

DOI: 10.12731/2576-9782-2022-4-82-99

UDC 5.10.72+81

**METALANGUAGE THEORY:
INTERPRETATION OF ZI-SHU-NV'S MARRIAGE BELIEF**

Zhang Suojun, Z.D. Astatyan

The relevance of the study is determined by the necessity to understand the mechanisms of formation within a society of socially significant ideas, beliefs and behavioral strategies.

The aim is to interpret the notions of marriage that existed in China's Pearl River Delta region among Zi-Shu-Nv girls who were known for choosing not to marry.

Materials and methods. The article deals with the semiotic approach to the analysis of Zi-Shu-Nv marriage belief in Chinese culture. This belief is interpreted as a cultural text, part of semio-sphere. The method of analysis was the interpretation of the phenomenon based on deconstruction from the perspective of metalanguage theory with a focus on contextual metalanguage, interpretive competence metalanguage and textual metalanguage.

Results. Each metalanguage is characterized by its own codes and rules. The article underlines the role of each metalanguage in the origin and development of Zi-Shu-NVs' marriage belief. The authors come to the conclusion that this belief is an inevitable outcome under the influence of social, personal and textual peculiarities of its time.

Practical implications. The results can be used in the interpretation of social phenomena in modern society.

Keywords: metalanguage; code; Zi-Shu-Nv; marriage belief; interpretation; meaning

**ТЕОРИЯ МЕТАЯЗЫКА: ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ
ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЙ О БРАКЕ ДЕВУШЕК ЗИ-ШУ-НЮ**

Джан Содзюн, З.Д. Асратян

Актуальность исследования обусловлена необходимостью осознания механизмов формирования в обществе социально-значимых представлений и поведенческих стратегий.

Цель состоит в том, чтобы интерпретировать представления о браке, существовавшие в Китайском регионе «Дельта Жемчужной реки» у девушек Зи-Шу-Ню, которые известны тем, что решали не выходить замуж.

Материалы и методы. В статье рассматривается семиотический подход к анализу брачных представлений Зи-Шу-Ню в китайской культуре. Представления трактуются как культурный текст, часть семиосферы. Методом анализа стала интерпретация данного явления на основе деконструкции с точки зрения теории метаязыка с акцентом на контекстуальный метаязык, метаязык интерпретационной компетентности и текстуальный метаязык.

Результаты. Каждый метаязык характеризуется своими кодами и правилами. В статье подчеркивается роль каждого метаязыка в зарождении и развитии брачных представлений Зи-Шу-Ню. Авторы приходят к выводу, что эти убеждения являются неизбежным результатом под влиянием социальных, личностных и текстологических особенностей своего времени.

Область применения результатов. Результаты могут быть использованы в интерпретации социальных явлений в современном обществе.

Ключевые слова: метаязык; код; Зи-Шу-Ню; брачное представление; интерпретация; смысл

Introduction

As it was truly admitted by E. Cassirer, people no longer live in a merely physical universe, they live in a symbolic universe [2, p. 43]. Symbolic universe is represented by signs and studied within the framework of semiotics. The expression and reception of any meaning is inseparable from signs. Thus, Y. Zhao underlined: “符号就不仅是表达意义工具和载体，符号是意义的条件 [‘signs are not only tools and vehicles of meaning, but also conditions of meaning’] [21, p. 2]. The founders of semiotics Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure underlined that a sign has a double nature: it has a form and meaning.

Y.M. Lotman defined semiotics as a science about communicative systems and signs that are used in the course of communication [15, p. 6]. According to Umberto Eco, “every cultural phenomenon may be studied as communication” [1, p. 55].

Semiotics studies not only linguistic signs but non-linguistic ones as well. Whether signs are linguistic or non-linguistic to gain their meaning human beings have to interpret them. The meanings of signs are perceived only by means of interpretation. This idea has been stressed by Y. Zhao who admitted: “符号等待解释，意义要解释后才能出现 [‘signs wait for interpretation, and meanings do not appear until they have been interpreted’] [21, p. 46].

Thus, signs are unthinkable without interpretation as well as without contexts. An interpretation of signs involves some codes and rule that constitute its metalanguage. There is a deep connection between culture and a metalanguage, that is, a mirroring image relationship. From this point of view, as a part of culture, the marriage belief represents textual meanings of the cultural sign interpreted by the interpreter under the influence of the metalanguage.

The aim of this article is to conduct a semiotic approach to the analysis of Zi-Shu-Nvs’ marriage belief, where Zi-Shu-Nv (自梳女) is a term referring to a girl who decides not to get married.

As it was truly admitted by Y. Chunlei and L. Xin Ru: “The inheritance and innovation of traditional culture is an important issue in the new era” [4, p. 190]. Even in China itself this cultural phenomenon is not familiar to many people due to its localization in the Pearl River Delta (*Zhūjiāng*) of China. However, scholars at home and abroad have made some achievements in related studies. The majority of these researches focus on cultural studies or anthropology, as, for example, Janice Stockard’s *Daughters of the Canton Delta: marriage patterns and economic strategies in South China, 1860-1930* (1989).

Materials and Methods

This paper attempts to apply the metalanguage theory to interpret Zi-Shu-Nvs’ marriage belief in the Pearl River Delta (*Zhūjiāng*) of China,

focusing on its implications and causes from three dimensions: a contextual metalanguage, a competent metalanguage and a textual metalanguage.

Metalanguage has been one of important keywords in the study of humanities and social sciences since the early 20th century. “Meta-” is a prefix in Greek which means “after” or “later” emphasizing the concept of order. It was later used by Aristotle, who represented the volume on philosophy in his works following the volume of natural science and called it “metaphysics”. After that, the term gradually denoted the meaning of regularity, principle and origin.

The definition of metalanguage originates in the field of philosophy and logic. Alfred Tarski, a Polish-born American logician and philosopher, proposed the definitions of object language and metalanguage as two languages in discussing the problem of the notion of truth: “The first of these languages is the language which is ‘talked about’ and which is the subject matter of the whole discussion; <...> The second is the language in which we ‘talk about’ the first language, and in terms of which we wish, in particular, to construct the definition of truth for the first language. We shall refer to the first language as ‘the object language and to the second as ‘the meta-language.’” [18, p. 349]. Thus, the object language and the metalanguage are oppositions: the object language speaks of objects while the metalanguage speaks of languages.

Language is both an object of philosophy and linguistics, and so is a metalanguage. In linguistics, many scholars such as Louis Hjelmslev (1961), Algirdas Judien Greimas (1982), Roman Jakobson (1960) and many others believe that metalanguage is an important concept in linguistic research. Louis Hjelmslev (1961) sought to build an ideal meta-semiology which object would be signs in semiotics. Roman Jakobson schematized six factors in verbal communication and classified language functions as “six functions” [11, p. 350-377]. He described metalingual function as speaking of language and its importance. In addition, he believed that meta-language is observed not only in the field of scientific researches, but also is an essential part of human natural language activities. After that, the concept of metalanguage was introduced into the field of semiotics, in which it is considered as a collection of codes interpreting the meanings

of signs. Therefore, a metalanguage is essential for understanding any sign text, and it is also crucial for a comprehension of its meaning. Every attempt to interpret signs requires the participation of a metalanguage.

Zhao Yiheng, a Chinese semiologist, devotes much attention to the study of metalanguages. He believes that metalanguages can be roughly classified as: “社会文化的）语境元语言 [(social and cultural) contextual metalanguage], (解释者的)能力元语言 [(interpreter’s) competent metalanguage], and (文本本身的)自携元语言 [textual metalanguage]” [21, p. 233], and he innovatively defines ideology as “文化的元语言 [the metalanguage of culture]” [21, p. 242]. He employs metaphors (metalinguistic conflict, metalinguistic whirlpool) to describe the relation between metalanguage and a vocabulary when interpreting the meanings of signs. Different metalanguages lead to different interpretations since these interpretations originate from different vocabularies. In his metalanguage theory, he inherited Tarski’s idea that a metalanguage is hierarchical, that is, the same level of metalanguage cannot explain itself, and both contradictions and conflicts of a metalanguage could be solved at the higher level of a metalanguage. Therefore, metaphorical concepts, such as “元语言冲突 [metalinguistic conflict]” [21, p. 236-238] and “解释漩涡 [interpretation whirlpool]” [21, p. 238-242] have been put forward. It seems that he prefers to employ metaphors or other figures of speech in defining and interpreting notions, which thus become concise, clear and easy to understand. Hence the analysis section of this paper is mainly based on Professor Zhao Yiheng’s metalanguage theory.

Results and Discussion

In ancient Chinese culture they advocated an idea of filial piety. This very piety was considered one of the main virtues. In the book of The Classic of Filial Piety it is recorded that “身体发肤，受之父母 [our body, hair and skin are what parents give]” [12, p. 2]. Accordingly, in ancient China the treatment of hair was very special and was paid much attention to. Men and women never cut their hair except for monks or nuns who had to shave their hair before converting into Buddhism. Currently, when a girl grows up or is about to get married, she is expected to comb

her hair up in a bun. From the semiotic perspective, then, a simple act of wearing this bun has at least two key meanings, i.e., reaching adulthood and an acquiescence to marriage.

However, the term “Zi-Shu” refers to “通过一定的仪式自行将头发盘起，以宣誓永不婚嫁 [the ritual of combing one’s hair up to make a vow never to marry]” [14, p. 1], and “通过一种特定的仪式，自行易辮而髻，以示独身终老，经过这种仪式的女性被称为‘自梳女’ [through a certain ritual, a woman who combed up her hair in a bun, as a sign of celibacy, was called ‘Zi-Shu-Nv’]” [13, p. 36]. This special custom originates in Shunde in the early 19th century, “此后随着自梳女的迁徙及其它原因，该风俗逐渐盛行于珠江三角洲的番禺、中山、南海、广州等地 [since then, with the migration of Zi-Shu-Nvs and other reasons, this custom has gradually prevailed in Panyu, Zhongshan, Nanhai, Guangzhou and other places in the Pearl River Delta]” [14, p. 15]. From the end of the 19th century to the time of the republic of China, it was especially popular. According to The Chronicles of Panyu County, “全县（广东省番禺县）自梳女共7011人 [there are 7,011 women in the whole county (Panyu county, Guangdong province) in 1933]” [19, p. 896]. The popularity of Zi-Shu-Nv in the late Qing Dynasty attracted attentions of many chronicles and newspapers in China. In the following part, we’ll conduct cultural semiotic analysis of Zi-Shu-Nvs’ marriage belief from the perspective of the metalanguage theory.

Contextual metalanguage

The contextual metalanguage of social culture is “符用性元语言，即是文本与社会的诸种关系，引出文化对信息的处理方式 [pragmatic metalanguage, which refers to the relationship between text and society, determining the way the culture processes information]” [21, p. 233]. From this definition it is clear that this kind of metalanguage focuses on the influence of the social and cultural environment on the interpretive behavior of sign interpreters. It should be a macro set of codes and it is characterized by universality within a certain scope. The famous American cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz said, “Not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts in people” [7, p. 81].

It can be seen that within different social cultures and historical periods, the same interpreter may interpret the meaning of the same cultural sign text in different metalanguage rules based on different codes, thus the interpretations of a sign text may be very different.

If we try to deconstruct the meaning of Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage belief we should ask the following questions:

- 1) what a general marriage belief implies;
- 2) what led Zi-Shu-Nvs to overturn the traditional marriage belief and decide not to marry;
- 3) whether Zi-Shu-Nv s' thoughts and actions are acceptable to the society?

In modern society, the meaning conveyed by marriage is generally happiness or love, because the metalanguage held by people is generally connected with the marriage perspective under the construction of social stability, legal integrity, economic development and ideological progress.

However, the contextual metalanguage held by Zi-Shu-Nvs is mainly composed of the following codes: the fear of marriage (brought about by culture and conventions). At that time, the society was dominated by the idea of men being superior to women and gender discrimination was serious, which was manifested in many things: a man might have more than one wife, but a woman was not free in her economy after getting married, but also suffered from abuse of her husband's family, in addition undertaking heavy housework. As a result, the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law was very rigid, like a master and a servant. The Literature and History of Sanshui, a popular local ballad, contains the following: “鸡公仔，尾弯弯，做人深抱甚艰难：早早起身都话晏，眼泪唔干入下间。下间有个冬瓜仔，问过老爷煮定蒸？老爷话煮，安人话蒸，蒸蒸煮煮都唔中意 [A chicken has a bent tail, and being a wife is a hard deal; Getting up early she is condemned to be late, going to the kitchen has her eyes wept. There is a white gourd in the kitchen. Her father-in-law prefers boiling it, whereas the mother-in-law loves steaming. No matter how to cook it, neither of them is satisfied]” [20, p. 54]. It can be seen that it was difficult to be a daughter-in-law at that time. With such a social culture unmarried women

interpreted marriage with fears. They feared that they would have a tough life if they married a poor one, or that their husbands would love others if they married a rich one. In order to resist marriage, some girls usually escaped from marriage or even committed suicide. This is the origin of their marriage belief.

The confidence of non-marriage was formed under the influence of both economic and social factors). In the Pearl River Delta, especially after the World War I there started to develop a silk worm industry. The silk price skyrocketed due to the great shortage of raw material in textile industry. All the factors led to the prosperity of local silk industry in 1921. At that time, domestic silk workshops were spread all over the villages, including those which were raised and run on their own and those which hired laborers. All the procedures were operated by women, including picking and feeding silkworms. According to *The Agricultural Chronicles of the Pearl River Delta IV*, the history of silkworm industry in the Pearl River Delta, in Shunde County “桑基面积达到三十万亩以上，稻田面积不及总耕地面积十分之一 [the mulberry field has an area of more than 300,000 acres, and the rice field is less than one tenth of the total cultivated area]” [19, p. 14]. In this economic context, the silk industry provided women with a large number of job opportunities, which enabled them to earn their own living and even have a surplus. Thus, under the influence of economic environment women acquired a basic confidence for non-marriage.

In addition, some social factors also gave them further confidence for non-marriage. Collective way of production and life has changed their traditional ideas on life and mentality. Their previous understanding of marriage meaning was no longer an essential part in their life. As time went by, “顺德女性独身不嫁已成风气，觉得妇女嫁人是一件卑鄙的事情 [it became common for women in Shunde to stay single. It was considered a contemptible thing for women to get married]” [14, p. 91-92]. They combed their hair up and even formed an organization so that they could live as a big family together; help, encourage and supervise each other. The atmosphere of living was very harmonious. It is also recorded in a historical book that admits: “按二女同居，虽不能具有

男女之形式，实具有男女之乐趣，或云适用摩擦力，或云适用机械的 [although the cohabitation of two females cannot take the form of sex like a man and a woman, it actually has the pleasure of sex by friction or some tools]" [10, p. 390]. It can be seen that Zi-Shu-Nvs also tried to get physiological satisfaction from each other, although that might be only partial satisfaction. “这种家庭式生活，可以满足自梳女心理、生理上的需求 [this kind of family life can meet their psychological and physiological needs]" [14, p. 77], which reassures their marriage belief with great support, especially for the next generation. Even after their death, there was no need to worry about the problem of worship, because most of Zi-Shu-Nvs could solve these problems when they were old and even dead with the help of other Zi-Shu-Nvs. There is no doubt that these psychological and physical satisfaction made their new marriage belief more confident, which is the necessary condition for Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage belief to be inherited. At that time, this marriage belief was further developed and formed.

Yet in Shunde, there was a traditional idea that a woman who didn't marry would bring bad luck to her family. “母家若有三灾六难，都会归罪与此女 [if there are some disasters or difficulties in her mother's family, she will be blamed]" [17, p. 104]. In the meanwhile, there appeared strict rules requiring such women not to die in the village, let alone to die in their own family. Although the marriage belief that they plan not to marry had been formed initially, it was impossible for girls who had been educated in Confucianism since childhood to pursue freedom without thinking about their families and social comments. Under the influence of this traditional concept, they could only seek a compromise, which might both comfort their families and be accepted by the society, namely the image of a married woman. This compromise might enable them to achieve celibacy. And this compromise was a fake marriage ceremony under the influence of traditional ideas. To be a Zi-Shu-Nv was the very method they could achieve their purpose. There was a ceremony similar to a wedding ceremony commonly on a fortunate day on which their hair would be combed up by relatives or close friends. After the ceremony, the prepared wine, meat and fruit should be brought home to worship

the ancestors, and rich families would even entertain guests at home. Guangdong amorous records recorded that “一若男子之娶亲，认为是毕生一件大喜事 [like a wedding ceremony, it was a lifetime happy event]” [3, p. 27]. Although it was a fake marriage, i.e., a formalized marriage or a sexless marriage, it was generally accepted by the society at that time. This was the final choice of the formalization process of Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage. The benefits of a fake marriage are obvious: the traditional marriage's misery could be shaken off without any conflict with conventions and the girls would not be isolated from the society. Thus, their marriage belief could be further consolidated and implemented.

The textual meanings of the signs summarized above had existed in the minds of unmarried women for a long time. Under the influence of these comprehensive social and cultural contexts, their previous marriage belief had lost its confidence and hadn't met their expectations any longer, and more and more often they had a complex state of mind which included fear, hatred and a desire to avoid marriage. Under such circumstances the metalanguage held by these unmarried women interpreted the meaning of marriage as a textual meaning of oppression, non-freedom and despicable behavior, so that they'd better stay away from men and marriages and find a new way of life. Women who hold such metalanguage basically reach a consensus depending on these codes, “任何能够符码化的对象都依赖于人们共同的文化规约 [any object that can be coded depends on people's common cultural conventions]” [5, p. 112]. The authors believe that the metalanguage of social and cultural context held by Zi-Shu-Nvs is the main reason for the origin of their marriage belief.

Competent metalanguage

The competent metalanguage of the addressee is regarded by professor Zhao Yiheng as “来自解释者的社会性成长经历 [the social growth experience of the interpreter]” [21, p. 233], that is to say, competent metalanguage is the ability of the text addressee to interpret a sign text based on his/her social experience, personal experience, cultural accomplishment, etc. This kind of metalanguage should belong to the micro and individual set of codes of an interpreter, and it should be characterized

as a certain degree of diversity. People's lives are different, and so are their experience and thinking habits. Naturally, the understanding of life should not be identical, which constructs everyone's unique competent metalanguage.

Some women even believe that “异性间的交往是不洁行为 [heterosexual intercourse is not saintly]” [14, p. 92], because of some religious reasons or the influence of superstitious thoughts. These women swear to God never to have sex with men. For these women such thoughts serve as the faith itself. Professor Zhao Yiheng clearly stated that “（感情和信仰）不是一般意义上的‘能力’，而是在理性背后，甚至在潜意识层次起作用的因素 [(feelings and faiths) are not competence in a common sense, but effective factors behind reasoning and even at the subconscious level]” [21, p. 234]. This kind of irrational interpretation may even surpass the rational thinking which reflects its powerfulness. Women who hold this metalanguage will be more deeply convinced of the rationality and necessity of formalized marriages. However, their interpretation of marriage is different, which not only includes a stronger desire to non-marriage to consolidate the determination of combing their hair up, but also includes the shame of sexual intercourse and sexual behaviors. This metalanguage makes up their marriage belief and sets up greater confidence for their non-marriage.

The fear of marriage and the belief in anti-marriage can be acquired from literature, and other people's speaking gradually on the subject matter, but there are some people who witnessed pain and suffering of traditional marriages. For women who have seen all these, it was as if they got real experience, and thus constructed a competent metalanguage with stronger desires to non-marriage. There is a legend in Shunde that there was a family named Hu which had five daughters. The first four daughters were all married, but they suffered physical and mental torture of various degrees in their husbands' families. As a result, the youngest daughter finally decided to be a Zi-Shu-Nv.

As addressees and interpreters of the sign text, Zi-Shu-Nvs have different experience and thoughts, that's why the implications of marriage belief are to some extent also different. However, through the above made

analysis it can be seen that women with some kind of religious belief or superstition and those who have seen the pain of traditional marriage tend to form a stronger non-marriage belief. Therefore, the competent metalanguage in their minds is bound to have the effect of strengthening their marriage belief.

Textual metalanguage

“文本是解释的对象，但是文本作为传达的环节，也参与构筑解释自身所需要的元语言集合 [text is an object of interpretation, but as a link of communication, a text itself is also involved in constructing the metalanguage needed for the interpretation]” [21, p. 234]. In the process of interpretation, not only a text itself, but also additional factors connected with it, do have meanings. And these additional factors are defined as “伴随文本 [with-text]” [21, p. 141] by professor Zhao Yiheng. In fact, any sign text is a combination of a text and with-texts, in which there are many social and cultural factors. Therefore, the huge cultural system connected by with-texts is also involved in the construction of the metalanguage. It can be seen that a textual metalanguage is a metalanguage system jointly constructed by a text itself and its with-texts. The characteristic of a textual metalanguage is intertextuality, that is, it can enrich itself by absorbing relevant components of other texts at any time. Thus, we see that to comb one’s hair up is a choice in the struggle against marriage. This part of the article deconstructs Zi-Shu-Nvs’ experiencing various attempts and exploration in the process of resisting marriage. It explains why they have such marriage belief.

There are such representative types of anti-marriage as 不落家 ‘never living with her husband’, 冥婚 ‘marring a dead man’, 买门口 ‘paying for a concubine for her husband’ and 迷夫教 ‘cursing her husband’.

不落家: it belongs to the pre-text of Zi-Shu-Nv, namely the impact of the previous texts in this text. 不落家, also known as 不落夫家, refers to “女子婚后很长一段时间不和丈夫一起生活，而仍居住在娘家，只是逢年过节到夫家小住，此后直到怀孕生子前始到夫家和丈夫过正常的夫妻生活 [a woman who lives with her parents rather than living with her husband after marriage for a long time. She just occasionally

meets and lives with her husband and his family on holidays, until the birth of the first child. The couple can have a normal life of husband and wife]" [14, p. 48]. This phenomenon has a long history, which was common in Song and Ming Dynasties. It was an early and successful attempt for women to resist marriage. As can be seen from the above definition, 不落家 is not really a non-marriage, but initially in the form of a fake marriage a woman married to the husband's family, and then slowly transitioned to the real life of a husband and a wife. Strictly speaking, it should be entitled "迟落家 [living with her husband later]" [14, p. 50]. It means to go to her husband's family later and was accepted by the society and the families of both men and women at that time. The contextual metalanguage of social culture was gradually formed, which laid a certain foundation for the production of Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage belief, and became their textual metalanguage.

冥婚: that is to marry people who have already died. There are many specific forms, such as 嫁神主 'marring a memorial tablet', etc., which are all from superstition. However, for women who hold the belief of non-marriage, the most important thing is that this form of a fake marriage can be recognized and accepted by the society. This should also be regarded as another attempt of women in the process of anti-marriage, which is the pretext of Zi-Shu-Nv. This construction of a metalanguage also lays a foundation for their marriage belief, and makes their marriage sign formalized further.

买门口 and 迷夫教: both of them also belong to the pretext of Zi-Shu-Nv, or they can be considered as the hypotexts of 不落家, that is, the text takes over from the text that came first. The former refers to a married woman unwilling to live with her husband, preferring to pay for a concubine for him. It is also a form of a fake marriage, in which a woman is nominally married but does not have a normal family life as a husband and wife. It is another attempt by women on the road to anti-marriage. The latter is a form of superstition in which women "用木头或布做成人偶，上面写上丈夫的生辰八字，然后再在人偶上面遍插绣花针 [make dolls out of wood or cloth, write their husband's birthday on them, and then insert needles all over them]" [14, p. 99]. It

was said that by cursing their husbands in this way, they could kill their husbands. According to Guangdong amorous records, “谭山乡有一男子在新婚洞房之夜，忽闻如哭如诉之声。家人起而察看，见新妇披麻戴孝，独自躲在墙隅暗处魔祭。新郎的家属睹状皆栗然惊呼，召集全家男女将之捉拿，于翌晨将她绑赴祠堂交父老问讯，始悉新娘为迷夫教徒” [in Tanshan county, there was a bridegroom suddenly hearing a voice like weeping or complaining in the night of marriage. His family went to see the bride dressed in mourning and sacrificing alone in the corner of the wall. His family members were astonished a lot and called every man and woman to arrest her. Next morning, she was tied to the ancestral temple and handed to folks for questioning. Then they knew she was a believer of 迷夫教” [3, p. 37]. It was later promoted and imitated by people, which to some extent increased Zi-Shu-Nvs’ confidence of anti-marriage.

The accompanying text is one of important components of the production of text meanings. The textual metalanguage represented by an accompanying text will naturally influence the production of Zi-Shu-Nvs’ marriage belief. Such metalanguage lays a foundation and plays a certain promoting role for the ultimate production of their marriage belief.

We mentioned different authors who studied and described the Zi-Shu-Nvs’ marriage belief. But all these studies analyzed the phenomenon from the approaches of cultural studies and anthropology. We tried to conduct a semiotic analysis of it.

The article touches upon various semiotic issues and different approaches to them. However, it is for the first time when semiotic analysis is applied to the interpretation of the Zi-Shu-Nvs’ marriage belief. More than that we tried to analyze the phenomenon from the perspective of the metalanguage theory based on Zhao Yiheng’s differentiation between contextual, competent and textual metalanguages.

Conclusions

This paper analyzes in detail the contextual, competent and textual metalanguages in the implications of Zi-Shu-Nvs’ marriage. It also explains the role of each metalanguage in the origin and development

of Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage belief. The authors prove that the textual metalanguage lays the foundation for the production of their marriage belief, the competent metalanguage further enriches their marriage belief implication and strengthens it, and the contextual metalanguage is the main reason for the production of Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage belief. On the whole, Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage belief is the product of social culture at that time, and a variety of metalanguages held by Zi-Shu-Nvs is the foundation to construct their marriage belief implication. Additionally, Zi-Shu-Nvs' marriage belief is an inevitable product which came into existence under the influence of the metalanguages.

References / Список литературы

1. Caesar M. Umberto Eco: Philosophy, Semiotics, and the Work of Fiction. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999, 220 p.
2. Cassirer E. An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture. New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 1944, 294 p.
3. Chen J., Li S., Wu Q. The Literature and History Data Research Committee in the CPPCC of Guangdong Province. 广东风情录 [Guangdong amorous records in the Chinese language]. Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publ., 1987, 220 p.
4. Chunlei Y., Xin Ru L. Thinking on innovative mode of Chinese traditional culture communication in the new era – A case study of China in the classics. *Amazonia Investiga*, 2022, 11(54), pp. 189-198. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2022.54.06.1>
5. Feng Y. Code and Meta-language: the Semiotic Interpretation of the Media Text's Meanings. *Journal of Jiangnan University (Social Science Edition)*, 2017, 34(4), pp. 110-114. URL: <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2017&filename=JHDX201704015&uniplatform=NZKPT&v=JcwhqNMx9ponfZuy40K-Wd6v0zTLhAGXuFz5soksyWqhFjmBtt-roWk8mTX7X3Y3f> (accessed September 23, 2022).
6. Foshan District Revolutionary Committee. 珠江三角洲农业志四珠江三角洲桑蚕业发展史 [The agricultural chorography of the Pearl River Delta IV, the history of silkworm industry in the Pearl River Delta in

- the Chinese language]. Foshan: Guangdong People Press, 1976, 124 p. URL: <https://max.book118.com/html/2019/0319/7146052101002014.shtm> (accessed October 03, 2022)
7. Geertz C. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, USA: Basic Books, 1973, 470 p.
 8. Greimas A.J., Courtés J. *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, 409 p.
 9. Hjelmslev L. *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961, 144 p.
 10. Hu P. 中华全国风俗志下编 [National customs of China, the second volume in the Chinese language]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei People's Publishing House, 1986, 372 p. URL: <https://max.book118.com/html/2019/1127/8041130074002065.shtm> (accessed October 11, 2022).
 11. Jakobson R. *Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics*. *Style in Language*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960, pp. 350-377.
 12. Kong Z., Wen J. (eds.). 孝经 [The Classic of Filial Piety]. Beijing: Chinese Population Press, 2014, 181 p. URL: https://so.gushiwen.cn/guwen/book_45.aspx (accessed September 28, 2022).
 13. Li N. 自梳女的“婚嫁”象征 [Marital Symbols of Zi-Shu-Nv]. *Ethno-National Studies*, 2004, 5, pp. 36-45. URL: <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD2004&filename=MZYJ200405004&uniplatform=NZKPT&v=oU0qTR0tzcrbh-2dCoZj21FIMn1T9W8tD1xVjcfTihEL2h7aQNF0gW1jtNnk9NkxM> (accessed September 23, 2022).
 14. Li N. 顺德文丛二自梳女文化解读 [Shunde literary series II interpretation of Zi-Shu-Nvs' culture in the Chinese language]. Beijing: People's Publ., 2007. URL: <http://book.kongfz.com/20224/135114186/> (accessed October 03, 2022).
 15. Lotman Y.M. *Lyudi i znaki [People and Signs]*. *Semiosfera. Kul'tura i vzryv. Vnutri mysljashih mirov. Stat'i. Issledovanija. Zametki [Semiosphere. Culture and Explosion. Inside thinking worlds. Articles. Investigation. Notes]*. St. Petersburg: Iskustvo-SPB Publ., 2010, pp 5-10. URL: https://edu.vsu.ru/pluginfile.php?file=%2F193961%2Fmod_resource%2Fcontent%2F1%2F%D0%9B%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BD%20

- %D0%AЕ.%D0%9C.%20%D0%9A%D1%83%D0%B-B%D1%8C%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B0%20%D0%B8%20%D0%B2%D0%B7%D1%80%D1%8B%D0%B2.pdf (accessed October 11, 2022).
16. Stockard J. Daughters of the Canton Delta: marriage patterns and economic strategies in South China, 1860-1930. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1989, 240 p.
 17. Tan H. 浅析顺德自梳女 [Comments on Zi-shu-nv in Shunde]. *Journal of South China Agricultural University (Social Science Edition)*, 2007, 1, pp. 102-105. URL: <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD2007&filename=HN-NA200701016&uniplatform=NZKPT&v=XdLN0HNYjaQ1yH6ojI-rmY7Brv4Rx-hLOGWYcHLo8m3cp3eqK-0sJ5RNgl1kmlldO> (accessed September 28, 2022).
 18. Tarski A. The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundation of Semantics. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1944, 4(3), pp. 341-376.
 19. The Committee of Panyu County Chorographies. 番禺县志 [The Chronicles of Panyu County in the Chinese Language]. Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publ., 1995, 406 p. URL: <https://max.book118.com/html/2020/0405/7161162042002126.shtm> (accessed September 05, 2022).
 20. The Literature and History Team in the CPPCC of Sanshui County Committee. 三水文史第八辑 [The Literature and History of Sanshui VIII in the Chinese language], 1983, 107 p. URL: <https://mtoou.info/jueban/1606885.html> (accessed October 11, 2022).
 21. Zhao Y. Semiotics: Principles & Problems. Naijing: Naijing University Press. URL: <https://wenku.so.com/d/4ce3f23ffd8a82186f0eed660eb2365d>, 2011, 426 p. (accessed September 05, 2022).

DATA ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Zhang Suojun

Hulunbuir University

Hulunbuir, China

generalzhangsj@163.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4806-6407>

Zoya D. Astatyan, PhD, Assistant Professor, Professor of Modern Languages and Communication

University of Science and Technology MISIS; Hulunbuir University

4 building 1, Prospect Leninsky, 119049, Moscow, Russian Federation; Hulunbuir, China

asratyan@mail.ru

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5952-3955

ДАнные об авторах

Джан Содзюн, преподаватель кафедры иностранных языков

Хулунбуирский университет

Хулунбуир, Китай

generalzhangsj@163.com

Асратян Зоя Дмитриевна, доктор филологических наук, доцент, профессор кафедры ИЯКТ

Университет науки и технологий МИСиС; Хулунбуирский университет

пр-кт Ленинский, 4, стр. 1, 119049, г. Москва, Российская Федерация; Хулунбуир, Китай

asratyan@mail.ru

Поступила 01.11.2022

После рецензирования 23.11.2022

Принята 10.12.2022

Received 01.11.2022

Revised 23.11.2022

Accepted 10.12.2022