

The Color of Green: Metaphorical Meanings in Thai and Chinese¹

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Abstract

Metaphor functions not only as a rhetorical device, but also as a cognitive framework for understanding concepts. This study investigates and compares the metaphors associated with the color green in Thai and Chinese, utilizing data from the Thai National Corpus (TNC) and the BLCU Corpus Center (BCC). Applying the contemporary theory of metaphor (CTM) from cognitive linguistics, the analysis identified 139 metaphors for green in Thai, categorized into five main meanings and nine sub-meanings, with anger emerging as the most prevalent sub-meaning. By contrast, the analysis of Chinese revealed 59 metaphors, divided into four main meanings and ten sub-meanings, where marital infidelity was identified as the most common sub-meaning. Overall, Thai people utilize green metaphors more frequently than do their Chinese counterparts; however, in both languages, green metaphors carry predominantly negative connotations. This study highlights both similarities and differences in the metaphors of green between Thai and Chinese, reflecting the intrinsic properties of the color as well as the social histories, geographical contexts, and cultural perceptions unique to each group.

Keywords: color metaphors, color terms, green, Thai and Chinese languages

Introduction

Color terms are fundamental lexical items present in all languages, playing a crucial role in how individuals describe the colors of various objects. Since ancient times, colors have been intricately linked to human life, influencing practices such as dyeing fabrics, painting containers, and creating works of art. Moreover, colors can convey specific meanings or serve as symbols within any society (Suwannawattanakarn, 2010). Duan (2017) also proposed that color has two layers of properties: physical properties and cultural properties. The former pertain to the straightforward description of a given object's chromatic characteristics, whereas the latter encompass a multitude of factors, including social life, religious beliefs, traditional practices, and the underlying cultural meanings associated with them.

In the fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and cognitive linguistics, the study of color terms has received considerable attention and has been a popular topic in the study of metaphors, such as the research of red and green metaphors in English and Spanish (Rodríguez Redondo and Molina Plaza, 2007), the study of white, black, yellow, red, green and blue metaphors in Arabic (Al-Adaileh, 2012), the research

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of color terms metaphors in Persian proverbs (Aliakbari and Khosravian, 2013) and the research of color metaphors in Indonesian (Wijana, 2015).

In traditional linguistics, metaphor is considered a type of figure of speech, defined as the strategic deployment of comparative language, particularly within poetry (Ma and Liu, 2008: 267). Traditionally, metaphor involves using language to draw comparisons between two entities, primarily facilitated by the copulative verbs “is” and “are.” For instance, in Thai, expressions such as /p^hô: mē: k^hu: rôm p^ho: rôm sai k^hô:ŋ lû:k/ (parents are the Bodhi tree of children), /t^háhă:n pe:n rúa k^hô:ŋ prat^hê:t/ (soldiers are the fence of the country), and /k^hru: k^hu: rûa tēâ:ŋ/ (teachers are the ferry boat) exemplify this approach (Chanthao, 2018).

In contrast, modern linguists view metaphor as a broader term encompassing all forms of figurative language, regardless of the presence of comparative terms. Metaphorical study evolution expands the scope of conceptual and method such as the contemporary theory of metaphor (CTM) in cognitive linguistics, which provides the core premise that the cross-domain mappings are not random but grounded in our everyday bodily experiences and cultural interactions. Speakers use these systematic, often unconscious, mappings to structure their perceptions, reason about the world, and guide our actions (Steen, 2011). Instead of being a specialized mode of thought, metaphor is the basic means by which people conceptualize reality and is actively reflected in a daily language. The CTM, therefore, redefined metaphor as an indispensable, pervasive element of human cognition that makes abstract thought possible.

Notable scholars in this cognitive linguistic approach include Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Ungerer and Schmid (1996), Kövecses (2002), and Cruse (2004). These researchers argue that metaphorical language is intrinsically linked to concepts, experiences, and everyday activities. Metaphors are thus not idiosyncratic expressions but rather collective understandings shared among members of a society.

Kövecses (2002) elaborates on the metaphorical understanding process as a mapping between two related conceptual domains. This process begins with the transfer of meaning from the source domain, which provides the original context, to the target domain, which encapsulates the new meaning intended by the speaker. For example, in the metaphor “love is a journey,” “a journey” serves as the source domain, while “love” is the target domain. This mapping elucidates how the characteristics of “a journey” enhance the comprehension of the complexities of love, demonstrating how metaphorical language allows for the articulation of abstract ideas through more concrete experiences. Consequently, metaphors enrich conceptual understanding by drawing parallels with relatable experiences, fostering deeper emotional connections in communication.

From this cognitive linguistic perspective, color metaphors can be defined as the comparison of color with other concepts, facilitating a transfer of meaning from the original context of color to a more complex or abstract final meaning. This transfer often employs experiences associated with the perception of that color to articulate or elucidate the new meaning. For example, this study analyzes the metaphor of green, the source domain is the basic color term “green,” the target domain is the other conceptual domains to which “green” is mapped (e.g. the emotion domain, behavior domain, object domain, etc.); and the mapping forms the metaphorical usage or meaning during the mapping process. The mapping process can be shown in the figure below.

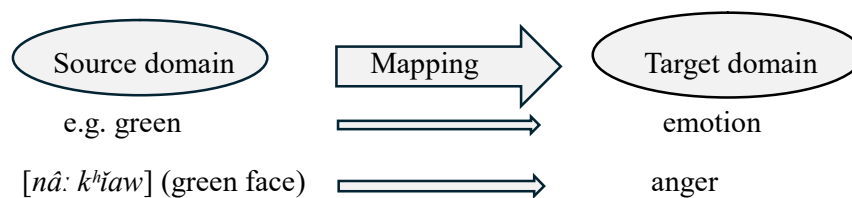


Figure 1 The concept of color metaphors

Yi (2005) asserts that the examination of metaphors is a crucial component of cognitive linguistics, primarily because metaphors are deeply rooted in cultural contexts. This dual nature of metaphor—both linguistic and cultural—necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the relevant target culture to fully grasp its implications. Similarly, Li (2010) emphasizes that metaphors arise from cognitive processes shaped by individual experiences. Such metaphorical expressions allow individuals to leverage one experience to understand another, thereby reflecting the intricacies of cultural characteristics. This interconnectedness of language, culture, and thought facilitates a deeper appreciation of cultural nuances and the exchange of ideas.

As noted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are influenced by the cognitive experiences of individuals within a shared culture. Despite the distinct languages and identities of Thailand and China, both nations are situated within a broader Asian cultural framework. Thus, it is plausible to hypothesize that color metaphors in Chinese and Thai may reveal both similarities and distinctive features.

Numerous scholars—including Jiang (2011), Yang (2013), Gong (2015), Miao (2016), Duan (2017), and Zhou (2018)—have conducted comparative studies of color terminology in Thai and Chinese. Their work primarily examines the construction of color terms, their meanings, social and cultural implications, and teaching strategies for Thai students learning Chinese color terms. However, these studies often neglect the metaphorical usages of color terms and frequently lack robust empirical methodologies based on extensive language data.

By contrast, Kanjina (2016) explores the emotional dimensions of colors in Thai, identifying five key color terms that function as metaphors. Meanwhile, Sriyanlak (2012) investigates the rich metaphorical meanings embedded in Chinese idioms related to color. Lin (2019) further contributes to this discourse by analyzing the color yellow across both languages, uncovering deeper metaphorical connotations in Chinese.

The existing literature suggests that while many researchers have engaged in thorough comparative analyses of color terminology in Thai and Chinese, most have concentrated on aspects such as the construction of color terms, their fundamental meanings, social and cultural dimensions, and educational strategies, with limited focus on metaphorical usage. Although some empirical studies have touched upon color metaphors, there remains a significant gap in comprehensive analysis utilizing extensive language data.

Green, a color prevalent in natural environments, has been identified by numerous scholars employing Berlin and Kay's (1969) basic color theory as one of the fundamental color terms in both Chinese and Thai throughout history (Yao, 1988; Liu, 1990; Ye, 2001; Li, 2004; Engchuan, 2000; Thipkongkha, 2010; Pornthipphanit et al., 2014; Unthanon and Chanthao, 2020). Despite a substantial body of prior research concerning metaphorical color terms, there has yet to be an in-depth, focused

comparative analysis of a single color. Specifically, a comparison of the metaphorical meanings of “green” in Thai and Chinese is currently absent from the literature. Therefore, this research seeks to address this gap by specifically examining the metaphors associated with green in both languages. By employing empirical methods and drawing from rich language data, the findings aim to enhance our understanding of the role of color metaphors in cultural cognition and provide deeper insights into how diverse cultural backgrounds influence metaphor construction.

Research Objectives

This study has two objectives: 1) To study the metaphors of green in Chinese and Thai; 2) To compare the similarities and differences between the metaphors of green in Chinese and Thai.

Research Methodology

Research design: This research employs a mixed-methods approach in linguistics, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The qualitative component focuses on the cognitive linguistics framework to identify the primary and sub-meanings of green metaphors in Thai and Chinese. The quantitative aspect analyzes the frequency and occurrence rates of these metaphors, providing insights into their prominence within each language.

Data: The data for this study are divided into two distinct corpora: a Thai corpus and a Chinese corpus. The Thai corpus is sourced from the Thai National Corpus (TNC), developed by Chulalongkorn University (2013), and utilizes the search term /*kʰɔw*/ (green) within the fiction category. The Chinese corpus is drawn from the Chinese Corpus Center (BCC), developed by Xun et al. (2016) of the Institute of Language Intelligence at Beijing Language and Culture University, employing the search term /*lǜ*/ (green) within the literature category.

Data definition: In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is conceptualized not merely as a linguistic strategy or a traditional figure of speech, but as a systematic foundation of human perception. Consequently, the data analyzed as metaphors can either be explicitly marked by comparison words such as “is,” “are,” or “like,” or implied using non-literal verbs or nouns within the discourse. For instance, in the Thai sentence, “The child’s face turned *green*, and he was trembling with fear of ghosts,” and the Chinese phrase, “Don’t be fooled by her appearance; she is a *green* tea bitch,” the term “green” functions as a cultural metaphor conveying complex meanings beyond its literal color value.

Data collection: Due to the TNC’s restriction of 1,000 entries per search, 1,000 entries containing the term “green” were randomly selected from both the Thai and Chinese corpora, yielding a total of 2,000 entries. These entries were subsequently reviewed and evaluated by native speakers to identify those utilizing the green metaphor. The selected entries were then analyzed and classified according to their metaphorical meanings.

Entries containing two or more colors were excluded from the analysis, as it is challenging to determine the specific meaning of each color in such cases. For instance, expressions in Chinese like “big red and big green” (referring to something gaudy) and “red light and green wine” (indicating a luxurious, corrupt atmosphere) illustrate this complexity.

Analysis: This study analyzes data on the metaphorical usage of the color term “green” in Thai and Chinese, employing the framework of the contemporary theory of metaphor (CTM) within cognitive linguistics. The methodology involves identifying and mapping the source domain (green) to its corresponding target domains in each language. A subsequent cross-linguistic comparison will be conducted to identify similarities and differences in the conceptualization of “green metaphors” between Thai and Chinese.

Results

The research results are categorized into three sections: Thai green metaphors, Chinese green metaphors, and a comparative analysis between the Thai and Chinese contexts.

Green Metaphors in Thai

From the selection of 1,000 Thai corpus in the search term /*k^haw*/ (green), 139 metaphorical expressions for green were found, divided into five main meanings and 10 sub-meanings, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Green metaphors in Thai

Main meaning	Sub-meanings	Frequency	Ratio	Ratio total
1) Emotions total 119 expressions	1.1) Anger	118	84.89%	85.61%
	1.2) Suffering	1	0.72%	
2) Place total 10 expressions	2.1) Kasetsart University	8	5.76%	7.19%
	2.2) Prostitution establishment	2	1.44%	
3) Characteristics total 7 expressions	3.1) Vitality	4	2.88%	5.03%
	3.2) Smelly	3	2.15%	
4) People total 2 expressions	4.1) Underage daughter	1	0.72%	1.44%
	4.2) Soldier	1	0.72%	
5) Behavior total 1 expression	Permission	1	0.72%	0.72%
Total	9	139	100%	100%

As illustrated in the table above, the green metaphors in Thai can be classified into five main meanings: emotions (85.61 percent), place (7.19 percent), characteristics or properties (5.03 percent), people (1.44 percent), and behaviors (0.72 percent). Among the nine sub-meanings identified, anger is the most prevalent at 84.89 percent, followed by Kasetsart University (5.76 percent), vitality (2.88 percent), smelly (2.15 percent), prostitution (1.44 percent), suffering (0.72 percent), underage daughter (0.72 percent), soldier (0.72 percent), and permission (0.72 percent). The following section will provide detailed examples of each sub-meaning, drawn from the TNC.

1) Emotions

1.1) Anger

In Thai, the color green is used as a metaphor to express anger or dissatisfaction. It is most commonly used in conjunction with the body parts on the head, namely the eyes, face, skin, and voice.

The most common Thai metaphors for green are /*ta: kʰiaw*/ (literally “green eyes”), /*nâ: kʰiaw*/ (literally “green face”), and /*sǎŋ kʰiaw*/ (literally “green voice”), which all refer to the state of being angry.

1.2) Suffering

In Thai, the color green is used as a metaphor to express suffering. This is exemplified by the term /*kʰiaw kʰāo*/ (literally “green fishy smell”), which refers to the smell of rice. However, rice has a fragrant smell. When the fragrance is masked by the hard work of farmers, it is perceived that the fragrant smell of rice is the smell of blood, which demonstrates the suffering of farmers. Synchronically, the metaphorical usage of “green” in this particular connotation has fallen out of active spoken use; its presence is restricted solely to traditional or archaic expressions.

2) Place

2.1) Kasetsart University

In Thai, the color green is used as a metaphor to refer to Kasetsart University of Thailand. This is evidenced by the phrase /*rúa sǐ: kʰiaw*/ (literally “green fence”), which is used to refer to the Kasetsart University, and the phrase /*lû:k sǐ: kʰiaw*/ (literally “green child”), which refers to the students of Kasetsart University. This is because Kasetsart University’s official color is leaf green. This is in accordance with the Prime Minister’s Office announcement on the determination of the image of the official emblem according to the Official Emblem Act.

2.2) Prostitution establishments

In Thai, the color green is used as a metaphor for locations where prostitution is conducted. This metaphor has its origins in the phrase /*kʰǎ:m kʰiaw*/ (literally “green lantern”), which refers to brothels. The genesis of this metaphor can be traced back to the Rattanakosin period during the reign of King Rama V of Thailand. At that time, in order to regulate and regularly monitor the health status of prostitutes, the government mandated that brothels must display lanterns outside their premises as a visual indicator. Although the color was not specified, the relevant officials used a lantern with green glass in the shape of a folding fan as a sample, and thus brothels were required to hang “green lanterns” as a sign (Bunnak, 2019).

3) Characteristics

3.1) Vitality

In Thai, the color green is used as a metaphor to signify vitality. This is due to the fact that green is the color of fresh foliage, as evidenced by the existence of terms such as /*muang kʰiaw*/ (literally “green city”) and /*pʰèn din kʰiaw*/ (literally “green land”) which refer to a metropolis or region characterized by a plethora of verdant trees, and a vital natural environment.

3.2) Smelly

In Thai, the color green is used as a metaphor to describe a malodorous substance. This is evidenced by the term /*mě:n kʰiaw*/ (literally “smelly green”). The term /*mě:n kʰiaw*/ originally referred to vegetables or greenery with an unpleasant smell. As well as referring to food and vegetables, it can also be used to refer to people who have an unpleasant smell. For example: “When they arrived, the peaceful atmosphere of nature disappeared and was replaced by the /*mě:n kʰiaw*/ of people.” However, the term /*kʰiaw*/ historically originated from the phonetic change (sound shift) of the older forms /*kʰiaw*/ or /*kʰiaw*/. Thus, /*mě:n kʰiaw*/ functions as a compound word used for semantic intensification. Subsequently, the orthographic form of both sounds underwent a phonetic and spelling evolution into the modern term /*kʰiaw*/.

4) People

4.1) Underage daughter

In Thai, the color green is used as a metaphor for an underage daughter. This metaphor is exemplified by the expression “/tòk k^hīaw/” (literally “fall into the green”), which originally referred to the practice of capitalists lending money to farmers when the fruit or rice was still unripe and then taking the fruit or rice back when it was fully ripe. The meaning of “/tòk k^hīaw/” has since been extended to imply that parents accept money from capitalists as payment for their unripe daughters. When the daughters mature, the capitalists take them into prostitution to repay the debt. In this metaphor, “k^hīaw” (green) serves as the source domain and is extended to mean “unripe rice or fruit.” This meaning is then mapped to the target domain, namely “underage girls.”

4.2) Soldier

In Thai, the color green is also used as a metaphor to describe soldiers. This is due to the fact that, within the international community, including Thailand, military personnel frequently wear green uniforms. Consequently, in Thai, the color green is employed as a metaphor for soldiers, as exemplified by the term /wê:t wo:ng sǐ: k^hīaw/ (literally “green circle”), which denotes the cohort of individuals who serve in the military.

5) Behavior

Permission

In Thai, the color green is employed as a metaphor to convey permission. This is exemplified in the idiomatic expression /p̄:t fái k^hīaw/ (literally “turn on the green light”), which signifies permission to proceed with a particular action. This metaphorical usage is derived from the modern traffic light system.

The results of this analysis indicate that the Thai term for “green” functions as a source domain, providing metaphorical connections to five target domains: emotions, place, characteristics, people, and behaviors that follow the mapping in the figure 2.

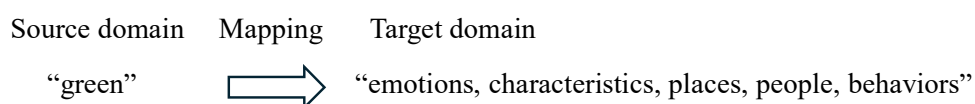


Figure 2 The mapping of “green metaphors” in Thai

The cross-domain mapping illustrated in Figure 2 yields the conceptual metaphor [GREEN IS HUMAN] because the four target domains— emotions, characteristics, people, and behaviors—belong to humans and [GREEN IS PLACE].

In addition, interpreting meaning in the lens of cognitive linguistics necessitates that the addressee possesses socio-cultural literacy, encompassing historical context, culture, and societal beliefs, to decode the intended metaphorical meanings. The analysis must also incorporate discourse-level examination of the color term, as its meaning is often context-dependent. For example, the phrase “this green fence produces graduates for the labor market” uses “green” as a metonymic or metaphorical reference tied to the established context of Kasetsart University.

Green Metaphors in Chinese

From the selection of 1,000 Chinese corpus in the search term /lǜ/ (green), a total of 59 metaphorical expressions for green were found, divided into four main meanings and 10 sub-meanings, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Green metaphors in Chinese

Main meaning	Sub-meaning	Frequency	Ratio	Ratio total
1) Behavior total 23 expressions	1.1) Marital infidelity	19	32.20%	38.98%
	1.2) Permission	4	6.78%	
2) Emotions total 16 expressions	2.1) Anger	12	20.34%	27.12%
	2.2) Fear	4	6.78%	
3) Characteristics or properties total 16 expressions	3.1) Vitality	7	11.86%	27.12%
	3.2) Sick or unhealthy	3	5.09%	
	3.3) Messy	3	5.09%	
	3.4) Terrifying	2	3.39%	
	3.5) Safe or high-quality	1	1.69%	
4) People	Young people	4	6.78%	6.78%
Total	10	59	100%	100%

As illustrated in the table above, Chinese green metaphors can be categorized into four main meanings: behavior (38.98 percent), emotions (27.12 percent), characteristics or properties (27.12 percent), and people (6.78 percent). Ten sub-meanings were identified, with marital infidelity being the most common at 32.20 percent, followed by anger (20.34 percent), vitality (11.86 percent), permission (6.78 percent), fear (6.78 percent), young people (6.78 percent), sick or unhealthy (5.08 percent), messy (5.08 percent), (terrifying) (3.39 percent), and safe or high-quality (1.69 percent). The following section will provide detailed examples of each sub-meaning, drawn from the BCC.

1) Behaviors

1.1) Marital infidelity

In Chinese, the color green is metaphorically employed to describe the behavior associated with marital infidelity. This is exemplified by the term */lǜ mào zi/* (literally “green hat”), as illustrated by the expression, ‘He’s been a “green hat” for seven or eight years, indicating that his wife has been unfaithful for that duration. The origins of this metaphor can be traced back to the Yuan Dynasty of China, when the parents and male relatives of prostitutes were required to wear green turbans. This tradition was reiterated during the Ming Dynasty, particularly in Nanjing, where men from the families of prostitutes faced similar obligations. By the Qing Dynasty, the phrases “wearing a green hat” or “being a green-turbaned man” had come to signify that one’s wife was engaging in extramarital relations (Zhang, 2003). This usage has persisted into contemporary times.

1.2) Permission

In Chinese, the color green is used as a metaphor to describe permissive behavior. This is exemplified in the phrase */kāi lǜ dēng/* (literally “turn on the green light”), which has the same meaning and usage as the Thai phrase */pà:t fái k’iaw/* (literally “turn on the green light”).

2) Emotions

2.1) Anger

In Chinese, the color green serves as a metaphor for expressing anger, particularly when paired with the word “face,” as illustrated by the phrase */liǎn dōu lǜ le/* (literally “the face turns green”), which indicates a state of intense anger. In this context, green intensifies the expression of anger. This usage shares both denotative and connotative meanings with Thai. However, while both languages utilize green

to convey anger, Thai exhibits a broader application. In Thai, green can be associated with not only the face but also the eyes, gaze, eye color, and voice. In contrast, in Chinese, the metaphorical use of green is limited to the face when expressing anger.

2.2) Fear

In Chinese, the color green is employed as a metaphor for expressing fear, with body parts such as the face often depicted in conjunction with this color. To illustrate, the phrase “*liǎn dōu xià lǜ le*” (literally “the face turned green with fear”) is an effective means of conveying a high level of fear. No analogous metaphor has been identified in the Thai language.

3) Characteristics or properties

3.1) Vitality

In Chinese, the color green is used metaphorically to represent vitality or abundance. For instance, the phrase “*/lǜ zhōu/*” (literally “green continent”) refers to a green area in a desert, commonly known as an oasis in English. For example, “His family is a small green continent,” which means that his family embodies vitality and abundance. Additionally, the term “*/lǜ zhōu/*” can describe a place that is tranquil and serene, or one that exudes joy. For example, “How I wish the world were a */lǜ zhōu/* of peace.”

3.2) Sick or unhealthy

In Chinese, the color green is employed as a figurative expression to signify a state of poor health or illness. To illustrate, the phrase */rén dōu lǜ le/* (literally “the body is already green”) is indicative of a state of poor health or illness. It can be observed that the skin or blood vessels may appear to have a darker hue when an individual is unwell. In this context, the green in question refers to cyan, which is a dark tone, and is therefore used to convey a comparison to a body that is sick or unhealthy. Although the Thai language also employs the color green to denote the color cyan, there is no analogous metaphor found in Thai.

3.3) Messy

In Chinese, the color green is used as a metaphor to signify messiness or disorder. This concept is illustrated by the phrase */huā huā lǜ lǜ/* (literally meaning “many flower colors and green”), which refers to a wide variety of colors. However, it also serves to represent various forms of disorder, including chaotic arrangements of objects, as well as disruptions in thought, logic, language, and other forms of reasoning. No equivalent metaphor has been identified in Thai.

3.4) Terrifying

In Chinese, the color green is used as a metaphor to describe a person’s terrifying or cruel nature. This metaphor is often employed in conjunction with other physical attributes, such as the eyes, to convey a similarly sinister and malevolent quality. For instance, the phrase */yǎn jīng dōu lǜ le/*, which translates to “the eyes have turned green,” describes an individual who has become imbued with a frightening and cruel disposition. No equivalent metaphor has been identified in Thai.

3.5) Safe or high-quality

In Chinese, the color green is used as a metaphor to describe the characteristics or properties of food or other things. These include safe or high-quality, non-toxicity, environmental friendliness, pollution-free, and safety. These modern green metaphors are used in societies all over the world. For example, */lǜ sè liáng shí/* (literally “green seed food”) refers to seed food grown without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Despite the existence of analogous metaphors in Thai, this study did not identify any.

4) People

In Chinese, the color green is used as a metaphor to refer to people, namely young people. The color green is used with gender-specific words, with the structure of gender-specific words (female-male) + green, meaning young women and men. Such as */cǎn lǜ shào nián/* (literally “light green boy”), which means young man, */huā nán lǜ nǚ/* (literally “flower man, green woman”), where the green woman in this phrase means a young woman. This metaphor comes from the color of young people’s clothes. No analogous metaphor has been identified in Thai.

The results indicate that the Chinese term for “green” functions as a source domain, providing metaphorical connections to four target domains: behavior, characteristic, emotion, and people that follows the mapping in the figure 3, below.

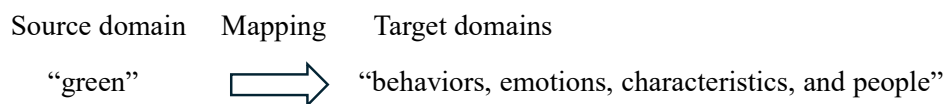


Figure 3 The mapping of “green metaphors” in Chinese

The cross-domain mapping illustrated in Figure 3 yields the conceptual metaphor [GREEN IS HUMAN] because four target domains—behavior, emotions, characteristics, and people—belong to humans.

Green metaphors comparison

The comparison of green metaphors in Thai and Chinese can be summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 Comparison of green metaphors

Main meaning	Sub-meaning	Thai	Chinese
Emotions	Anger	118	12
	Fear	N/A	4
	Suffering	1	N/A
Characteristics or properties	Vitality	4	7
	Smelly	3	N/A
	Sick or unhealthy	N/A	3
	Messy	N/A	3
	Terrifying	N/A	2
	Safe or high-quality	N/A	1
Behavior	Marital infidelity	N/A	19
	Permission	1	4
People	Young people	N/A	4
	Soldier	1	N/A
	Underage daughter	1	N/A
Place	Kasetsart University	8	N/A
	Prostitution establishment	2	N/A
Total		139	59

A comparison of Thai and Chinese shows that green metaphors are more common in Thai, with five primary meanings, compared to four in Chinese, which lacks place-related metaphors. In addition, both languages share metaphors such as anger, vitality, and permission. Unique Thai metaphors include suffering, smelly, soldier, underage daughter, Kasetsart University, and prostitution establishment; while unique Chinese metaphors include marital infidelity, fear, sick or unhealthy, messy, terrifying, safe or high quality, and young people.

The divergence in the target domains of the “green” metaphors, which contributes to the central argument of the conceptual metaphor analysis, is as follows: [GREEN IS HUMAN] is shared across both languages, whereas the conceptualization of [GREEN IS PLACE] is unique to the Thai context and absent in the Chinese context.

Discussion

Overall, the use of metaphorical language is considerably more prevalent in Thai than in Chinese, with both languages exhibiting a proclivity towards ascribing negative connotations to the color green. In the Thai language, negative meanings such as anger (84.89 percent), suffering (0.72 percent), and prostitution (1.44 percent) account for 89.2 percent of green metaphors. In Chinese, negative meanings such as marital infidelity (32.20 percent) and anger (20.34 percent) total 72.87 percent. Furthermore, this study identified nine sub-meanings of green metaphors in Thai and ten in Chinese, which contrasts with Sriyanlak’s (2012) single metaphorical meaning for green in Chinese. This discrepancy is likely due to Sriyanlak’s focus on idiomatic expressions in Chinese, whereas this research employs a larger corpus of modern data for analysis.

In terms of the main meanings related to emotions, this study found that green expresses emotions in both Thai and Chinese cultures, aligning with Kanjina’s (2016) conclusion that green serves as an emotional metaphor in Thai. In addition to its use in relation to eyes, skin, and face, this study also identified green’s association with sounds to express anger. The observation that both cultures use green to convey multiple emotions aligns with the perspective of Shi et al. (2021) that colors and emotions do not have a one-to-one correlation. Furthermore, the differing emotional metaphors of green in these cultures highlight the influence of cultural factors on color preferences, as shown by Jonauskaite et al. (2019), who noted that Greeks associate purple with sadness while Chinese associate white with it.

In terms of the main meanings related to characteristics or properties, metaphors in Chinese are richer than those in Thai, with Chinese identifying five meanings and Thai only two. Additionally, this study did not find any metaphors related to safety, quality, or environmental protection in Thai. While such metaphors do exist in Thai—for example, “green food” referring to organic food and “green economy” referring to an environmentally friendly economy—this study was unable to find them due to limitations in the Thai language corpus. Future research could explore more recent corpora, such as data containing color terms from social media. Furthermore, although both Chinese and Thai employ the term “green” to signify vitality, the specific lexical items utilized differ. In Chinese, the phrase “green continent” (oasis) is used, whereas in Thai, no analogous term exists. This discrepancy can be attributed to the geographical environment, as Thailand lacks any desert landforms.

In terms of the main meanings related to people, although both Thai and Chinese use green as a metaphor for underage or young women, the sources of the two are quite different. The Chinese metaphor

comes from the color of young women's clothes, while the Thai metaphor comes from the color of unripe fruit or rice. In addition, although the Chinese military also wears green uniforms, there is no green metaphor associated with soldiers in Chinese. This reflects the different mindsets of the Chinese and Thais.

In terms of the main meanings related to place, although the green metaphor associated with brothels does not appear in Chinese, the origins of the metaphors */lǜ màozi/* (literally “green hat”) in Chinese and */kʰō:m kʰǎw/* (literally “green lantern”) in Thai reflect the fact that in the history of China and Thailand, prostitutes and brothels were once legal and subject to unified management by the government. Secondly, no specific green metaphors related to place were found in Chinese, indicating that colors are more prominently used in Thai society. For example, many governments and social institutions in Thailand use colors as their symbols, such as purple banks, pink banks, green banks, and blue banks. In China, it is nearly impossible to find institutions using colors as their symbols. Therefore, no green-related metaphors pertaining to place were found in Chinese. This reflects the differences in the social and cultural contexts of the two countries.

Conclusion

A cognitive linguistic approach to metaphor emphasizes the underlying conceptual system as manifested in linguistic expressions. The green metaphors in Thai and Chinese have both similarities and differences. These similarities and differences are deeply rooted in the two peoples' cognition of color, color-related experiences, ways of thinking, natural geographical environment, as well as similarities and differences in social history and culture. A linguistic analysis of modern compound words is recommended to investigate the semantic expansion of “green” in socio-economic contexts, as seen in the example, “the stock market was green across all continents today.”

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