Motives in Han Characters

Our clothes, houses, vehicles, accessories, and many other things are signs that we live in the 21st century. Those things are different from things when we see photos in the 40s. Those things tell us which year they come from. We can say that they are signs around us. Linguists F.de Saussure and C.S.Peirce were pioneers of semiotics/semiology. They proposed theories to understand the meaning behind each sign inside language, statue, gesture.

According to Saussure, the fundamental fact about linguistic sign is arbitrariness: every language contains two elements side by side - the completely unmotivated and the relatively motivated - mixed in various proportions. Completely unmotivated means absolute arbitrariness but conventionalised, while relative arbitrariness means motivated. The statement above show that Saussure admits there are language signs are motivated or non-arbitrary. He also said that Chinese language that is unmotivated in the lexical field(Komatsu 1993:87a,89a).

As a logician and mathematician, Peirce had another opinion. As an adherent of Plato's paradigm that language signs are nature-like, Peirce thought many language signs, especially in the field of grammar as iconic. As we know, Peirce divided signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. Iconic signs are signs that show a resemblance to nature or convey a certain similarity with an object (Ungerer & Smith 2006:301).

The topic of this research is Han characters as motivated signs. Han characters are icons of things, actions, or emotions that the character depicts. This study uses Peirce's theory which emphasizes the existence of similarity between the shape of Han character and the idea referring to its referent.

There are two theories underlying this research. First, the definition of sign by Peirce. Second, the cognitive linguistics approach used to explain the similarity in meaning and form (Hiraga, 2005:204) with the model of blending analysis. As an icon, each character consists of meaning and form. Compound character 好 *hǎo* 'good' can be analyzed as an image icon (symbol) 好 and as a diagrammatic icon (idea, concept). The question is how to explain Han character's component having different meanings merge into new meanings.

Cognitive Linguistic can explain that human cognition through visual or audio experience can conceptualize the idea of 女 and 子, then merge them into new meaning. This image icon consists of twocomponents:女 'woman', and 子 'child'. The model of blending brings out ideas of the source space and target space and then combined them into blend space to get new meaning of the compound character.

The method used is to specify the meaning of each component in the mapping. This kind of analysis can explain in detail, not only say the compound words meaning as a combination of two characters. This research also give new insight into explaining the correlation between the shape of Han characters which resembles the actual referent in the real world into their meaning in compound characters. The data are from the Chinese dictionary.