The Metaphor of Abortion in Chinese

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Abstract: The meaning of “abortion” in Chinese is quite simple and explicit, but the metaphor connotation of it is rich and various. The classification and analysis of the use of the word, the application scope and its emotional inclination is done in this article on the basis of the search results of Baidu. It tries to disclose the metaphorical thinking about abortion and the great pressure added by these symbolic meanings to females who have experienced the pain of abortion by revealing the metaphorical meaning of abortion.

Keywords: Abortion, Metaphor, Gender politics

1 Introduction

Abortion is a thing none of the women wants to face. However, according to statistics, each year there are more than 13 million cases of abortion in China. This suggests that more than half of the women of childbearing age have experienced abortion. Abortion is the unique life experience of women who bear the process of abortion alone, during which great damages have been made both to their bodies and spirits. However, abortion is not the personal matter of women; on the contrary, it is related to the healthy birth and population control strategy, and the strength of the nation. Therefore, abortion is always the center topic of the debate among religions, ethics, laws and politics.

Abortion, especially the induced abortion, is a sensitive topic in the whole world. Feminists agree that the induced abortion is a big progress of women’s liberation. They hold that to decide independently their reproductive rights is a precious right for women to determine their own destiny. On the contrary, lots of people argue that induced abortion is against ethics and religion. Because of the specific circumstance in China, there is not a clear attitude towards abortion. In the impression of Chinese, abortion is either a kind of disease or a kind of medical technology. However, if carefully examine the use of the word, we will find that Chinese people's attitudes toward abortion are not as impartial as it looks. In fact, abortion is full of diversity in its filed, but too often its diversity is realized through metaphor. Namely, we take abortion as a metaphor to describe other things, but in the appreciation of metaphor, we are actually thinking on the basis of metaphor. In real life, we also understand the world in line with metaphor. Our interest in metaphor not only lies in its rhetorical functions, but also lies in its cognitive function. Therefore, abortion becomes a slightly mysterious word for us. Sometimes, it is an ambiguous and unseemly topic to talk about openly in social life; sometimes, it becomes Gospel and Savior, face refined models even recommend it in the advertise; sometimes, it is a curse causes the anger of people, they even don't mention it; sometimes, it becomes the synonyms of failure, people can talk about it unbridled in any area.

Therefore, it is clearly that abortion does not only belong to the category of physiology or medicine, it is a cultural event more than a medical event; it is a public event more than a private event.

2 Internet-based Corpus Analysis of Metaphor

Internet can be regarded as an enormous corpus, with Baidu search engine as its ideal corpus search tool, the advanced search function which can search according to period of time and the areas, in particular, satisfied the requirement of grasping the word comprehensively and accurately of this research.

Therefore, in order to collect the required corpus, we have searched *abortion* on Baidu at 8pm on August 25th, 2011. The time field is limited to the year 2010, and the search scope is the headlines of all the news on people.com.cn. There are 172 records all together. The application filed of the word is classified on this basis and results can be seen the in Table.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical treatment</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Husband should be checked if wife is easy to abort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and Economics</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Vanke's further issue of tens of billions will abort, the refinancing of housing enterprises is a failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and Technology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>The found of American study: abortion and embryo stop increase divorce rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Limitation of 15%-off discount is boycotted, it will be faced with abortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Husband asks for reproductive rights for the wife aborted without his permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Lili Alan grieved after she abort again with 6 months pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Experts: US has to be friendly to China after the abortion of G7 motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Abortion of Barcelona’s several acquisitions leads to the scapegoat, Josep Guardiola i Sala offends the tycoon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that the application field of the word is very broad, almost covering all the news classifications in which medical treatment and social life, finance and economics and entertainment are of the most frequent application, accounting for 19.2%, 25%, 22%, 15% respectively, while its application in sports, politics, culture, science and technology is relatively less, accounting for 8%, 4%, 4%, 2.3% respectively.

In sections like medical treatment, science and technology, social life and entertainment, *abortion* is basically used for its medical meaning. And the news reported the abortion itself or some related events. While in sections like finance and economics, culture, politics and sports, abortion is used for its metaphorical meaning which means that things cannot be achieved because of some obstacles in the process of brewing or execution. We’ve also noticed that the emotional tendency of the second meaning users can be divided into three categories. The results are showed in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Strongly negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Economics</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 The Emotional Tendency Statistics of *Abortion* in Some Areas
The so-called user’s emotional tendency refers to the emotion expressed in news content. For example, in the news *China-Australia 40 billion energy order aborted, Medias’ views were different on whom the winner was*, the emotional tendency is neutral. The news is reporting the whole event only, without showing any obvious emotion; the emotional tendency is negative in *Abortion of Barcelona’s several acquisitions leads to the scapegoat, Josep Guardiola i Sala offends tycoon, and the news concerns about the prospect of Barcelona; pleasant goat was aborted, money worship and lust boosting the spread of vulgarization* is obviously a negative news. The spoof behavior of *letting the vulgarity forever lead the entertainment to die* insulted and abused the popular culture. Moreover, it is the provocation toward mainstream culture. These fiery words in the article expressed strong negative emotions. It is understandable that *abortion* cannot make people have a good association, but it is very surprising that news use it so frequent to express negative emotions. Here the *abortion* is obviously its metaphorical meaning. The metaphor usage is to show that users think *abortion* and news events are similar, which remind us to go back to analyze people’s attitudes toward *abortion*.

3 *Abortion and Its Metaphorical Thinking*

In history, Chinese and foreign scholars have an enduring interest in metaphor. In recent years, as a kind of cultural phenomenon, metaphor attracts people’s attention increasingly, becoming a very good breakthrough point of cultural study. The so-called metaphor is cultural behavior of mastering one thing under the implications of other things. It is the sum of psychological behavior and language behavior. In essence, metaphor is first expressed as linguistic phenomenon, but it hints a more profound psychological phenomenon and cultural phenomenon. Its psychological mechanism is metaphorical thinking.

According to the further detail analysis of 172 news headlines in the retrieval results, we can discover that when *abortion* is used as a metaphor, the metaphorical thinking under the usage have mainly four categories.

3.1 In some usings, *abortion* is treated as a metaphor of *failure or disappointing*. For instance, the two news *the National Olympic Team’ cannot assemble by the contract, the warm-up match of field training may be abort and " EVOC dream paradise’s <Dragon Ball> may abort, it made up the number for web games* have expressed that things are not going well. At the end of the news, the concluding words such as *loss, insufficient* etc. are used.

This kind of metaphor of abortion is one of its most common usages in daily life, for the failure of giving birth to children and the failure of achieving goals share obvious similarities and both of them are brought frustration and disappointment. Nowadays, though we may admire the females who choose to be DINK and regard them as very brave women, it is quite difficult for us to imagine what kind of strain, anxiety, depression, guilty as well as frustration that the infertile women are suffering from, let lone for us to notice what kind of psychological impact that the constant appearance of the word “abortion” and its increasingly negative meaning had brought to the females.

3.2 There are two pieces of news in search results. One is that a middle school student submitted a NPC and CPPCC proposal, in which he advocated Chinese government to ban the advertisements of abortion on buses. The just turned fifteen year-old student hold that such “filthy advertisements” would contaminate his and his classmates’, especially his female classmates’ eyes. The other one is that one day on a bus, a mother and her daughter were pressed by the around passengers to give their seats to a pregnant woman. While leaving her seat, the mother said “Be careful of abortion”. Such words lead the pregnant woman to be so angry that she gave the mother a slap. The involved parties in the two news show great aversion to the word “abortion” with adequate reasons. The student worries that the advertisement would have a bad influence on young girls and the pregnant woman regard “Be careful of abortion” as a vicious curse.
If the student’s worry is not groundless for the fact that there are more and more Chinese underage girls suffering from abortions year by year, the pregnant woman’s anger is somewhat unfounded but out of dread of traditional taboo. China is a country that pays much attention to taboo and obscenity. Due to the scruple of taboo, certain things and human activities are often expressed with the assistant of metaphor and other rhetorical devices. Take making love as an example, in Chinese tradition, it is used to be delivered in various obscure ways, like “clouds and rain”, “be on one bed”, “sleep together”, “be undressed by”, “washing feet nightly”, “ooxx” and so on. When we broaden our research field, we will find that things related to generation usually have conventionalized taboo: being pregnant is “being in happiness”, being parturition is “being on the basin”. Compared with those examples, the taboo “abortion” is different because it derives from fear and worry. Although abortion, as a matter of fact, is not infective, it seems that it is infective in moral. As a result, any association with “abortion” is as annoying as doing something wrong, and even just the word “abortion” seems having magic power that could make people feel being disparaged or insulted. Such taboo in fact, is a kind of disrespect for women who are suffering from abortion.

3.3 Abortion is also metaphorized as punishment of lechery. Many factors could lead to abortion, such as mother’s physical condition, environment or genetics. But lots of medical reports in the searched results tend to emphasize that lechery is the main reason. A piece of news titled “a sunglasses girl runs over five people, who has aborted for eight times” reports a woman who hurt and killed five people while driving. The cause of the accident is drunken driving, but the news spent three-quarter part in digging her past love affairs and particularly pointed out that she had aborted for eight times. It seems that abortion is the proof of her lechery and the author seems indicating that a woman with eight times of abortions is reasonable to be the perpetrator of such a serious traffic accident.

Aborting no matter actively or passively, women are always victims. But this kind of metaphorical thinking holds that good girls and women would not experience abortion. Such opinion originates from the male-centered culture. In essence, it reveals male requirements that demand females to keep their bodies pure and be loyal to them through such a soundless condemn of abortion. It is a kind of indifference to females’ feeling and living condition. Writer LinBai in his book “Say It, Room” says “Abortion is a kind of female wind, flying across every woman’s body, but having never touched any man”. What he says reveals women’s loneliness and helplessness before abortion.

This kind of metaphor shows us that a woman, who does abortion operation, is not only examined nakedly on the operation table, but also morally questioned under the cold public opinion. A failing mother who has lost her baby; an independent woman who has full command of her life; a patient who has been through both physical and spiritual wound—all of them are not the first image of aborted woman. The basic instinct of Medias and gossips is “what has she done?”

3.4 Besides a man and a woman, there is still one life involved in an abortion, which is the dead baby. The thinking way that the death of a baby will always be metaphorized as the punishment meted out by God is not infrequent. From the ancient time to now, many people would scold the villain with “may you be the last of your family line” to appease their resentment in some unforgivable cases. It is taken as the cruelest and severest punishment to the villain. Judgment from the God is much more severe and fair than that of laws and morality. We can often see it in literary works, movies and TV series. In the movie <Justice, My Foot!>, Stephen Chow plays a famous lawyer of Qing dynasty. He takes bribes and helps criminals get clear of charges by twisting the fact with his eloquence and ability. Although he gets richer and richer, he still receives his retribution. His kids either are aborted or die young. In the end he has to thoroughly reform himself to get rid of the punishment of having no offspring. This kind of superstitious belief does not extinct nowadays. I once have read a piece of news with the title <7 Sins of iPad cause “abortion” of Chinese trademark auction >. The news has listed several defects of iPad such as virtual high price, over weight, insufficient external ports, etc and blames these for the failure of the auction. The news seems to be out of question at first glance, but think over it carefully, you will find that the
match of “sin” and “abortion” in the headline makes people very uncomfortable. Nowadays, abortion becomes more and more common in China. There are many reasons involving laws and regulations of birth control, affirmation to women’s independent reproductive rights, and development of reproductive technology. Abortion, to a large extent, is not the God’s will but people’s option. However, progress of technology, improvement of public opinion and adjustment of policies and regulations haven’t rescued women from the condemnation that abortion is something that they deserve. Positive words such as “affirmation” “development” and “progress” can not eliminate people’s sense of guilty to “dead babies” when explaining the word abortion. The idea that abortion must have been caused by some wrong deeds still shows up now and then in the identity of metaphor. Thereupon, “abortion” is metaphorized to morally incorrect things: the listing plan of a readymade company has aborted; a music concert which is on suspicion of swindling has aborted; the transference of a club which owes wages to employees has aborted.②

4 Conclusion

Many of the women who go to a hospital to do artificial abortion choose to use fake identities. They try to solve the thing without any clue left. In fact no woman who has ever done abortion would like to recall that experience. Unfortunately, the influence of aborting is obvious and long-lasting even though women bury it deeply in their hearts. Analysis above proves that the word “abortion” can be seen almost everywhere: Advertisement of abortion curing and painless abortion buzzes nosily; news about the abortion of merger proposal of multinational corporations is shocking and dreadful; the news of the abortion of Kobe Bryant’s plan to China is passed from one person to another. The usage of “abortion” reminds women all the time that abortion can never be forgotten.

In her classical work < Illness as Metaphor >, Susan Sontag says: “Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.” ③ Compared with general illness, at least citizens of the kingdom of abortion do not include all the males. But it is not the reason that we pay less attention to abortion. On the contrary, it just reminds us to watch out for the weak status women occupy in gender politics and to introspect “abortion” as a complex and various cultural phenomenon. Only when the metaphor that makes women feel shameful and guilty is eliminated and everyone can use frankly the original meaning of “abortion”, can women both in the kingdom of abortion and the kingdom of the well have a more harmonious ecological environment.

References


② Three pieces of news from the searching results