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Kharlay O.

CULTURE-SPECIFIC CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF BEAUTY

She that is born a beauty is half married.
(English proverb)

From the perspective of cultural linguistics, this paper a) investigates and compares the conceptualisations of beauty in the Chinese, English and Slavonic (Polish and Ukrainian), b) analyses the cultural contexts of in which beauty conceptualises and c) reveals the crucial peculiarities of the human's perception and evaluation of beauty in the appointed languages. Based on the theory that language is an activity the character and structure of which express the culture and individuality of speakers (Humboldt 1907), attention is mainly focused on the interrelationship of language and culture pointing out ontological features of Chinese, Polish, English and Ukrainian worldview and perception of beauty. A sufficient number of examples demonstrate the ontological features and the empirical generalizations embedded in conceptual images of beauty in the analysed languages. Furthermore, the findings of the paper may assist in learning the axiological value of beauty and its origin in the chosen languages and cultures.

Key words: cultural linguistics, conceptualisation, semantic feature, cross-cultural research, beauty.

Харлай О.В. Культурноспецифічні концептуалізації краси. Стаття присвячена дослідженню та порівнянню особливостей концептуалізації краси у китайській, англійській, українській та польській мовах.

Ключові слова: лінгвокультурологія, концептуалізація, семантична ознака, крос-культурне дослідження, краса.

Харлай О.В. Культурноспецифические концептуализации красоты. Статья посвящена исследованию и сравнению особенностей концептуализации красоты в китайском, английском, украинском и польском языках.

Ключевые слова: лингвокультурология, концептуализация, семантический признак, кросс-культурное исследование, красота.

Beauty has long been considered an integral part of human perception of the world. Despite being a broad notion, it is typically associated with a quality of people, places, or things that makes them very attractive to look at.¹ Its contemplation gives pleasure and enjoyment. Distinguished philosophers and scientists in the whole world took an interest in values and importance of beauty for humanity in different eras. However, its understanding is deeper, more aesthetic and superb than one can imagine. The perception of beauty is known to vary and modify throughout epochs. For instance, the medieval art aimed to eulogize inner, spiritual beauty in contrast to the epoch of Renaissance during which an individual, their appearance and perfection were prioritized.

It is noteworthy that culture does not exist in isolation, but is transmitted through material objects, rituals, institutions, and art, from one generation to another. The culture is embodied not only in the physical and spiritual world but also in the language. Every culture seems to be wrapped up in the language and

¹ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (English-Chinese). (2000). 4th ed., Pearson, 162.

it continuously 'communicates' with people [13]. It is universal means of concept production. At the same time the vocabulary of any language is determined by the social consciousness of the nation that uses it. Saussure observed, that 'the culture of a nation exerts an influence on its language, and the language, on the other hand, is largely responsible for the nation' [6, 20]. That is every language has its hidden contents because cultural information often exists in the latent form so the scholar's task lies in finding a 'key' in order to decode the hidden meanings.

The dominant tasks of this research is a) to investigate and compare the conceptualisations of beauty in the Chinese, English and Slavonic (Polish and Ukrainian) languages, b) to analyse the cultural contexts of in which beauty tereotypyzat, c) to reveal the crucial peculiarities of the human's perception and evaluation of beauty in the appointed languages.

The paper contrasts cultural conceptualisations of beauty in the Chinese, Polish, English and Ukrainian languages. The exploration is done from a cultural-linguistics perspective and the related field that of ethnosemantics. The choice of the theoretical background is determined by the fact that there is, as Sharifian [8] states, 'a close relationship between language, cultural tereotypyzation, and cultural cognition'. Many scholars maintain this idea [4; 8]. According to Sapir-Whorf's hypothesis, the varying concepts and categories inherent in different languages affect the cognitive classification of the experienced world in such a way that speakers of different languages think and behave differently because of it [5]. Brown [1] holds the view that 'a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.' Nida [15] concurs that 'language and culture are two language items symbolic systems. [...]. Every language form we use has meanings, carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language.' This paper studies the features of the realities chosen by a cultural community to represent conceptualisations of beauty in its language throughout the years.

In the theoretical framework of cultural linguistics, *language* forms the centre of cultural cognition of a group and serves its 'collective memory bank' [9, 476]. It is believed to express the deep meaning of life, to accumulate ethno-cultural information that is everything that belongs to the people as a kind of historical and anthropological formation. Although language changes in the course of history, it is also stored in these altered forms with more or less permanent characteristics.

In its turn, *cultural cognition* is understood as 'the collective cognition that tereotypyza a cultural group. Due to its dynamic nature, it is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated within and across the generations of the relevant cultural group, as well as in response to the contact that members of that group have with other languages and cultures' [9, 476].

Conceptualisations are defined by Sharifian [9] as 'products of human cognition collectively'. They develop through interactions between the members of a cultural group and enable them to think as if in one mind, somehow more or less in a similar fashion.

Having accepted this theory, the paper aims to identify and compare specific characteristics of the conceptualisations of beauty as ‘a cultural phenomenon which reflects people’s cultural understanding of the real world’ [11], employed by different languages in order to capture the uniqueness of every language analysed in particular. Based on the premise that ‘language does not reflect the world directly: it reflects human stereotyping, human interpretation of the world’ [12, 7], this research attempts to see what key features of beauty are shaped by ‘human nature’ and to what extent they are determined by culture in the appointed languages.

The conceptualisations of beauty in the Chinese, English and Slavonic (Polish and Ukrainian) languages are illustrated by the examples taken from a selection of printed and electronic dictionaries along with the sources that offer insight into the specific context usage.

In this research, the conceptualisations of beauty have been compared in terms of cross-cultural approach. Such an approach opens entirely new avenues of research [3, 11] and attempts to explore the limits and possibilities of human language by comparing the structures of a range of diverse languages [10]. It allows revealing important distinctions as well as similarities embedded in the cultures chosen for the analysis and represented in the languages respectively.

Thus, the findings of this research emerging from the semantic analysis can be used in a range of comparative and contrast disciplines such as General Linguistics, Comparative Linguistics, Cognitive Linguistics, Cross-cultural Communication, Linguistic Typology, etc.

For centuries, in Chinese culture the proper place for a woman was at home, where she was largely responsible for the upbringing and education of children. The chief virtue proper to these roles was obedience: first to her father, then to her husband, and finally to her adult son.² Even the character 女 (*nǚ* ‘woman’) traditionally depicts an outline of a woman kneeling on the floor, showing her obedience to a man.³ The Chinese idiom 嫁雞隨雞, 嫁狗隨狗 (*jià jī suí jī, jià gǒu suí gǒu*) lit. ‘If you marry a chicken follow the chicken, if you marry a dog follow the dog’⁴ vividly confirms this idea. Nevertheless, if the girl was physically attractive she had a chance to marry into money, get status in the social hierarchy and lead relatively ‘easier’ life. Thus, beautiful girls were mostly preferred by the potential ‘wealthy’ husbands. Similarly, Ukrainians used to say Личко дівку віддає lit. ‘Face marries a girl.’⁵ It is worth mentioning that marriages in Chinese families were always arranged by parents basing on the social status and prosperity of the candidates and no feelings of love or sympathy were taken into consideration.

Myth, history, and legend provide evidence of ancient women whose beauty was considered undoubtedly phenomenal. These are the women considered to

² Adler, J. A. Daughter/Wife/Mother or Sage/Immortal/Bodhisattva? Women in the Teaching of Chinese Religions. *Teaching about Asia* 11-16, Retrieved from <http://www2.kenyon.edu>

³ ShaoLan Hsueh. (2014). *Chineasy: The New Way to Read Chinese*. United Kingdom: 46.

⁴ *Traduction de Proverbes Chinois (Expressions et Chengyu)*. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.regine-traduction.com/proverbes-chinois.php>

⁵ Українські традиції. Прислів'я та приказки про красу та її цінність. Retrieved from <http://traditions.org.ua/usna-narodna-tvorchist/pryslivia-ta-prykazky/1563-pryslivia-ta-prykazky-pro-krasu-i-vrodu>

be the most beautiful either on the basis of their sexual power over men or their physical attractiveness. Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Venus up to this day are still the popular figures in Western culture. Their legacy survives in numerous works of art and numerous dramatizations of their stories in literature and other media.

In the ancient China, there were four women who all left a large footprint in the long course of Chinese history. One of them was Xi Shi 西施 (497 BC) – a legendary beauty of ancient China. Xi Shi's beauty was said to be so outstanding that when she leaned over a balcony to look at the fish in the pond –.... the fish would be so dazzled that they forgot to swim and sank away from the surface, thus winning her the title of 'the one who sinks the fishes': 沉魚 (*chén yú*), means 'sank fish.'⁶ She is often depicted in Chinese paintings as a beautiful lady kneeling by the riverside, washing gauze.⁷

This description serves as the first two characters of Chinese idiom 沉魚落雁 (*chén yú luò yàn*), which literally means 'fish sink and goose alights' and is used to compliment someone's beauty.

The name of Xi Shi is indirectly related to another Chinese idiom: 東施效顰 (*dōng shī xiào pín*), where 東施 is the name of a fictional person in the Spring and Autumn Period in Chinese history. 效 means 'imitate,' and 顰 means 'knit brows, frown.' A literal translation of the whole idiom is 'Dong Shi imitates (the famous beauty Xi Shi) in knitting her eyebrows (and ends up looking even uglier).' This is the metaphor for 'blindly imitate others to benefit from it, but end up with the negative result.'⁸

The story says that everyone admired Xi Shi whenever she left the house. Another girl in the village, Dong Shi, was extremely ugly – no matter what hair styles she tried and what clothes she wore, she never got the attention Xi Shi enjoyed. One day, Xi Shi's chest hurt and she frowned and held her hand by her breast to ease the pain. All the people in the village were worried about her and gave her even more attention. Dong Shi noticed that, got even more jealous and started doing the same. But when the people in the village saw the ugly Dong Shi frowning and holding her chest in pain, the mere sight got them so sick that they ran home and locked their doors tightly. The equivalent of the idiom is found in the English language: *Ugly women, finely dressed, are uglier.*⁹

Taking into consideration the conception of beauty and its criteria that exist in the social consciousness of every ethnic group analysed in our paper, we can say that beauty is one of the key characteristics of a woman. It takes her life to a new level and sometimes assigns a new meaning. Beauty is considered to be generally acceptable and it can be equally appreciated by the representatives of various age categories as well as national, racial and ideological groups. One of the main features of beauty is that it can be detected in any of the temporal and spatial dimensions, in different historical and social conditions.

⁶西施 (*Xi Shi*) – *A Chinese beauty's legend*. (18 July 2012). Retrieved from <http://lang-8.com/276806/journals/1584822>

⁷*Four Greatest Beauties of China: Xi Shi (西施)*. (13 September 2012). Retrieved from <http://theirhistory.blogspot.com/2012/09/four-greatest-beauties-of-china-xi-shi.html>

⁸Jiao L., Kubler C. C., Zhang, W. (2011). *500 Common Chinese Idioms. An annotated Frequency Dictionary*. Routledge, 159.

⁹*Ibid.*, 99.

Thus, the 'power' of feminine beauty and its strength are recognized by various linguistic communities. For instance, in Polish the evidenced sayings are: *Gdzie uroda, tam i siła* 'Where beauty is, there is strength' (compare with Ukrainian proverb Де врода, там і сила 'Where beauty is, there is strength')¹⁰, *Uroda wielki orator, wielki mocarz* 'Beauty is great speaker, great potantate', the influence of which is so strong that it can even capture: *Uroda każdego zniewoli* 'Beauty can captivate anyone'¹¹ In the Russian language there are eloquent expressions found in the novels 'The Brothers Karamazov' and 'The Idiot' of the outstanding Russian classic Fyodor Dostoevsky, where the characters of novels reflecting on the beauty believe it can save the world: Красота спасет мир 'Beauty will save the world', they call it 'terrible' and provide it with the characteristics of mystery and mysticism: Ужасно то, что красота есть не только страшная, но и таинственная вещь. Тут диавол с Богом борется, а поле битвы – сердца людей 'The terrible thing is that beauty is not only fearful but also mysterious. Here the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart.'¹² In the Chinese language, the stunning beauty of a woman is endowed with a destructive force that is capable of capturing cities and states. Thus, an exceedingly beautiful woman is called 傾國傾城 (*qīng guó qīng chéng*) which means 'lovely enough to cause the fall of a state and the collapse of a city.'¹³

The importance of beauty becomes apparent when a girl is deprived of natural appeal. As evidence for this, Slavic people tend to mock at such girls: Pol. *Grunt uroda, komu tej jednej nie dostaje, nie dadzą jej bogactwa ani obyczaje* 'Beauty is the foundation, someone who does not get it, will not get it by means of wealth or in any other way'¹⁴; Ukr. Нічого дзеркало винить, коли пика погана 'If your face is ugly, don't blame the mirror,' Така хороша, що не варт і гроша 'So good-looking that is not worth a penny';¹⁵ Pol. *Taka uroda jak u Żyda broda* 'So beautiful as a Jew beard'¹⁶ (stereotypically red and thin), they were scorned, emphasizing the impossibility of changing the appearance: Pol. *Nie pomoże mydło, woda, kiedy brzydka uroda* 'Soap and water will not help if the beauty is ugly'¹⁷; Ukr. Не допоможе панні мило, коли чорна, як кадило 'Soap will not help if the girl is as black as incense', Те, що природа дала, милом не одмиєш 'The fact that nature has given no soap can wash away'¹⁸, and were partly openly insulted, using images of animals (frogs, dogs etc.) and their unexpected reaction to unattractive girls: Ukr. Така погана, що й жаби б не їли 'So bad even the frog would not eat', Така ладна, що як на двір вийде, то всі пси брешуть 'So good-looking that when she goes outside, all the dogs start barking'; Як вигляє у вікно, то три дні собаки брешуть, а одна, як

¹⁰Українські традиції...

¹¹*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń Przystłowiowych Polskich.* (1969-1972). Tom I–III. J. Krzyżanowski (red.). Warszawa, 598.

¹²Достоевский Ф.М. (1972-1990). Полное собрание сочинений: в 30 томах. Ленинград: Наука, 100.

¹³Jiao, L. et al., 104.

¹⁴*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń...*, (Tom III), 598.

¹⁵Українські традиції...

¹⁶*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń...*, (Tom III), 598.

¹⁷Ibid., 598.

¹⁸Українські традиції...

придивилась, так і сказала! 'When she looks out of the window, dogs bark without a break for three days, when one dog looked closer, it went bezerk.'¹⁹

It is interesting to note that the Chinese used to analyse very picky girl's looks before calling her a beauty: 品頭論足 (*pǐn tóu lùn zú*) 'criticise head and feet' means 'make critical remarks about a woman' physical appearance trying to find fault.'²⁰

By contrast, it is believed that attractive girls go through life easier, because they cause a greater degree of confidence and trust: Pol. *Na urodę brać, dawać (na kredyt, bez poręczenia)* 'Beauty gets, sells without guarantee'²¹, Ukr. Пригожому все роже 'An attractive person looks beautiful in any outfit',²² it is easier for them to find a husband: Eng. *She that is born a beauty is half married*²³, Ukr. Личко дівку віддає 'Face sells the girl', Гарний цвіт не буде довго стояти при дорозі 'A beautiful flower will not stand directly in the path'²⁴; Pol. *Gdzie jest miód, tam będą i pszczoły, gdzie piękna dziewczyna, tam będą i chłopcy* 'Where there is honey, there will be the bees, where a beautiful girl, there will be the boys.'²⁵ It is interesting to learn that in the Chinese equivalent of this idiom, the main feature for a successful marriage is modesty, not beauty: 窈窕淑女, 君子好逑 (*yǎo tiǎo shū nǚ, jūn zǐ hào qiú*)²⁶ which means 'modest, retiring young ladies are sorted by gentlemen.' However, proverbs in different languages warn girls from getting a lot of admirers, because ultimately the choice of the husband may be the worst: Chinese: 千揀萬揀, 揀了個爛燈盞 (*qiān jiǎn wàn jiǎn, jiǎn le gè làn dēng zhǎn*) 'choosing thousand and ten thousand times, eventually choose a broken lamp', English: *A maiden with many woers often chooses the worst.*²⁷

In the Slavic cultures, it is necessary to have certain virtues for a girl to be considered beautiful. Generally, these are girl's decency and virginity: Pol. *Uroda bez cnoty nie może w sławę iść* 'Beauty without virtue cannot get any fame', *Uroda cnotę krasí (zdobi)* 'Beauty garnishes virginity', pleasant to talk: *Uroda bez przyjemności nic przyciągnie wiele gości* 'Beauty without agreeableness does not attract many guests.'²⁸ For the Ukrainians, a girl's natural intelligence and savvy are significant: Ukr. Краса минеться, а розум пригодиться 'Beauty ends up, wit comes useful', На красуню дивитись любо, а з розумною жити добре 'Beautiful girl is pleasant to look at, but a wise one is good to live with',²⁹ her kindness: Не шукай краси, а шукай доброти 'Don't look for beauty, but look for kindness',³⁰ as well as her industriousness: Ukr. Не дивися на личко, а питай про роботу 'Don't look at the face, but ask for the work done.'³¹ In English

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 97.

²¹*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń...*, (Tom III), 597.

²²Українські традиції...

²³Jiao, L. *et al.*, 520.

²⁴Українські традиції...

²⁵*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń...*, (Tom II), 491.

²⁶Jiao, L. *et al.*, 520.

²⁷Ibid., 315.

²⁸*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń...*, (Tom III), 598.

²⁹Українські традиції...

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

thinking, *Beauty is only skin-deep*, which suggests that how someone looks is not as important as a good character³². It is interesting to know that in Chinese culture, the emphasis on pre-marital abstinence and virginity also results in a continuous sex segregation, which is one of the characteristics of traditional Chinese gender culture rooted in the concept of virginity. For instance, in the Song and Ming Dynasties, a woman was expected to be loyal to her husband before she gets married and after her husband dies.³³ If a girl happened to violate the rules and lost her virginity before the marriage she was strongly condemned by the society and given offensive names: for example, such a girl could be called 破鞋 (*pò xié*) which literally means ‘broken shoe,’ that is a loose woman.³⁴

Eventually, feminine beauty is fleeting and short-lived, as evidenced by the following expressions – peculiar warnings for young beauties that are verbalized in idioms and sayings in different languages: Chinese: 紅顏易老 (*hóng yán yì lǎo*) means ‘pretty face easily turns old,’ Eng.: *The fairest silk is soonest stained* or *The fairest rose at last is withered*,³⁵ Pol. *Uroda rzecz nietrwala* ‘Beauty is not long-lasting’,³⁶ Ukr. Три речі скоро минають: луна, веселка і дівоча краса ‘Three things flow away fast: moon, rainbow and girl’s beauty’, Як була я молода, була в мене врода, а тепер на виду і в дзеркалі не найду ‘When I was young, I was a beauty, now when I stay in the daylight, I cannot find it in the mirror.’³⁷ However, Chinese demonstrated pejorative attitude to the women, who not being young any longer, were trying to attract the opposite sex and compared them to Lady Xu: 半老徐娘 (*bàn lǎo xú niáng*).³⁸ The idiom means ‘flirtations of a middle-aged woman who still remains traces of her erstwhile beauty.’ Lady Xu was a concubine of Emperor Yuan of the Liang Dynasty. She carried amorous affairs even when she was getting old. In the Russian language, there is a playfully ironic utterance женщина бальзаковского возраста ‘the woman of Balzacian age’ which is used to mark a woman in her thirties. The saying became commonly used after the publication of the novel ‘A Woman of Thirty’ (1829-1842) by the French writer Honore de Balzac. The heroine of the novel, viscountess d’Aiglemont, was distinguished by independence of judgment and freedom in revealing her feelings. Indeed, in the 19th century socialite, a lady older than thirty had to be married because at that time girls got married at the age of 14-16. Therefore, it was thought that a 30-year-old woman had no right to love. Initially, this expression ironically denoted women who wanted to resemble the main character of the novel; with the lapse of time, the meaning of the expression has changed and now stands for a woman aged 30-40 years.

It is known that every nation has its beauty criteria. If in the Slavonic cultures they are basically similar, it turns out interesting to consider some of them in

³²Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (English-Chinese). (2000). (4th ed.). Pearson: Longman, 163.

³³Zhang, Y. 張宇蓮. (1996). *Marriage, living apart and reunion: experience of Chinese immigrant wives*. Master’s thesis, the University of Hong Kong, China. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10722/33788>, hnp.

³⁴Mair, V. (6 August 2012). *Chinese terms of address for single ladies*. Retrieved from <http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=4116>

³⁵Jiao, L. *et al.*, 160.

³⁶*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń...*, (Tom III), 598.

³⁷Українські традиції...

³⁸*Ibid.*, 130.

Chinese culture, compare and trace their cultural conceptualisations and linguistic verbalization.

On the one hand, the Chinese recognize the existence of various types of beauty. Describing the range of the types of beauties, the Chinese use the idiom 燕瘦環肥 (*yàn shòu huán féi*) which means ‘*Yáng Yùhuán* was plump while *Zhào Feiyàn* was skinny.’ The idiom mentions Empress Xiaocheng (孝成皇后), an empress during the Han Dynasty. Her husband was Emperor Cheng. Xiaocheng was often compared and contrasted with Yang Guifei (the real name is Yang Yuhuan), the beautiful concubine of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and one of the four Chinese beauties, because she was known for her slender build while Yang was known for her full build. Thus, it means that every beautiful woman is attractive in her own way.³⁹

It is worth mentioning that in ancient times, a woman’s stoutness showed the well-being and social status of her family. It meant she did not do any heavy manual job, could afford better and tastier food and, respectively, was considered attractive and was called 秀色可餐 (*xiù sè kě cān*) ‘Beauty that is the feast of the eye.’⁴⁰ Two Chinese beauties, namely Xi Shi 西施 and Yang Guifei 楊玉環, were weity and ample. For comparison, in the Slavonic cultures, a plump woman was an illustration of health. She could perform physical work on the farm and in the field, and give birth to healthy children.

By contrast, there is another Chinese idiom which states different beauty criteria, so that a fair-complexioned, rich, and pretty single female in her twenties or thirties is extolled as 白富美 (*bái fù měi*) lit. ‘white [not ethnically] – wealthy – beautiful’).

Although the Slavs call a physically attractive girl білолиця lit. ‘with white face colour’, for them the skin color does not play a major role as a setting of beauty compared to Chinese culture. Many Chinese people believe the white will be more beautiful. There is an ancient Chinese saying: 一白遮百醜 (*yī bái zhē bǎi chǒu*) which in the English equivalent is *A white complexion is powerful enough to hide seven faults* (faults in your body type, face, demeanour and many others.)⁴¹. It means no matter what flaws your appearance has, but if your skin is of white colour – you are a beauty.

On the other hand, beautiful women in Chinese culture were believed to be slim and graceful. The proof of it is the following idiom: 婷婷玉立 (*ting ting yù lì*) ‘Slim and graceful.’⁴² Moreover, the description of slim and delicate woman’s body can be found in classical Chinese poetry:

娉娉裊裊十三餘，	‘Slender, she’s just thirteen,
荳蔻梢頭二月初	the tip of a cardamom bud
	in early spring.’ ⁴³
不堪盈手贈	‘Alas, I cannot hold the moonlight
	in my slender hand.’ ⁴⁴

³⁹English translation for “環肥燕瘦”. Retrieved from <http://en.ichacha.net/chinese-english/%E7%8E%AF%E8%82%A5%E7%87%95%E7%98%A6>

⁴⁰ Jiao, L. *et al.*, 130.

⁴¹百度一下，你就知道, Retrieved from <http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/485870679.html>

⁴²Jiao, L. *et al.*, 117.

⁴³100 *Classic Chinese Poems*, 131.

纖手破新橙

‘she cuts for him a fresh orange
in her slender fingers.’⁴⁵

Delianating attractive woman’s appearance Chinese tend to appeal to the auspicious symbols in their culture. For instance, Chinese often compare physically attractive and elegantly dressed women to flowers and actualize the phytonimic images of hibiscus and lotus: 芙蓉 (蓮花) 出水 (*fú róng (lián huā) chū shuǐ*) ‘Hibiscus (lotus) rises out of water’⁴⁶ talking about a graceful woman (in Chinese culture hibiscus symbolizes glory, fame, splendor and lotus-flower is a sacred Buddhist symbol of the evolution. To the Chinese, it symbolizes ultimate purity and perfection because it rises untainted and beautiful from the mud [2]. The idioms 錦簇花團 (*jǐn cù huā tuán*) lit. ‘Bouquet of flowers and piles of silks’ and 花枝招展 (*huā zhī zhāo zhǎn*) lit. ‘The flowering branches sway’ are used to describe richly-attired and gorgeously dressed women.⁴⁷

In the Chinese culture, jade is another symbol of beauty. It is a highly treasured gem, which represents goodness, preciousness and physical attractiveness. The example of comparing an elegant woman to jade can be found in traditional Chinese poetry: 玲瓏如玉 (*líng líng rú yù*) ‘Exquisite as jade’, 玉人何處教吹簫 (*yù rén hé chù jiāo chuī diào*) ‘A jade-like beauty’.⁴⁸

The moon is till today one of the most prominent and potent symbols amongst the vast collection of Chinese characters. In Chinese minds, the moon is associated with gentleness and brightness, expressing the beautiful yearnings of the Chinese. Traditionally, the Chinese have always associated the moon with the female beauty deriving their inspiration from the natural cycle of the moon: 纖纖月 (*qiān qiān yuè*) ‘As graceful as the new moon’⁴⁹, 花容月貌 (*huā róng yuè mào*) lit. ‘Countenance of a flower, face like the moon’.

In some Chinese idioms, the semantics of beauty is greatly hyperbolized to show its exclusivity 閉月羞花 (*bì yuè xiū huā*) lit. ‘Hiding the moon, shaming the flowers’ meaning fig. ‘Female beauty exceeding even that of the natural world’, 國色天香 (*guó sè tiān xiāng*) lit. ‘National grace, divine fragrance’, 絕代佳人 (*jué dài jiā rén*) lit. ‘Beauty unmatched in her generation’, 絕世佳人 (*jué shì jiā rén*) lit. ‘A woman of unmatched beauty.’

It is interesting to note that representatives of such distant cultures like Chinese, Polish and Ukrainian almost equally agree that being beautiful to a girl is not the equivalent of the happy fate and easy life. The Chinese idiom 紅顏薄命 (*hóng yán bó mìng*) lit. ‘Beautiful women suffer unhappy fates’⁵⁰ evidences it. In the Polish language there are idioms with the synonymous meaning: *Uroda często abo wielom szkodliwa* ‘Beauty is often harmful to many,’⁵¹ as well as in Ukrainian: Не будь красива, а будь щаслива ‘Do not be beautiful, but be happy.’⁵²

⁴⁴Ibid., 025.⁴⁵Ibid., 217.⁴⁶Jiao, L. *et al.*, 47.⁴⁷Ibid., 61.⁴⁸100 *Classic Chinese Poems*, 041, 135.⁴⁹Ibid., 231.⁵⁰*Traduction de Proverbes Chinois (Expressions et Chengyu)*. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.regine-traduction.com/proverbes-chinois.php>⁵¹*Nowa Księga Przysłów i Wyrażeń...*, (Tom III), 598.⁵²Українські традиції...

At the same time, representatives of different in kind cultures such as Chinese and English agree that if a man is in love, the appearance of his beloved seems flawless, the most attractive and elegant to him. In this case, the Chinese describe the girl placing her on the same footing as Xi Shi. The following Chinese and English idioms illustrate it: 情人眼裏出西施 (*qíng rén yǎn lǐ chū xī shī*) lit. ‘In the lover’s eye, there is Xi Shi’, *If Jack’s in love, he’s no judge of Jill’s beauty, Every lover sees a thousand graces in the beloved object, Beauty lies in lover’s eyes.*⁵³

A summary of the features that underlie the stereotypization of *beauty* can be seen in the table below:

Table 1

Beauty is /means...	Chinese	Polish	Ukrainian	English
• powerful	+	+	+	
• transient	+	+	+	+
• white skin colour	+			
• easy life		+	+	+
Absence of beauty = hard life		+	+	
Beauty + virtues:				
• modesty	+			
• decency		+		
• innocence		+	+	
• intelligence			+	
• kindness			+	
• industriousness			+	
• good character				+

The accomplished analysis revealed that the importance of the category of *beauty* and physical attractiveness differs in the analysed cultures. The sources of the features that underlie the conceptualisations of beauty and are inherent to the Chinese, English, Polish and Ukrainian languages are as follows: traditional national culture, cultural symbolism, social and gender stereotypes. The leading role of the latter is especially notable in such a patriarchal society as Chinese.

Beauty was one of the crucial factors of a successful marriage in a hierarchical Chinese society in contrast to the Slavonic ones in which physical attractiveness is considered as an addition to the girl’s virtues: innocence (Ch., Pol., Ukr.), industriousness (Ukr.), and decency (Pol.).

Similar positively and negatively marked features in the compared conceptualisations are ‘beauty – power’ (Ch., Pol., Ukr.), ‘beauty – easy life’ (Pol., Ukr.,

⁵³*Chinese Idioms...*, 327.

Eng.), 'beauty – transient' (Ch., Pol., Ukr., Eng.), 'beauty – pejorative attitude' (Pol., Ukr.).

In the Chinese culture, the girls with white skin color and of slim body type are mostly preferred and this feature is represented in the language respectively. In the Chinese language, stereotypization of woman's beauty is symbolic, and it is expressed by means of phytonymic images (flower, lotus, hibiscus) and signs identified with nature objects (moon, jade).

The perspective of the further research lies in defying and comparing of other culturally marked categories and concepts (e.g. manhood – womanhood) in various languages and cultures.

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