The Study of Thai Elephant Culture Based on the “Elephant Metaphors” in Thai Idioms

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ABSTRACT
The elephant, as a national treasure of Thailand, is a sacred symbol of the Thai people. Elephants play a very important role in Thai people’s life; and it, as a culture, has penetrated into all aspects of Thai society. Thai people take the “elephant” as a source to construct a huge system of “Elephant Metaphors” with their own intelligence and wisdom. Through this huge system of “Elephant Metaphors,” people can clearly know about Thai “Elephant Culture.” The “Elephant Culture” represents the crystallization of Thai people’s adaptability and result of the adaption to the particular environment of the tropical region of Indo-China Peninsula; it is an important integral part of the overall Thai culture; and it is also a Faith Culture, which has its own system. Thai “Elephant Culture,” as a symbol of the Thai people as well as Thailand, has the following characteristics: a symbol of the Thai ethnic group, a symbol of power and honor, a symbol of auspiciousness and wisdom, a symbol of strength, as well as a modest symbol of negativity and evil.

KEYWORDS
Thailand; elephant metaphors; elephant culture

1. Introduction
Metaphor is the most profound part of a culture that reflects the most attractive features of culture. Through these metaphors, we can clearly see the connotation and extension of a certain culture. Therefore, such metaphors cannot be reproduced or imported in another national cultural environment.
Metaphors usually have cultural uniqueness; they often originate from special national cultures, such as special national beliefs, deified legends, politics, history, and literary inheritance, etc. (Ding 217–227). Therefore, such metaphors are often irreproducible and non-portability in other national cultural environment. Metaphors also carry the overall cognition and value orientation of a certain nation (Han, “The Meaning Construction” 69–78). Once they leave the special cultural environment that gave birth to them, they will dry up and die.

The Thai people have long lived in the Indo-China Peninsula, having a long history and cultural heritage. Influenced by the special geographical environment as well as historical and cultural heritage, Thai people have generated a special emotion for the elephant. They love elephants, worship elephants, and also fear elephants. After a long historical development, Thai people have gradually developed a special “elephant culture.” This is reflected in Thai idioms, and there are lots of metaphors constructed with “elephant” or behaviors related to “elephant” as the source domain. In this study, we will refer to these metaphors as “elephant metaphors.”

In this study, we will first use the conceptual metaphor theory to analyze the “elephant metaphors” in Thai idioms in order to give readers a clear understanding of “elephant metaphors” in Thai. On this basis, we will use the theory of cultural linguistics to explore the nature, status and characteristics of the Thai elephant culture that is reflected by “elephant metaphor” in Thai idioms.

2. An analysis of “elephant metaphors” based on conceptual metaphor theory

Since ancient times, metaphor has been one of the hotspots of scholars in both East and West. Different schools have proposed different metaphor research theories from their own research perspectives, such as “comparison theory of metaphor,” “substitution theory of metaphor,” “interaction theory of metaphor,” “conceptual metaphor theory,” and so on (Feng 2–15; Han, “A cognitive Poetic Study” 33–40). These theories have made their own unique contributions to the study of metaphor in different historical periods, and promoted the continuous development of metaphor study.

At present, among many metaphor theories, conceptual metaphor theory is the most innovative theory. This theory was first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their book “The Metaphor We Live By.” Later, Lakoff (1993) systematically expounded the concept metaphor theory in the article “Contemporary Metaphor Theory.” The core idea of the theory is that metaphor is a systematic mapping from a specific conceptual domain to an abstract conceptual domain (Lakoff 202–251; Li 131–133; Nick & Katz 36–47). This theory holds that the mapping of metaphor is mapped from source domain to the target domain in a way that the structure of image schemas in source domain is consistent with the internal structure of the target domain; it is unidirectionally mapping from source domain to target domain (Evans & Green 296–303; Ogarkova & Soriano 19–35). The entire mapping diagram is as the Figure 1.

According to the concept of metaphor theory, any metaphor must involve a source domain and a target domain. The core operating mechanism of metaphor is a structural mapping based on some similarity from the source domain to the target domain (Geeraerts 206–207; Landau, Zhong & Swanson 54–71; Callies 63–81).
When using this theory to study metaphors, researchers often classify metaphors according to the different source domains of metaphors.

In this paper, we will divide the “elephant metaphors” in Thai into the following three categories according to the source domain: the first employs the whole elephant as the source domain, the second employs a part of the elephant’s body as the source domain, while the third employs elephant-related behaviors as the source domain.

2.1. Using the whole elephant as the source domain

In the construction of this category of metaphors, the whole elephant is used as the source domain. The elements participating in the mapping in the source domain mainly include: participants (elephants), the particular nature or characteristics of the elephant, the state or ending of the elephant. These elements are structurally mapped to the entity of the target domain, so as to let people know about the entity of the target domain through the elephant. The entire mapping diagram is as the Figure 2.

And the specific cases are as follows:

\[\text{Literal translation: Elephant with long and hard teeth and elephant with tall and strong body cannot live in the same forest.}\]
Free translation: If two men ride on a horse, one must ride behind.

\[
ts^{h}:a:n^{55} \, ta:i33 \, t^{h}:a:n^{55} \, tua^{33} \, ?au^{33} \, pai^{33} \, pua^{33} \, ma^{33} \, pit^{21}
\]
(ts\(^{h}:a:n^{55}\) elephant; ta\(^{i33}\) die; t\(^{h}:a:n\)\(^{55}\)\(tua^{33}\) entire/whole; ?au\(^{33}\) take; pai\(^{33}\) pua\(^{33}\) lotus leaf; ma\(^{33}\) come; pit\(^{21}\) cover)

Literal translation: After the elephant dies, cover the carcass with a lotus leaf.

Free translation: The cat shuts its eyes when it steals cream.

\[
ta:33 \, bo:t^{21} \, k^{h}:lam^{33} \, ts^{h}:a:n^{55}
\]
(ta\(^{33}\) eye; bo\(^{t^{21}}\) blind; k\(^{h}:lam^{33}\) feel; ts\(^{h}:a:n^{55}\) elephant)

Literal translation: Touch the elephant with a hand and tell others the shape of the elephant.

Free translation: Having a limited outlook.

\[
k^{h}:a:51 \, ts^{h}:a:n^{55} \, ?au^{55} \, ?a:33
\]
(k\(^{h}:a:51\) kill; ts\(^{h}:a:n^{55}\) elephant; ?au\(^{55}\) take; ?a\(^{33}\) ivory)

Literal translation: Kill the elephant and take its ivory.

Free translation: Kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

\[
ts^{h}:a:n^{55} \, p^{h}:ua:k^{21} \, kot^{21} \, nai^{33} \, p^{h}:a^{33} \, n^{33}p^{h}:ra:i^{33} \, ri:k^{21}
\]
(ts\(^{h}:a:n^{55}\)\(p^{h}:ua:k^{21}\) white elephant; kot\(^{21}\) to be born; nai\(^{33}\) in/at; p\(^{h}:a^{33}\)\(n^{33}p^{h}:ra:i^{33}\)\(ri:k^{21}\) remote areas)

Literal translation: White elephants were born in remote places.

Free translation: Talents often come from remote areas of society.

\[
ts^{h}:a:n^{55} \, p^{h}:ua:k^{21} \, kot^{21} \, nai^{33} \, p^{h}:a^{33} \, n^{33}p^{h}:ra:i^{33} \, ri:k^{21} \, ma:51 \, kot^{21} \, nai^{33} \, kru^{33}
\]
(ts\(^{h}:a:n^{55}\)\(p^{h}:ua:k^{21}\) white elephant; kot\(^{21}\) to be born; nai\(^{33}\) in/at; p\(^{h}:a^{33}\)\(n^{33}p^{h}:ra:i^{33}\)\(ri:k^{21}\) remote areas; ma\(^{51}\) do not; kot\(^{21}\) to be born; nai\(^{33}\) in/at; kru\(^{33}\) big city)

Literal translation: White elephants are usually born in remote rural areas rather than big cities.

Free translation: People of insight often come from the remote areas, not the big city.

Concerning these elephant metaphors of idioms, a large number of characteristics of elephants are used, such as precious, difficult to get along with similar ones, bulky, scarce, etc. to characterize people, things, behaviors, etc. These vivid elephant metaphors help people gain a better understand the world while enhancing language expressiveness.
2.2. Employing part of the elephant’s body as the source domain

In the construction of this category of metaphors, only a certain part of the elephant’s body is employed as the source domain. The elements participating in the mapping in the source domain mainly include: a certain part of the elephant’s body, the nature or characteristics of “the certain part of the elephant’s body” and the state or ending. These elements are structurally mapped to the entity of the target domain, so as to let people know about the entity of the target domain through a certain part of the elephant’s body. The entire mapping diagram is as the Figure 3.

And the specific cases are as follows:

\(?\text{au}^{33}\text{nu:a}^{55}\text{mu}^{215}\text{pa:i}^{33}\text{pa}^{21}\text{nu:a}^{55}\text{ts}^{h}\text{a}^{\eta}^{55}\)

(ʔau\text{ take; nu:a meat; mu: pig; pa:i go; pa: mix; nu:a meat; ts\text{h}a:η\text{ elephant})

Literal translation: Mix pork with elephant meat.

Free translation: To teach fish to swim.

\text{ts}^{h}\text{a:η}^{55}\text{ʔ\text{au}^{55}\text{na}^{51}}

(ts\text{h}a:η\text{ elephant; t}^{h}\text{au}^{55}\text{ leg; na:51 front})

Literal translation: The front leg of the elephant.

Free translation: Bellwether.

\text{ts}^{h}\text{a:η}^{55}\text{ʔ\text{au}^{55}\text{na}^{51}}\text{ts}^{h}\text{a:η}^{55}\text{ʔ\text{au}^{55}\text{lan}^{215}}

(ts\text{h}a:η\text{ elephant; t}^{h}\text{au}^{55}\text{ leg; na:51 front; ts\text{h}a:η\text{ elephant; t}^{h}\text{au}^{55}\text{ leg; lan}^{215}\text{ hind/back})

Literal translation: The front leg of the elephant, and the back leg of the elephant.

Free translation: A good Jack makes a good Jill.

\text{du:}^{33}\text{ts}^{h}\text{a:η}^{55}\text{xai}^{51}\text{du:}^{33}\text{xa:η}^{215}\text{du:}^{33}\text{na:η}^{33}\text{xai}^{51}\text{du:}^{33}\text{me:}^{51}

(ʔ\text{du: look; ts\text{h}a:η\text{ elephant; xai}^{51}\text{ let/allow; du: look; xa:η}^{215}\text{ neck; du: look; na:η}^{33}\text{ girl; xai}^{51}\text{ let/allow; du: look; me: mother)}

Literal translation: The nature of the elephant looks at the neck; the character of the girl looks at the mother.

Free translation: From the foot we may judge of Hercules.

\text{th:}^{21}\text{b:x}^{51}\text{ta:}^{33}\text{ts}^{h}\text{a:η}^{55}\text{x\text{a:η}^{215}\text{ta:}^{33}\text{len}^{55}}

(thi: frequent; b:o^{51} overgo; ta:33 eye; ts\text{h}a:η\text{ elephant; xa:η}^{215}\text{ far/alooof; b:o}^{51}\text{ overgo; ta:33 eye; len}^{55}\text{ flea})

Literal translation: Instead of catching the eyes of elephants, catch the eyes of the flea.

Free translation: Spoil the ship for a halfpenny worth of tar.

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**Figure 3.** Mapping schema of using a part of the elephant’s body as the source domain.
Literal translation: Put sugar cane in the mouth of an elephant.
Free translation: The goat fell prey to the tiger.

Literal translation: The ivory.
Free translation: Very precious thing./Talented person.

Literal translation: Elephant dies and leaves ivory.
Free translation: A tiger leaves a skin behind him.

Concerning these elephant metaphors of idioms, a large number of features of an elephant’s certain part, such as precious, rare, nonrenewable, etc. are used to characterize people, things, point of view, etc. in real life, allowing people to understand various kinds of affairs and phenomena while providing an artistic perspective for people’s cognition.

2.3. Employing elephant-related behaviors as the source domain

In the construction of this category of metaphors, some elephant-related behaviors or actions are used as source domains. The elements participating in the mapping in the source domain mainly include: behaviors or actions related to an elephant, the nature or characteristics of behaviors or actions, and the state or ending. These elements are structurally mapped to the entity of the target domain, so as to let people know about the entity of the target domain through the elephant-related behaviors or actions. The entire mapping diagram is as the Figure 4.

And the specific cases are as follows:

Literal translation: When you see elephant poop, follow it.
Free translation: Follow the suit.

Figure 4. Mapping schema of using elephant-related behaviors as the source domain.
tsʰ aːŋ²⁵ lɛːn¹⁵ jaː²¹ tsʰ uː²¹ jut²¹ raːn¹⁵ xaːŋ²¹⁵

(tʰ aːŋ²⁵ elephant; lɛːn¹⁵ gallop; jaː²¹ do not; tʰ uː²¹ hastily; jut²¹ stop; raːn¹⁵ pull; xaːŋ²¹⁵ neck)

Literal translation: When the elephant is running, don't pull the rope to make it stop immediately.

Free translation: Don't be close when God is angry.

tʰ aːŋ²⁵ lɛːn¹⁵ jaː²¹ jut²¹ xaːŋ²¹⁵

(tʰ aːŋ²⁵ elephant; lɛːn¹⁵ gallop; jaː²¹ do not; jut²¹ interfere/disturb; xaːŋ²¹⁵ neck)

Literal translation: Don't disturb the elephant while it's running.

Free translation: Do not challenge the determination of God.

jaː²¹ kʰ au¹⁵ tɛːkʰ naː³³ tsʰ aːŋ²⁵

(jaː²¹ do not; kʰ au¹⁵ enter; tɛːkʰ break; naː³³ tʰ aːŋ²⁵ ivory)

Literal translation: Don't grab the teeth of an elephant.

Free translation: Do not beard the lion in his den.

tsʰ aːŋ²⁵ laːi¹⁵ lɛːn¹⁵ liaːŋ¹⁵ lɔp²¹

(tʰ aːŋ²⁵ elephant; laːi¹⁵ gallop; liaːŋ¹⁵ dodge; lɔp²¹ stand aside)

Literal translation: Avoid elephants when they run.

Free translation: Do not contend with the powerful.

kʰ iː²¹ tsʰ aːŋ²⁵ waːŋ³³ kʰ aːŋ²¹⁵

(kʰ iː²¹ ride; tʰ aːŋ²⁵ elephant; waːŋ³³ put; kʰ aːŋ²¹⁵ thing)

Literal translation: Riding an elephant and put things elsewhere.

Free translation: Believing others too easily may result in some loss.

kʰ iː²¹ tsʰ aːŋ²⁵ tsap²¹ tak³³ tɛːn³³

(kʰ iː²¹ ride; tʰ aːŋ²⁵ elephant; tsap²¹ catch; tak³³ tɛːn³³ grasshopper)

Literal translation: Riding an elephant to catch a grasshopper.

Free translation: Labor hard to little avail.

tsʰ aːŋ²⁵ tok²¹ man³³

(tʰ aːŋ²⁵ elephant, tok²¹ fall, man³³ oil)

Literal translation: Elephant off oil.

Free translation: Simmer over.

Concerning these elephant metaphors of idioms, a large number of behaviors related to an elephant are used to characterize certain types of phenomena, events, truths, etc. in real life, letting people deeply understand our external world through these vivid image metaphors while broadening people's cognitive perspective.

2.4. Summary of elephant metaphors

All of the above three categories of metaphors are closely related to the elephant. They represent the cognitive crystallization of the Thai people who have long-term contact with elephant in daily lives. They show people the unique "elephant culture" of the Thai ethnic group. Of course, the elephant metaphors in Thai idioms only reflect a part of Thai
elephant culture. In addition to the elephant metaphors of idioms, Thai elephant culture is also manifested in all aspects of Thai social life.

In the following sections, we will focus on the nature, status and characteristics of the “elephant culture” in Thai based on these “elephant metaphors.”

3. The nature and status of Thai elephant culture

In ancient China, “culture” refers to the rule and cultivation of the emperor; it exists in opposition to the “armed forces” (Ding & Zhang 18). Culture in the modern sense refers to each ethnic group’s adaptability and adaptation results in a specific environment (Zhang 23; Ding & Zhang 19). Any kind of culture is created by a specific ethnic group in a specific environment, reflecting the specificity of human behavior; it also reflects the mutual coordination and coordinated development of people and environment, as well as harmonious coexistence between people and environment. The Thai ethnic group has lived in the Indo-China Peninsula, which is in the tropical region since ancient times, and this area has a high population of elephants. In such a special environment, the Thai ethnic group and the elephants have long adapted to each other and live in harmony, thus creating a unique “elephant culture.”

Elephants play a very important role in the daily life of Thai people. In ancient times, Thai people used elephants as tools for farming and transportation. At the same time, in the long-term historical development, elephants (especially white elephants) have also been given a sacred color by Thai people. It represents power, spreads auspiciousness, and indicates the country flourishes and people live in peace. It is also a symbol of wealth, and a gathering of wisdom and auspiciousness. In Thai myth, the white elephant is the most sacred of all creatures, symbolizing the natural power of the royal family (Leider 172–173).

Furthermore, Thai people believed in Theravada Buddhism. According to Buddhist legend, after Mrs. Mayer dreamed a white elephant gave her a lotus that represented wisdom and purity, she found herself pregnant with Buddha (Edward 11–24). So, in Buddhism, the elephant is a symbol of fertility, and white elephants make this belief more pure.

From the period of King Ramkhamhaeng of the Sukhothai Dynasty in the thirteenth century, the white elephant holds a lofty status in Thailand, symbolizing supreme kingship (Cannobanced 158–168). It is said that King Mahachakkaphat who ruled Thailand in the sixteenth century, raised more than 300 imperial elephants, including seven white elephants; the Tabinshwehti, king of Burma was very jealous of King Mahachakkaphat who had so many white elephants, and asked Thailand to surrender to Myanmar, using white elephants as a tribute; after being rejected, Tabinshwehti launched a large army to attack the Ayutthaya kingdom of Thailand in 1549 (Sayamanon 84–92; Ammaphan 141–145; Tinwoog 154–162).

From the late Ayutthaya Dynasty, the Thai government stipulated that the white elephant is royal property (Cannobanced 48). From that time on, anyone who finds a white elephant must give it to the royal family. The white elephant lives in the palace and is treated as a godly beast.

Therefore, it can be said that “elephant culture” represents the crystallization of the Thai people’s adaptability and adaptation to the specific environment of the Indo-China peninsula. As a self-contained totemic belief culture, “elephant culture” is one of the
important components of Thai culture. Nowadays, “elephant culture” has penetrated into all aspects of Thai society as a self-contained totemic belief culture. After a long period of development, it has sublimated a spirit that represents the Thai ethnic group, that is: “elephant spirit.”

4. The characteristics of Thai elephant culture

From the “elephant metaphors” in Thai idioms, people can systematically understand the characteristics of Thailand elephant culture. To sum up, the characteristics of Thailand elephant culture mainly include the following aspects:

4.1. The symbol of Thai

Thailand is known as “white elephant state.” When it comes to Thailand, people naturally think of elephants; similarly, most people think of Thailand when it comes to elephants. Thailand is the main place for elephant growth and breeding in the world. Elephants symbolize auspiciousness and sacredness in the minds of Thai people. The gentle habits of elephants deeply affect the temperament of Thai people. Thai people are as gentle and modest as elephants, so, it is also known as a “country of smile.”

In the history of Thailand, the flag of Thailand used to have an elephant pattern. The white stripe on the current national flag of Thailand evolved from a white elephant. When opening the map of Thailand, we will find that the map of Thailand is like the head of an elephant. For this reason, Thai people like to use the various parts of the elephant head to refer to various parts of Thailand: the northwestern region represents the forehead of the elephant, the northeast region is the elephant’s ear, the Bangkok Bay region is the elephant’s mouth, while the southern part is the elephant nose.

The elephant is a symbol of Thai. In the mysterious country of Thailand, elephants are everywhere, and they are loved and respected by the people. Thai people are as hard-working and simple like elephants, and they spread their reverence for elephants to all parts of the world, so that Thai culture, characterized by elephant culture, is well known throughout the world and is widely praised.

The Thai government has designated March 13th as the “National Elephant Festival.” Through the “National Elephant Festival,” the Thai government hopes to awaken the public’s love for elephants and the inheritance of elephant culture. On this day, a variety of colorful activities will be held throughout the country. Furthermore, many national wild forest parks and many elephant domestication bases have been established by the funding of the Thai government, intending to protect the living environment of elephants. The Mesa Elephant breeding and training center in Chiang Mai, Thailand is the first elephant breeding and training base in Thailand that passed ISO 9001 certification in 2008.

The major international events in Thailand often use elephants as mascots and logos. For example, the mascot of the 13th Asian Games in Bangkok is an elephant named “Chai Yu.” The Thai people used the image of “Chai Yu” to carry out a very successful tourism and cultural promotion to the world.

Moreover, the handicraft articles of elephants have become a national gift for kings to visit abroad. For example, when King Bhumibol Adulyadej visited the 14 European countries in 1960, the gifts, which he gave to the head of state of these countries, were
Thailand’s most distinctive handicraft article of elephants. This handicraft article of elephant vividly reproduces the wonderful moments of elephants fighting in ancient Thai wars.

From all of these phenomena and cases, we can see that the elephant has become a symbol of Thailand.

4.2. The embodiment of power and honor

The elephant is given a mysterious color in Thailand, and the white elephant became a symbol of the royal family and royal power. In ancient times, the kings of Thailand have sent people to the folk to search for elephants every year, and the white elephant that is clever and strong is the first choice. The best white elephants are often used as mounts by the king; whether traveling or leading the battle, the king would ride his own white elephant mount to symbolize his supreme king power. The Thai royal family worshipped the white elephant since ancient times and regarded it as a symbol of national auspiciousness. With the development of history, elephants (especially white elephants) have been given supreme status by the Thai people, becoming a symbol of power, status and honor.

There is a medal in Thailand called “The Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant.” It is divided into the following levels: Knight Grand Cordon (Special Class), Knight Grand Cross (First Class), Commander (Third Class), Companion (Fourth Class), Member (Fifth Class), Gold Medalist (Sixth Class), Silver Medalist (Seventh Class). This medal was founded in 1861 by the king Rama IV and is the highest honor for foreigners in Thailand (Srilockout 245).

There are many elephant metaphors about the power, status and honor in Thai idioms, such as: thāːŋŋaːːn215 tsʰaːŋŋsaːn215ʔan33suːŋ215 jai21juː21 paː21tiau33 kan51 maːi51 (If two men ride on a horse, one must ride behind), ?au33 nuːaː55 muː215 paːi33 pa21nuːaː55 tsʰaːŋŋʔau55 naː51 (To teach fish to swim), tsʰaːŋŋtʰau55 naː51 (Bellwether), tsʰaːŋŋʔau55 naː51 tsʰaːŋŋʔau55lan215 (A good Jack makes a good Jill), tsʰaːŋŋʔau55 jai21 tsʰuː21juː21raithai55 xaːŋŋ215 (Don’t be close when God is angry), tsʰaːŋŋʔau55 jai21 thāːŋ21 xaːŋŋ215 (Do not challenge the determination of God), etc. In these metaphors, the elephant, or some part of the elephant’s body, or the elephant’s behavior is used to characterize the people who have power and status, reflecting the power, status, and honor that the elephant symbolizes.

The kings of ancient Thai used white elephants as imperial mounts. Precious white elephants are a good sign of the country’s prosperity and a symbol of the king’s wisdom and authority. When the royal appraisal expert confirms a white elephant through special appraisal criteria, the Thai people will hold a large celebration to announce that a new white elephant belongs to their King. Until now, the Royal Thai Guard has retained war elephant troops to symbolize the supremacy of royal power.

In ancient Thailand, the white elephant was originally one of the royal mounts for the king’s travel. It is a symbol of identity and royal power. But with the development of society, elephants (especially white elephants) have become a symbol of power, honor and social status in Thai society.
4.3. Representing auspiciousness and wisdom

Whether in Thailand or in other countries, Thai people always like to put a pair of cute elephant sculptures at the gate. Many traditional Thai crafts are also based on elephants. Elephants always make us think of Thailand and Thai people. According to legend, Buddha Sakyamuni was born after his mother dreamed that a white elephant offered lotus flowers to her, so Thai people who believed in the Theravada Buddhism regarded the white elephant as a godly beast, foretelling the prosperity and peace of the country (Polainoni 264).

According to the Thai version of the “Buddha Sutra • Buddha Shakyamuni,” the Buddha was born as an elephant before being born as Buddha Shakyamuni. The elderly Shakyamuni also tamed the wild elephant Narogiri. This wild elephant was released by Tigidado, the cousin of Shakyamuni. As a result, elephants are found in many carvings and murals in Thai temples. For example, in Suthatana Watararam Temple in Thailand, there are black gold-plated lacquered artworks with Indra’s three-headed elephant as their mounts.

In the mind of Thai people, elephants have always stood for gentleness, endurance, integrity, and so on. Religion and folklore give elephants a sacred and inviolable color. According to Thai folk belief, people can walk through the elephant’s belly for good luck. And in the temple of the Reclining Buddha in Bangkok, the elephant sculpture is placed in the Buddha case together with the Buddha sculpture for worship. It is precisely because the image of elephants brings positive associations, that elephant culture can be widely spread and accepted in Thailand.

Many Thai folk-tales and jokes contain the image of elephants. For example, Thai folk have spread a joke: If the Thai king is dissatisfied with a subordinate, he will give a white elephant to him. In order to raise a white elephant representing auspiciousness and wisdom, the minister will soon be ruined. Later, in Thai, the idiom “white elephant” was used to describe “assets that require high costs to maintain.”

In addition, many literary works of Thai, such as the historical novels Narisuan, Four dynasties, prose collection Me and elephant, Thai nursery rhymes Elephant song, and Thai traditional drama Khon, etc., have shaped the image of an auspicious and intelligent elephant for us. In addition, there are many elephant-related folk customs around Thailand. For example, Thai people hold elephant parades to celebrate when they become monks. Elephant culture goes deep into every aspect of Thai people’s daily lives. Many sculptures can be seen on both sides of the road, many of which are elephants, and Thailand’s most famous beer brand is Elephant. And there is an elephant war tower in Suphan Buri province, and a famous 29 m-high elephant sculpture in the Samut Prakan Museum for tourists to visit. In the Thai film “Boxer 2,” elephant boxing created by the actor Tony Kah uses human bodies to simulate the movements of elephant trunks and tusks, which is extremely lethal. The film combines Thai boxing and elephant culture and plays a good role in cultural communication.

In Thai idioms, there are many elephant metaphors that reflect that the elephant represents auspiciousness and wisdom, such as: khəːj aː 33 tsʰaːn 55 ?au 55 naː 33 (Kill the goose that lays the golden egg), tsʰaːŋ 55 pʰuaːk 21 kət 21 nai 33 pʰa 33 nəm 33 pʰrai 33 rɪː 21 (Talents often come from remote areas of society), tsʰaːŋ 55 pʰuaːk 21 kət 21 nai 33 pʰa 33 nəm 33 pʰrai 33 rɪː 21 maː 51 kət 21 nai 33 kruŋ 33 (People of insight often come from the remote areas, not the
big city), tsh\textsuperscript{h}a:ŋ\textsuperscript{55} ph\textsuperscript{h}ua:k\textsuperscript{21} ma:ts\textsuperscript{a}:k\textsuperscript{21} pa:21 (The essence comes from nature), du:ts\textsuperscript{h}a:ŋ\textsuperscript{55} xa\textsuperscript{51} du:33 xa:ŋ\textsuperscript{33} xa\textsuperscript{51} du:33 me:51 (From the foot we may judge of Hercules), n\textsuperscript{a}:ts\textsuperscript{h}a:ŋ\textsuperscript{55} (Very precious thing./Talented person), etc.

From these elephant metaphors, we can know that Thai people like to use elephants to characterize good people and things, and like to use white elephants to depict valuable items or talents.

The elephant has a close relationship with all aspects of Thai society, including history, culture, religious beliefs, economy, etc. In Thailand, from king to civilians, everyone loves elephants and has a deep affection for elephants. One case that has often been mentioned is that in the Temple of the Reclining Buddha in Bangkok, the elephant sculpture is placed in the Buddha case together with the Buddha sculpture for worship. In addition, in the history of Thailand, elephants are the heroes on the battlefield, just like the warhorses in ancient China. On the battlefield, ancient Thai generals used elephants as mounts, and the king used the white elephant as mount to increase their power. The famous wars in ancient Thai history were almost all related to elephants. The elephant made a great contribution in the war.

The most famous elephant war in Thai history took place on January 25 1592 (Sayamanon 68–79). It was a battle between Thai King Narisuan and a Burmese prince. At that time, the Burmese prince led two armies to advance to the capital of Thailand, and the two sides launched a decisive battle in Suphan Province. At that time, the elephant that the king of Thailand was riding was in estrus. When the elephant stopped, the King of Thailand found himself surrounded by the Burmese army. At this time, the prince of Burma was leading the crowd to cool down under the tree. Seeing this, the king Narisuan had a clever idea, he excitedly said: “Do you dare to fight me alone?” The Burmese prince immediately rushed to the king Narisuan to fight against him. In the first round, King Narisuan was in a bad situation and his helmet was cut. Immediately, the King Narisuan seized the opportunity to raise the head of the war elephant on which the Burmese prince was riding, and he tended to chop the Burmese prince to the neck of the elephant with his knife. The Burmese army saw that the coach was dead and had no intention to fight again. Since then, King Narisuan’s fame has grown. In the next 150 years, Myanmar did not invade Thailand again.

Nowadays, the Royal Army in Thailand still retains war elephants. As Thai people often say: If there is no elephant, the history of Thailand may need to be rewritten. Because of this, in the minds of Thai people, the industrious and brave elephant is considered as creator of a better life, a representative of auspiciousness and wisdom.

4.4. A symbol of strength

In ancient Thailand, elephants were widely used in heavy labor, such as in reclaiming wasteland; cultivating the land, transporting goods, cutting down trees in the forest, etc. In today’s forest logging in Thailand, elephants are still the indispensable and rare tools of labor. Therefore, in Thai society, elephants are often used to characterize people who are tall and obese, or personify objects that are huge in size, symbolizing infinite strength.

In Thai idioms, there are so many elephant metaphors which use elephants or elephant-related behaviors to characterize big entities or events, reflecting the infinite strength represented by elephants, such as: tsh\textsuperscript{h}a:ŋ\textsuperscript{55} ta:33 t\textsuperscript{h}a:ŋ\textsuperscript{55} tua\textsuperscript{33} ?au\textsuperscript{33} pai\textsuperscript{33} pua\textsuperscript{33} ma:\textsuperscript{33} pit\textsuperscript{21} (The cat shuts its eyes when stealing cream), t\textsuperscript{h}i:21 lo:t\textsuperscript{51} ta:33 t\textsuperscript{h}a:ŋ\textsuperscript{55} xa:ŋ\textsuperscript{21} lo:t\textsuperscript{51} ta:53
4.5. Implying slight negativity and evil

Because of the strength of the elephant, people naturally have a little fear of it. In Thai history, many people have been bitten or trampled by an elephant. Facing such a huge animal, people have to be on the lookout for its unpredictable aggression. Therefore, in the “elephant culture” of Thailand, the elephant also carries a slight negativity and evil connation.

In Thai idioms, there are so many elephant metaphors which use elephants or elephant-related behaviors to characterize negativity or evil behaviors or events, reflecting the slight negative and evil meanings implied by elephants, such as: ṭā:ŋ h: phaː k:11 th: aːŋ 55 (The goat fell prey to the tiger), x:ŋ h: lam 33 th: aːŋ 55 (Having a limited outlook), th: aːŋ 55 saː 215 nː xuː 21 k: aː 91 kau 21 miː aː 93 rak 33 (It cannot be entrusted to the person), xen 215 thː aːŋ 55 kːiː b: h: 91 taː mː 92 thː aːŋ 55 (Follow the suit), jaː 91 h: au 51 teː k: 21 ɗː aː 93 thː aːŋ 55 (Do not beard the lion in his den), etc.

In the previous chapter, we said that Thai elephants are more docile. But once an elephant is thought to have been attacked, it will make a counterattack, which will hurt people. A large number of soldiers died because of stomping by elephants in the war of 1952. Regarding elephant trampling, the most recent incident occurred in a scenic spot in Pattaya, Thailand on December 21, 2017. It was caused by tourists grabbing the elephant’s tail when taking photos, which caused the elephant to feel angry, catching up with tourists. In the process of the chasing, a tour guide was rolled up by an elephant nose, fell to the ground and was stomped to death. From this incident, we can see that once the docile elephant gets angry, the consequences are very serious.

5. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, we can see that the elephant, as the national treasure of Thai, is a sacred symbol in the Thai people’s minds, a gathering of wisdom and auspiciousness, a guardian of peace. It plays a very important role in the lives of Thai people. “Elephant” as a culture has penetrated into every aspect of Thai society. The Thai people used their intelligence and wisdom to construct a big metaphorical elephant empire based on elephants. Through this broad elephant metaphor system, people can clearly understand the Thai elephant culture.

Culture and language, like the two sides of a coin, are symbiotic and co-prosperous. Culture and language often interact and infiltrate each other. It can be seen from the large number of Thai elephant metaphors that the image of the “elephant” has a profound influence on the development of Thai language, and elephant metaphor also continues to highlight its new artistic charm with the development of the Thai language.
“Elephant culture” represents the crystallization of the Thai people’s adaptability and adaptation to the specific environment of the Indo-China peninsula. It is one of the important components of Thai culture. And it is a self-contained totemic belief culture, a symbol of Thai ethnic groups and Thailand. And the “Thai elephant culture” has its own unique characteristics: The symbol of the Thai, the embodiment of power and honor, representing auspiciousness and wisdom, a symbol of strength, yet implying a slight negativity and evil.

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