely as follows:

But giving up on color as a metaphysically real ‘primary quality’ has profound philosophical consequences. It means abandoning the correspondence theory of truth, the idea that truth lies in the relationship between words and the metaphysically and objectively real world external to any perceiver. Since there is no color in the world in itself, a sentence like ‘Blood is red,’ which we all take to be true, would not be true according to the correspondence theory. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 26)

They strongly believe that “metaphorical concepts are inconsistent with the classical correspondence theory of truth. Instead, what is required is embodied truth.” (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 128) In fact, we can also talk about the correspondence theory from the intersubjective perspective. The concept “color”, for instance, should be considered as an intersubjectively agreed category with sub-categories that differ from culture to culture. This perspective explains how human beings perceive and define color while laying aside the unattainable world-in-itself.

During the “dark age of metaphor”, as discussed in the first chapter, many mainstream philosophers like Locke and Hobbes did not believe that metaphor can generate serious thought, let alone conveying truth. Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 120) also realized this point, as argued in their criticism against “commonsense theory”:

If the commonsense theory were true, metaphor would not serve the central function of language, which is supposedly to express and communicate literal truths about the world. Because of this, metaphor has been traditionally relegated to a theory of tropes, which is intended to handle uses of language in which truth is not thought to be at issue: poetry, rhetorical flourish, fictional discourse, and so on. The banishment of metaphor from the realm of truth explains why metaphor has traditionally been left to rhetoric and literary analysis, rather than being taken seriously by science, mathematics, and philosophy, which are seen as truth-seeking enterprises.
However, what Lakoff/Johnson failed to realize is that the real problem does not lie in that those philosophers did not hold an embodied philosophy but lies in that their theory of truth was not based on an intersubjective reason. Their failure in realizing the above fact led them to a fairly questionable framework of metaphor interpretation:

We have evolved so that the hidden mechanisms of meaning produce a global experience for us that allows us to function well in the world. Our preponderance of commonplace basic experiences – with basic-level objects, basic spatial relations, basic colors, and basic actions – leads us to the commonsense theory of meaning and truth, that the world really, objectively is as we experience it and conceptualize it to be. As we have seen, the commonsense theory works very well in ordinary simple cases precisely because of the nature of our embodiment and our imaginative capacities. It fails in cases where there are conflicting conceptualizations or worldviews, and such cases are quite common. (Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 509-510)

Common or “global experience” is a result of a negotiated interpersonal contract rather than produced by a hidden mechanism of meaning in a single mind. As just mentioned above, the so-called “preponderance of commonplace basic experiences” is, in fact, very limited.

Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 508-509) have enumerated three important findings in cognitive science based on empirical studies, all of which prove that human understanding is built upon intersubjectively negotiated ideas:

• We experience objects as colored in themselves, even though it is now known that they are not. The neural system responsible for the internal structure of our color categories also creates for us the experience of color.

• We experience space as structured by image schemas (as having bounded regions, paths, centers and peripheries, objects with fronts and backs, regions above, below, and beside things). Yet we now know that space in itself has no such structure. The topographic maps of the visual field, the orientation-sensitive cells, and other highly structured neural systems in our brains not only create image-schematic concepts for us but also create the experience of space as structured according those image schemas.

• We experience time in terms of motion and resources, even though neither of those is inherent in time itself. Our metaphors for conceptualizing time in terms of motion not only create a way to comprehend and reason about time in terms of motion but also lead us to experience time as flowing by or ourselves as moving with respect to time.
Besides the embodied experience, there is a space for cultural communication and negotiation among the subjects. Concepts are embodied, but they are at the same time not sealed in our bodies; rather, they are open for communication and negotiation. Not all the concepts have to be understood through individual experiences.

In fact, the impasse of metaphorical essentialism and experientialism in the cognitive theory of metaphor is against Lakoff/Johnson’s original idea of seeking a middle course between objectivism and subjectivism because some of their initial arguments including the following one were once quite promising:

An experientialist approach also allows us to bridge the gap between the objectivist and subjectivist myths about impartiality and the possibility of being fair and objective. The two choices offered by the myths are absolute objectivity, on the one hand, and purely subjective intuition, on the other. We have seen that truth is relative to understanding, which means that there is no absolute standpoint from which to obtain absolute objective truths about the world. This does not mean that there are no truths; it means only that truth is relative to our conceptual system, which is grounded in, and constantly tested by, our experiences and those of other members of our culture in our daily interactions with other people and with our physical and cultural environments. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 193)

The notion of intersubjective and subject-object interactions here is quite important. However, such insightful understanding is not consistently carried out in Lakoff/Johnson’s theory. Although they mentioned the word “interactional” in the paragraph below, they did not interpret it in a right way:

In summary, the usual objectivist accounts of these phenomena (dead metaphor, homonymy with similarities, or abstraction) all depend on preexisting similarities based on inherent properties. In general, similarities do exist, but they cannot be based on inherent properties. The similarities arise as a result of conceptual metaphors and thus must be considered similarities of interactional, rather than inherent, properties. But the admission of interactional properties is inconsistent with the basic premise of objectivist philosophy. It amounts to giving up the myth of objectivism. (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 215)

Here Lakoff/Johnson have evidently misapplied the concept of “interactional properties”. The word “interactional” should be understood in the sense that human cognition is the result of human intervention. Similarities are not created by conceptual metaphors but recognized by metaphor users. In fact, the traditional comparison approach to metaphor is promising as long as it recognizes that similarities between things and events are
intersubjectively established. Lakoff/Johnson (2003: 209), however, have failed to see this important point as is shown in the following argument: “Metaphor can contribute to understanding only by making us see objective similarities, that is, similarities between the objective meanings M and M’. These similarities must be based on shared inherent properties of objects—properties that the objects really have, in and of themselves.” Epistemologically, there can be no “inherent properties” of objects; rather, we always locate properties of objects through intersubjective communication among members of a particular community. Habermas (1984: 12-13) terms this approach as “phenomenologist” compared to the “realist” approach revealed in the cognitive theory, and he has this to say:

(b) The phenomenologist does not rely upon the guiding thread of goal-directed or problem-solving action. He does not, that is, simply begin with ontological presupposition of an objective world; he makes this a problem by inquiring into the conditions under which the unity of an objective world is constituted for the members of a community. The world gains objectivity only through counting as one and the same world for a community of speaking and acting subjects. The abstract concept of the world is a necessary condition if communicatively acting subjects are to reach understanding among themselves about what takes place in the world or to be effected in it. Through this communicative practice they assure themselves at the same time of their common life-relations; of an intersubjectively shared lifeworld. This lifeworld is bounded by the totality of interpretations presupposed by the members as background knowledge.

Like Foucault’s concept of power, the conceptual metaphor theory is also not free from contradictory self-thematization. That is to say, on the one hand, conceptual metaphors are supposed to be near a priori, while on the other hand, they are also subjectively determined. In his critique of Foucault’s theory of power in genealogical historiography, Habermas (1987b: 274) made a very illuminating remark on the idea of “transcendental synthesis with the presupposition of an empiricist ontology”:

In his basic concept of power, Foucault has forced together the idealist idea of transcendental synthesis with the presupposition of an empiricist ontology. This approach cannot lead to a way out of the philosophy of the subject, because the concept of power that is supposed to provide a common denominator for the contrary semantic components has been taken from the repertoire of the philosophy of the subject itself. According to this philosophy, the subject can take up the basically two and only two relationships towards the world of imaginable and manipulable objects:
cognitive relationships regulated by the truth of judgements; and practical relationships regulated by the success of actions.

Similarly, in Lakoff/Johnson’s embodied philosophy, they also presuppose “an empiricist ontology” through their solid reliance on the neural connections for the near universal conceptual metaphors, in which the innovative capacity of metaphor disappears behind the abstract concepts. Most importantly, their theory is still very much rooted in the philosophy of the subject. As suggested by Habermas, they should find a way out of the subject-centered reason to meet on a higher level a communicative reason. A theory of meaning based on intersubjective reason demonstrates that the process of metaphorization is not only a cognitive process but also a process of negotiation. The negotiation can be a self-negotiation based on self-reasoning or a negotiation among members of a cultural community based on intersubjective reason. Guided by Habermas, we can then reach the following agreement for an effective solution to the issue Lakoff/Johnson failed to resolve: We admit that truths and certain norms can only be established intersubjectively through interactions among members in a particular cultural community. In this sense, we can say that nothing is a truth unless it is agreed upon as a truth.

Lakoff/Johnson actually have made an interesting point in Metaphors We Live by: “When people who are talking don’t share the same culture, knowledge, values, and assumptions, mutual understanding can be especially difficult. Such understanding is possible through the negotiation of meaning.” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003[1980]: 231) It is a pity, however, that they fail to fully pursue this communicative approach to the study of meaning. In fact, a meaning is legitimate and understandable only if it survives the test of negotiation among members of a community. The same is for metaphor: a metaphor is legitimate and understandable in a particular cultural community only if it survives the test of negotiation among its members. Under the communicative approach, metaphor users regain the place they should have.

3.5 Metaphor and Ideology
As we have discussed in the previous section, the theory of communicative action and intersubjectivity by Habermas can provide a necessary space for communication between different metaphor users, and thus serves as a crucial dimension for our cultural framework of metaphor interpretation. Moreover, it can also remedy the deficiency in Lakoff/Johnson’s embodied philosophy in terms of the understandability between
individual experiences. However, it should be pointed out that Habermas’s theory of communicative action is based on an ideal mode of human communication where people spontaneously strive for mutual understanding and agreement. This reveals the Utopian nature of Habermas’s theory. He is right to believe that, in order to coordinate activities, people have to agree among themselves in relation to representations of their collective environment, but that may not always be the case. Put differently, although the theory of communicative action explains many speech activities in real life, there is still one link lost in their theory. In fact, Habermas’ mistake lies in that he equals speech acts geared to intersubjective recognition to all ordinary speech acts. In real life situations, language does not always act as mediation for mutual agreements. In his book entitled Beyond Ontology, Ding (1994: 117-118) made a very insightful critique on Habermas’ Utopian version of intersubjectivity:

By confining communicative praxis solely to speech acts that are oriented to mutual agreement, Habermas has neglected a large portion of language reality that is antagonistic in nature. He speaks of the “learning processes” in which all the individuals gradually develop more advanced forms of moral consciousness culminating in a “a universal ethics of speech” where norms are justified argumentatively. If we accept what Habermas says as correct, history then would become nothing more than a process through which the aspiration towards rationally founded consensus becomes ever more explicitly articulated in language. In real life situations, however, there are innumerable instances where to speak is not to agree but to fight, and the solution often has to be brought about through the use of military or economic force.

The same is to metaphor. Being one type of human speech and one important way of conveying meaning, metaphor is also not completely oriented to mutual agreement. Therefore, the deficiency of Habermas’s theory of communicative action, although it can to a great extent bridge the gap between idea and reality, lies in that it is based on an assumption of ideal communication between members of a society, and in doing this, it ignored the ideological differences between various metaphor users. An ideological dimension thus constitutes the missing link in Habermas’s theoretical framework. In this section, therefore, we are going to examine metaphor in relation to ideology so as to establish a sound cultural framework for metaphor interpretation.
Oftentimes, the choice of a metaphorical vehicle reveals a person’s class, educational background, and other ideological aspects. Look at the two metaphors Qian Zhongshu used in his well-known novel *Fortress Besieged*:

When men students saw Miss Pao, they burned with lewd desire, and found some relief by endlessly cracking jokes behind her back. Some called her a charcuterie – a shop selling cooked meats – because only such a shop would have so much warm-colored flesh on public display. Others called her “Truth,” since it is said that “the truth is naked.” But Miss Pao wasn’t exactly without a stitch on, so they revised her name to “Partial Truth.” (Qian 2003: 15)

In the first metaphor, Miss Pao’s exposed body is compared to a charcuterie ‘熟食铺子’ /shu shi pu zi/, and, in the second metaphor, the same near naked body is compared to “Partial Truth”. The first metaphor can be quickly understood by most people from all walks of life, although, in the original Chinese version, the English translation of “熟食铺子” /shu shi pu zi/ was presented, representing that the author is well-educated, especially in the 1940s of China. At least, the charcuterie vehicle is easy for people to understand and needs less explanation. The “Partial Truth” metaphor, however, reveals more of the ideological dimension of the writer, like his class, belief, and educational background, for the concept of truth is a rather abstract philosophical term and is not talked about much by ordinary people, especially in the time when the novel first appeared. To understand the metaphor, one should know another metaphor “truth is naked”, which is a rather difficult thing for the working class, let alone the majority of illiterate peasants at that time. In other words, the second metaphor reveals the intellectual background of the writer. This example shows that people from different classes may have different abilities in terms of metaphorical appreciation and interpretation, and sometimes those who want to display their meanings in a metaphorically understandable way should also accommodate themselves to their addressees’ interpretive abilities and cultural background.

Besides, people of different classes and social ranks usually vary in values and world views, which results in diverse forms of subcultures within a cultural community. Oftentimes, unique metaphorical representations adopted by members of a class or social rank constitute an important part of a subculture, reflecting a special groupthink of its members. As pointed out by Kovecses (2005: 97): “Subcultures often define themselves in contradiction to mainstream culture, and, often, they can in part be defined by the

167
metaphors they use. And sometimes the self-definition of a subculture involves the unique metaphorical conceptualization of important concepts on which the separateness of the subculture is based.” This is essentially right if we examine the plant-related metaphors preferred by Chinese scholars who perceive in some plants the same virtues they pursue in life, such as perseverance and moral integrity, hence the formation of “the four noble flowers” and “three durable plants of winter”. To be more specific, “the four noble flowers” refer to plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum, while the “three durable plants of winter” refer to pine tree, bamboo and plum. These plants often appear not only in homes and offices the scholars live and work but also in poems and paintings they create, serving as “a central motif of Chinese poetry and visual arts for well over a thousand years” (Ding 2010: 130). The inclinations of Chinese scholars featured by specific metaphorical representations form their social distinction. In other words, people of a class or occupation have their relatively stable forms of metaphorical representation, through which they “produce and reproduce at least the appearance of conformity to the behavioral rules that constitute their specific social field” (Ding 2010: 132).

Moreover, metaphor can sometimes be a battlefield where different powers meet and struggle. For example, when someone says that “my surgeon is a butcher” or “my boss is a snake”, he or she does not only want to get agreement from others, rather, he or she wants to express anger or a feeling of dissatisfaction. If the surgeon or boss hears that kind of metaphor, they will not be happy and will probably fight back by using a different metaphor. Another example may be found in the American politics. The democratic party of the United States is metaphorized as a “donkey”, while the republican party is metaphorized as an “elephant”. When a republican calls his democratic colleague a donkey, he is probably using the metaphor negatively or at least ironically, although both parties accepted the nicknames for them. In this situation, the metaphor user is evidently not seeking for mutual agreement. Volosinov (1973: 23) is essentially right when said that language is the very site where power struggles, and meaning is usually the outcome of those struggles:

Existence reflected in sign is not merely reflected but refracted. How is this refraction of existence in the ideological sign determined? By an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and same sign community, i.e., by the class struggle.

Class does not coincide with the sign community, i.e., with the community which is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus
various different classes will use one and same language. As a result, different oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of class struggle.

Similarly, metaphor is also an arena of class struggle. In fact, the entire sign system is often an arena of class struggle, in which the class in power manipulate the use of signs and the use of metaphor to achieve political goals or material benefits. Although by law everyone has the right to metaphorize everything freely, there are moments in real situations when a certain metaphorical association is banned by rulers. Indeed, nothing can destroy the creation of meaning than a powerful hand. Because metaphor creates new meaning and new knowledge, all dictators will prevent it from being used freely. If you want to have control over other people, you should first control their freedom of using language, since language is directly related with how people think. One of the important things for the rulers is to control the use of metaphor. Such a ruler’s logic is very common in authoritarian states. For instance, in some countries, people are not allowed to connect very sensitive figures like state leaders with negative things. In the world of free speech, however, people may use whatever they want to metaphorize even the most powerful person. For example, the newly elected American president Donald Trump was extensively (both positively and negatively) metaphorized by the American press.

Then there are metaphorical taboos in all cultures and societies, which remind metaphor users that some metaphorical associations are not suitable to be used in communication or in public. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of metaphorical taboos: those caused by the intervention of power and those caused by cultural taboos (the ordinary ones). And there is a huge difference between power manipulated metaphorical taboos and ordinary metaphorical taboos, because the former is more related to power while the latter is a result of intersubjective negotiation between members of a cultural community. In terms of the former, there have been many bans of metaphor in history. For instance, ordinary people in ancient China were forbidden to use the same given name as the emperor, which is called “避讳” /bi hui/ in Chinese. In Qing dynasty, poets who used the word “清” /qing/ in their poems should be very cautious, because many poets who used the word in a negative manner or disrespectful manner were killed by the rulers. Since metaphor is deeply rooted in culture, they are more likely to be oppressed when normal cultural activities are largely constrained.
throughout the society, such as the cultural disaster the Chinese nation had experienced during the notorious period of cultural revolution.

Indeed, power behind metaphor can be best exemplified by the metaphor manipulation in China during the period of cultural revolution. Generally speaking, leaders usually would like to control the use of metaphor for the following two reasons: to avoid falling into “exorbitant affectation”, or to control people’s mind through language manipulation, like ideological control. Evidently, the control of metaphor use in the cultural revolution in China belongs to the latter situation. During that period of time, it would be a disaster for someone to make a metaphor like “communism is a withered tree”, or “communists are monsters”, or “Stalin is garbage” both in public and in private. Those who use these metaphors will be either punished or even beaten to death by the Red Guards. This means, when someone said: “Stalin is garbage”, his listeners would most likely tell him “Never say that!” or “Hold your tongue!” What is worse, the users of those metaphors were more likely to become enemies of the country and the people. The government at that time forbade people from using any metaphor that attacked it or belittled it so that they could achieve greater ideological control in the country. The reason they did this is that they wanted to unify the majority under the label of the working class to fight against the minority of people who believed in the bourgeois ideology. During that special time, communist mentors like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Lenin, and Stalin could only be associated with something positive, while negative association become metaphorical taboos. Although power cannot completely wipe out those semantic features from our mind, it definitely can prevent them from being used, at least for the time being. Thus, we can see how rulers try to control people’s mind through the manipulation of metaphor.

The French scholar and semiotician Roland Barthes visited China in the year 1974 (Barthes 2011). Years before his visit to China, he traveled in Japan, and that visit resulted in the book *The Empire of Signs*. Compared to his attitude on China, Barthes was evidently much more interested in Japan, which he also saw as a “cultural other” to the western world, although it seems that he also added much imagination into it, when he was immersed in the “mysterious oriental civilization”. Roland Barthes was, to some extent, not lucky because he visited China in a bad time when the country and its people were seared in the flames of the cultural revolution. China of 1970s had greatly disappointed Barthes because, at that time, the country was oppressed by a tight
ideological control, and the use of metaphor was strictly confined. Barthes did not see a
country in which various kinds of signs, be it index, or icon, or symbol, could be adopted
freely to form new signs and new meaning; rather, what he witnessed was a severe
control of sign usage and around him was thousands of stereotyped symbols of
ideological propaganda enforced by the government. Through the exposition and
analysis in the previous chapters, we already have a clear idea that, in real language use,
the formation of metaphor is never “governed” by those conceptual metaphors proposed
by Lakoff/Johnson. In fact, the force actually governs or manipulates metaphor are its
users.

During the cultural revolution, political correctness had priority over all other
matters. Chairman Mao was deified, and had the supreme power. Therefore, metaphors
he created in his works were worshiped in the way Lakoff/Johnson see conceptual
metaphors. Indeed, many of the metaphors in his poems were considered as being
fundamentally true, and most Chinese people at that time did “live by” them. For instance,
in one of Chairman Mao’s famous poems, he says 中华儿女多奇志, 不爱红妆爱武装
/zhong hua er nv duo qi zhi, bu ai hong zhuang ai wu zhuang/ ‘Chinese girls are so
aspiring that they prefer army uniforms to red garments’. The main theme of that poem
was to praise women soldiers in the army. However, because of the supreme influence
and authority of Mao, nearly all Chinese people could recite it. As a result, the color
green (the color of the uniform at that time) was more usually associated with “being
aspiring”. Since the color grey was the uniform color of the former Red Army, it is also
preferred by the authorities. This explains why, from the founding of the PRC to the end
of the cultural revolution, the color grey and the color green (See Figure 4) are two
prevailing colors in Chinese society.
Similarly, clothing was also metaphorized for the purpose of class struggle. At that time, people did not have much space in choosing colors for what they wore. For young people, the only popular color for them was green, and if someone dressed in fancy color to attend public events, he or she would be condemned by many for being corrupted by decadent bourgeois ideas. During that special era, the western lifestyle of dressing was a target of criticism. Thus, for most occasions, people’s choice on color of clothes was largely confined to green, grey, blue, and black. Even the leaders and their relatives had to abide by the very strict dressing code, and those who violated it would be condemned or even punished. For example, the former first lady, Wang Guangmei (See Figure 5) was humiliated during the cultural revolution for wearing cheongsam or Qipao during her visit abroad.
The mainstream view at that time was that people should not associate Qipao with beauty, hence the metaphorical association between Qipao and beauty in people’s conceptual world was nearly banned. On the contrary, Qipao was connected with the declined feudal Qing Dynasty. Metaphors or metaphorical associations are much easier to be manipulated because of the unstable relationship between tenor and vehicle. Since there are many semantic features for the cultural unit Qipao, we can either adopt the semantic feature “elegant traditional costume” or choose the “official costume of a feudal dynasty” to make a metaphor. Rulers of the Cultural Revolution chose the latter one while oppressing the former one. Up to that point, Qipao had been seen to represent an elegant traditional costume. However, the government reinterpreted the symbol Qipao by adding a derogatory sense to it. In this way, Qipao was negatively metaphorized for the purpose of class struggle.

In Habermas’ framework of intersubjective communication, a sound mechanism of cultural reproduction can secure a continuity and coherence in culture and tradition. We should hear what Habermas has to say on this respect:

D – The cultural reproduction of the lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the semantic dimension: it secures a continuity of tradition and coherence of knowledge sufficient for daily practice. Continuity and coherence are measured by the rationality of the knowledge accepted as valid. This can be seen in disturbances of cultural reproduction that get manifested in a loss of meaning and lead to corresponding legitimation and orientation crisis. In such cases, the actors’ cultural stock of knowledge can no longer cover the need for mutual understanding that arises with new situations. The interpretive schemes accepted as valid fail, and the resource “meaning” becomes scarce. (Habermas 1987a: 140)

Just as what Habermas has argued, the cultural revolution is a disturbance of cultural production. Indeed, the manipulation of metaphor together with the overwhelming oppression in the cultural field during the cultural revolution had drastically reduced the Chinese nation’s competence in cultural reproduction, which accordingly led to orientation crisis in the whole society. Consequently, the Chinese nation had lived for decades on very limited stereotyped patterns with little creation. Thus, what Roland Barthes witnessed in the year 1974 was a distorted culture in a special time where metaphor and meaning production was severely manipulated by rulers to achieve political dominance. If Roland Barthes had the chance to visit China today instead of
1970s, it is quite possible that he would be fascinated by the carnival of signs in society just as what he had experienced in Japan, because, today, the Chinese nation has regained the right to use signs more freely, especially in relation to metaphor, and, as a result, traditional Chinese culture is alsoreviving. All these reveal the dynamic tension between ideology and metaphor.
Conclusion

Based on the global anatomy presented in this study, I wish to first reiterate several points on Lakoff/Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory. To begin with, the conceptual metaphor theory as a form of metaphorical essentialism is in contradiction with the polysemous nature of the sign. The relation between metaphorical tenor and vehicle is dynamic rather than static. To be more specific, vehicular diversity and multivalency are two important features of metaphor that cast serious doubts on the hypothesis of ‘conceptual metaphors’ which, being meta-metaphorical or meta-linguistic constructs, can tell us nothing but a dry and empty formula “A is B”. Moreover, there are no universal categories that determine our way of speaking and writing: Conceptual metaphors are shown to be superfluous by abundant variations at all levels of categorization and conceptualization which lies at the heart of human cognition. Last but not least, it should be pointed out that metaphor or metaphorical thinking is neither based on the so-called cross-domain mappings nor determined by some unconscious neurological structures presumed by Lakoff/Johnson.

As to Lakoff/Johnson’s embodied philosophy or experientialism, they really have not offered anything new to the philosophy of meaning. All they have done is to repeat a common sense that humans understand the world around them through their bodily experience with it and therefore no human cognition can correspond to the world as it is. It is true that humans share certain very basic physiological characteristics such as having two eyes, two legs, one nose, and so on, but the environments they live in are so diverse and different that they react to their surroundings in vastly different ways. Lakoff/Johnson are right about our way of knowing the world being largely metaphorical (Vico made this point a long time ago), but our metaphors can be very different from one another. The problem is how individual experiences and meaning can be shared by a group of people. The embodied philosophy cannot solve this problem through the rather restricted mechanism of bodily experience. The missing link in their philosophy is a space for interpersonal communication and negotiation.

As a promising alternative, cognitive linguists may find in Peirce’s theory of the sign a sound solution to this theoretical impasse. Indeed, the Peircean epistemology of metaphor offers a much better perspective than Lakoff/Johnson’s. As a logician, Peirce sees metaphor as a result of logical processes that create new meaning. Indeed, metaphor is important to Peirce not as a rhetoric adornment but as a way of abductive thinking, i.e.,
iconic reasoning which is defined as one of the two types of abduction. This is also one important contribution Peirce has made for metaphor study, i.e., depicting its underlying logic. In this sense, Peirce has emphasized a long time before Lakoff/Johnson (2003 [1980]) that metaphor means a lot more than rhetoric. Both Umberto Eco’s metaphorology and Ersu Ding’s metaphor theory are in line with Peirce’s theoretical framework where the meaning of a metaphor depends on an interpreter in a particular socio-historical context. They both realize that our metaphors can be very different from one another, and that is why we need encyclopedic knowledge about the world and the user to understand his or her metaphors. In other words, we need to reconnect metaphors with the specific cultural and historical contexts in which they appear. They are definitely not determined by some unconscious neurological structures presumed by Lakoff/Johnson which bring us back to his small number of conceptual metaphors that they think we live by. On the contrary, metaphor is situated in a cultural space for dynamic interpretation on the part of metaphor users where innumerable semantic features of objects or life situations are rhizomaticly linked on the basis of encyclopedic knowledge shared by members of a particular culture. From this perspective, metaphorical meanings are intersubjectively established, and our task is to trace the cultural patterns in metaphor, hence the need of an archeology of metaphor in different cultures. In the cultural framework, the success of metaphorical representation is dependent upon the correct interpretation of its meaning, that is, they are understood as they are meant to be. In that sense, we can say that nothing is a metaphor unless it is interpreted as a metaphor. By going beyond the ontological aspect of metaphorical concepts, the Peircean epistemology of metaphor can remedy Lakoff/Johnson’s cognitive theory so as to elucidate the actual processes of metaphorization and symbolization through a broader view of sign evolution. This is, perhaps, the most important legacy the great American philosopher and semiotician has bequeathed to us on the study of metaphor.

Now that the present study has elaborated a sound epistemology of metaphor from the perspective of Peircean semiotic tradition and proposed a cultural framework for metaphor study, there is an urgent need for future studies to reconnect and elucidate the relation between metaphor and culture through examining cultural specific metaphors. We have found out that, more often than not, the same life situation is metaphorically semiotized in different ways across languages and cultures, and there is a fair portion of metaphors where the connection between the vehicle and the tenor is made not on the
basis of a common background to life shared by people across different languages but via a special knowledge about some unique aspects of the culture in which they appear. This may perfectly serve as the general philosophy for our future exploration on metaphor study. To end this thesis, therefore, I will enumerate several key areas for future research on metaphor studies, which may also form a brief research outline for an archeology of metaphor:

1. Many culture-specific metaphors originate from the unique social customs of their users. One typical case in point is the long tradition of Taoism, also known as Daoism, and its practice of monastic life in China. The roots of Taoism go back at least to the 4th century BCE. Early Taoism drew its cosmological notions from the School of Yinyang (Naturalists), and was deeply influenced by one of the oldest texts of Chinese culture, the Yijing, which expounds a philosophical system about how to keep human behavior in accordance with the alternating cycles of nature. Taoism differs from Confucianism by not emphasizing rigid rituals and social order, rather, it emphasizes the harmony between nature and life and pursues immortality. To date, Taoism has become an integral part of Chinese life. It is no surprise that some aspects of the monastic life have been employed to shed light on its secular counterpart as can be seen in the following examples:

1) 八仙过海，各显神通。/ba xian guo hai, ge xian shen tong/ — ‘Eight immortals crossing the sea, each shows magic power.’

2) 脱胎换骨/tuo tai huan gu/ — ‘remould oneself thoroughly and become a new man’

3) 返老还童/fan lao huan tong/ — ‘being rejuvenated’ or ‘becoming young again in one’s old age’

4) 不食人间烟火/bu shi ren jian yan huo/ — ‘To be otherworldly’ or ‘refuse to eat food cooked in the world’

5) 霞举飞升/xia ju fei sheng/ — ‘be raised by rosy clouds and fly to the heaven’

Obviously, all the metaphorical vehicles here are related to the monastic life of Taoist priests that has become familiar to most Chinese people but not to people in another culture. To be able to make sense of the expressions, foreigners have to learn about Taoism and its practice either in person or from reading.

2. Culture-specific metaphors are generated not only out of the unique behavioral
patterns and material objects of their users but also from the users’ written records of real or fictional events and characters that are not shared with other nations. In the latter case, the motivating link between a current life situation and a metaphorical expression is provided by knowledge about a particular linguistic or pictorial text, be it from history books, ancient myths, folklore, literature, popular media, and what not. We may have a glimpse of the inseparability between metaphor and culture from the examples listed below:

1) 韶鸡起舞 /wen ji qi wu/ — ‘rise up upon hearing the crow of a rooster and practise with the sword’

2) 图穷匕见 /tu qiong bi xian/ — ‘the dagger shows itself when the map unrolls completely’ or ‘the real intention is revealed in the end’

3) to open Pandora’s box

4) 叶公好龙 /ye gong hao long/ — ‘Lord Ye professed to love dragons’

5) 金玉良缘 /jin yu liang yuan/ — ‘predestined match between gold and jade’

6) 木石前盟 /mu shi qian meng/ — ‘a pledge between wood and stone’

2.1 The first two examples are allusions to real historical figures and events which are used as metaphorical vehicles for similar life situations. The phrase “闻鸡起舞” /wen ji qi wu/ (rise up upon hearing the crow of a rooster and practise with the sword) is related to a Chinese historical figure Zu Ti in the Jin Dynasty. As a young boy, Zu Ti was full of aspirations. He expressed his ambition and determination to serve the country whenever talking with his friends. He was also a man of action. In order to achieve his goal, he rose up upon hearing the roosters crow to practice with the sword every day. He finally grew up to be a very famous general of his time. This story was well documented in The History of the Jin Dynasty. The phrase is now used to refer to anyone who has aspiration to serve the country and works diligently to achieve the goal. It is for this reason that the word “舞” /wu/ is translated into “practicing with the sword” rather than “dancing”. Thus, without the knowledge on the background story behind the metaphor, it would be very difficult for people from other cultures to grasp the true meaning of it.
Likewise, “图穷匕见” /tu qiong bi xian/ (the dagger shows itself when the map unrolls completely) was originally related to a figure in Chinese history, Jing Ke, and a famous event was a guest residing in the estates of the prince of Yan state and renowned for his failed assassination attempt of Ying Zheng, King of Qin state, who later became first emperor in Chinese history (reign from 221 BC to 210 BC). Jing Ke was sent by Dan, the crown prince of Yan state, to assassinate Ying Zheng, King of Qin state. In order to approach the King, they decide to present as gifts the map of Dukang, the first part of Yan state that the Qin wanted. Concealing the dagger inside the map scroll, Jing Ke represented the Yan and met with the King. When the King gradually unrolled the map, Jing Ke immediately seized the revealed dagger and attacked the King. Although the assassination was unsuccessful and Jing Ke was killed, the story was handed down by people ever since. In modern Chinese, “the revealed dagger in the unrolling map” is metaphorized by people to refer to someone’s real intention (usually negative ones) uncovered in the end. To understand its full import, however, one has to be familiar with the historical anecdote that gave rise to the metaphor.

2.2 Metaphorical allusions, however, do not have to be related to real historical figures and events all the time. In fact, many metaphorical expressions can be traced back to unreal or fictive worlds that vary from one culture to another. However, “pre-scientific” or superstitious some of those texts may seem, they provide an important foundation for the understanding of a large number of metaphors that are very much in force today. For instance, the third metaphor above, “to open Pandora’s box”, is related to a famous story in the Greek mythology. Pandora’s box is an artifact taken from the myth of Pandora’s creation in Hesiod’s Works and Days. The “box” was actually a large jar that Zeus gave to Pandora, which contained all the evils of the world. Breaching Zeus’ instructions of never opening it, Pandora opened the jar and all the miseries and evils flew out to afflict mankind, leaving only “Hope” inside once she had closed it again. The story cannot be scientifically proven, of course, but it does provide a metaphorical vehicle whose present meaning is “to perform an action that
may seem small or innocent, but that turns out to have severely detrimental and far-reaching negative consequences”.

The fourth example given above originates from an old legendary in the Han Dynasty. A Lord Ye of ancient times who was very fond of dragons adorned his whole palace – beams, pillars, doors, windows and walls – with drawings and carvings of them. When a real dragon in heaven heard of this it was deeply moved by his infatuation and paid him a visit. When Lord Ye saw the real dragon thrusting in its head through the window of his study and its tail moving in his palace, he was frightened out of the house for his life. Clearly, what Lord Ye loved was not real dragons. One can safely claim that nobody in China actually believes in the existence of dragons, but that does not prevent people from using the expression to mean metaphorically “the professed love of what one actually fears”.

2.3 Examples 5) and 6) represent another important source for culturally unique metaphors, that is, the so-called belle-letters which is often nationally-based. The Chinese phrase “金玉良缘” /jin yu liang yuan/ (predestined match between gold and jade) originates from the great Chinese novel A Dream of Red Mansions, in which the hero Baoyu who was born with a jade finally married his cousin Baochai who always wore a golden necklace. Their marriage was not only happily agreed by their parents, but also was blessed by almost all their relatives and friends. The phrase is now used by many Chinese to refer to “a perfect couple” or “a happy marriage”. Likewise, another metaphor “木石前盟” /mu shi qian meng/ (a pledge between wood and stone) taken from the same novel is connected to the pledge Baoyu and Daiyu made in their past life (wood refers to Daiyu and stone represents Baoyu). The phrase is now used by many to refer to “the fruitless but poignant love” or even “the doomed love”. Obviously, a certain degree of familiarity with the literary text alluded to is essential to the understanding of the above metaphors.

As is obvious from the examples presented above, many metaphors are closely related to the culture in which they are produced. To understand them or to learn to use them in new situations, we have to delve into the original cultural contexts from which they are
derived. Such an effort contributes to what I call an “archeology of metaphor” to which I plan to devote myself in the near future.
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188