A cultural linguistic approach to friedrich holderlin's poem *bread and wine*

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ABSTRACT

Cultural linguistics examines discourse through integrating the culturally-defined, conventional, and contextually situated meaning with the dynamic, momentaneous, and emerging meaning. The poem of Friedrich Hölderlin engages themes such as divinity, homecoming, and the natural world, embodying great philosophical, poetic, and aesthetic value by manifesting the truth of human existential being. From a cultural-linguistic perspective, this paper aims to examine the application of cultural cognitive models in the meaning construction of Hölderlin's poem Bread and Wine. We first introduced the development of cultural linguistics and its integration into cognitive linguistics theories, and then identified and analyzed four major cognitive models: the propositional model, image-schematic model, metaphoric model, and metonymic model manifested in the poem within the cultural contexts, exploring how they contribute to the poetic meaning construction process. The findings of this paper show that the poetic discourse's meaning is greatly shaped by human cognitive structures and cultural contexts, and different cognitive models rooted in the poet's embodied experience with the surrounding environment govern the meaning construction process and demonstrate the core poetic themes of humanity, spirituality, and divinity. This study may provide readers with both cognitive and cultural pathways into poetic discourse interpretations. Further research is expected to explore a more comprehensive cultural linguistic model that governs the meaning construction of poetic discourses.

Keywords: Bread and wine, Cognitive mechanism, Cultural linguistics, Embodied experience, Holderlin, Idealized cognitive model.

Highlights of this paper

- This paper aims to analyze the cognitive models involved in Bread and Wine within the cultural-linguistic framework, revealing their role in the meaning construction of poetic discourse.
- The cultural and cognitive approach to the poem Bread and Wine reveals that the poetic discourse's meaning is greatly shaped by human cognitive structures and cultural contexts.
- The fundamental cognitive mechanisms of the propositional model, image-schematic model, metaphoric model, and metonymic model govern the fundamental meaning construction process of the poetry Bread and Wine, and the cultural factors based on the poet's interaction with the environment (e.g., Christianity, Romanticism, and philosophical idealism) give meaningful experiential elements to these cognitive models.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term cultural linguistics was first proposed by Palmer (1996) in *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*. It is the synthesis of cognitive linguistics with Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics, and the ethnography of speaking (ES), intending to interpret discourse meaning by merging linguistic theory, cultural theory, and sociolinguistics theory (Palmer, 1996). As a multidisciplinary branch, it deals with the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualization (Montalban et al., 2017). In explicit terms, it examines discourse by integrating culturally defined, conventional, and contextualized meaning with dynamic, momentaneous, and emerging meaning. Cultural linguistics provides a theoretical and analytical framework that "focuses on examining features of language that encode conceptualizations rooted in the cultural experiences of speakers" (Farzad Sharifian, 2017). Applied research of cultural linguistics has evidently opened up new possibilities for studies on language and culture (Sharifian, 2011, 2014, 2015).

The poetry of Friedrich Holderlin engages themes such as divinity, homecoming, and the natural world, embodying great philosophical, poetic, and aesthetic value by manifesting the truth of human existential Being. In *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry* by Steiner (1991), poetry completed the philosophical language of his time by capturing the essence of being and time. In *Bread and Wine*, Holderlin created various poetic images to represent the great times of holy Greece, where the gods resided, lamenting the dawn of all gods and calling for their return as the symbol of divinity. This paper aims to analyze the cognitive models involved in *Bread and Wine* within the cultural-linguistic framework, revealing their role in the meaning construction of the poetic discourse.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CULTURAL LINGUISTICS

2.1. The Three Traditions of Cultural Linguistics

The three traditions of cultural linguistics, named Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics, and the ethnography of speaking (ES), share the focal interest in meaning construction. Flourishing in the early to mid-20th century, Boasian linguistics is mainly concerned with the significant role of language in revealing human mental life. Boas held that different language phenomena intermingled with the cultural experience could shape language. Further, Sapir (1964) followed the tradition and clarified that the linguistic categories (e.g., number, gender, case, tense, mode, voice, aspect) are firstly abstracted from experience and then systematically elaborated in language, which influences human orientation in the world. Like Sapir, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis proposed by the linguist Benjamin Whorf claimed that linguistic structure partly shaped language users' thoughts based on his observations of the Hopi language.

Ethnosemantics is the study of the ways in which different cultures organize and categorize domains of knowledge, such as those of plants, animals, and kinship systems. It is defined as "the study of the ways in which different cultures organize and categorize domains of knowledge, such as those of plants, animals, and kin" (Palmer, 1996). The studies of ethnosemantics involve componential analyses of lexicons or observations on taxonomies,

including color terms, to discover the cultural and cognitive differences reflected through language. However, it primarily focuses on lexical analysis and may exclude themes such as images or image schemas, which are important for understanding the relationship between language and culture (Palmer, 1996).

The ethnography of speaking (ES) primarily investigates culturally defined imagery in language and discourse within specific sociocultural situations. Goodwin and Duranti (1992) claimed that ES provides a route to speech acts in culturally defined categories rather than fixed ones. However, it fails to explore the interrelationship between language and cognition. Research findings on ES give inadequate attention to schemas, frames, and gestalts, which could be complemented by cognitive linguistic theories (Palmer, 1996). Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics, and ES share an interest in the intimate interaction among language, society, and culture. The emergence of cultural linguistic synthesis first integrated these three linguistic traditions by advancing the program of Whorf, avoiding the objectivism of ethnosemantics, and adding precision to ES (Palmer, 1996).

2.2. The Integration of Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics offers an experiential approach to the study of meaning, claiming that human cognition bears the imprint of the embodied human experience of interacting with the surrounding environment. The core of cognitive linguistics exhibits two central tasks: the generalization commitment and the cognitive commitment, aiming at revealing the fundamental cognitive mechanisms behind human language. Classic cognitive linguistic theoretical tools, including conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), conceptual integration, mental space theory (Fauconnier, 1994), imagery schema theory (Lakoff, 1987), cognitive semantics (Talmy, 2000), and idealized cognitive models (Lakoff, 1987), have offered a holistic perspective to language and cognition. Yet, investigations of cognitive linguistic theories generally present an inadequate attention to culture and discourse, which play an indispensable role in discursive meaning construction. The integration of schemas, mental images, metaphorical systems, or Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) embodied in language within the cognitive linguistic framework into cultural linguistics may assume a cognitive perspective on language and culture. For instance, speech genres could be treated as culturally defined cognitive models (Palmer, 1996). Hence, such synthesis may explore the emergent and situated meaning in discourse. Moreover, previous cognitive linguistics studies on poetry mainly focused on the applications of conceptual metaphor theory (Freeman, 2003; Rasse, Onysko, & Citron, 2020; Steen, 2009), image schema (Asgari, 2013; Pagán Cánovas, 2016), and conceptual integration theory (Freeman, 2008; Hosseini & Ahangar, 2024; Jiang-hua, 2020) in poetic textual interpretations with little attention to the role of cultural cognitive models in poetic meaning constructions.

In cognitive linguistics, the idea of cognitive models carrying embodied features could structure thought and be used in forming categories and in reasoning (Lakoff, 1987). ICMs, naturally, are cognitive models that are idealized as a structured whole applied by speakers in their mental representations to understand a particular situation (Lakoff, 1987). According to (Lakoff, 1987), ICMs generally follow four structuring principles, including propositional models, image-schematic models, metaphoric models, and metonymic models. The proposal of four cognitive models provides cognitive theoretical tools to explain the meaning construction of *Bread and Wine*.

Cultural linguistics and cognitive linguistics share an interest in images. Images are "mental representations that begin as conceptual analogs of immediate, perceptual experience from the peripheral sensory organs" (Palmer, 1996). Therefore, as cognitive events, images may indirectly reflect or evoke the sociocultural background at the human conceptual level. The synthesis of cultural linguistics and cognitive linguistics on image interpretation could thus offer a route to the source cognitive models that generate meanings. Moreover, concerns about culture make the cognitive models more holistic in governing discourse within the cultural linguistic framework.

3. ON HOLDERLIN'S POEM *BREAD AND WINE*

Being explicitly located as the poet of Being and as "poet of poets" by Heidegger, Hölderlin marks the poet of German destiny (Lin et al., 2019) by bridging thinking and poetry not only in his poetic text but in the individual experiential ground. As the "precursor of poets in a destitute time," the philosophical, literary, and historical stance in his poetic language articulates the truth of being, the nature of language as the shelter of truth, and the relationship between truth and poetry. In *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, Heidegger redefined the relation between philosophy and poetry, arguing that Hölderlin's hymns have achieved the highest form of thoughtfulness within a non-philosophical form. Poetry could thus be an original way of expressing fundamental existential truths. Previous studies on Hölderlin's poetry mainly focus on its philosophical and cultural explanations, such as exploring how the poetry arouses the consciousness of the Holy and connects human beings with their nature of Being, which has been forgotten by his contemporaries (Crowe, 2007; Magrini, 2014; Most, 1986). There are also researchers who examine how Hölderlin's poetry provides solutions to overcome human subjectivity and humanism through the divine force of pure spirit manifested through poetic language, contributing to the unity between subject and the world and becoming a path to liberation (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2004; Pöggeler, 1974).

Bread and Wine, one of the most representative and influential poems of Holderlin, displays his praise of ancient Greece and laments the dawn of all gods, symbolizing the poet's divine calling for a new civilization where all contradictions or duality disappear. In this poem, Holderlin created many images in the nine stanzas to construct the poetic discourse. The exposure of truth that underlies his poetic language reveals the existential essence of poetry. In the first three stanzas, he describes the scene where all gods are absent (e.g., quiet streets, fantastical night, Holy remembrance). The fugitive gods manifest the failure of reason at that age to encounter the essence of being. In the middle three stanzas, he recalls the holy ages of ancient Greece (e.g., the festival hall, the thrones, the oracle, and temples) and laments the disappearance of all gods (e.g., fading Thebes and Athens, silent ancient theaters, the absence of joyful ceremonial dancing). In the last three stanzas, he appeals to the reconciliation of day and night, the west and east, and divinity and individuality (e.g., the appearance of a quiet genius, the torchbearer of the Highest). The images presented by poetic language manifest human relationships with Being and push readers to confront their destiny.

Apart from Heidegger's interpretations of Holderlin's poetry to address the issue of Being, in previous investigations into Holderlin, researchers explored his poetic texts to explain concerns regarding time and being from a philosophical perspective (Dastur, 2000; Elden, 1999; Li, 2014), literary (Jennings, 1983; She, 2016; Stone, 2003), and mythological perspectives (Guo & Leu, 2013; Most, 1986). For instance, Hu, Wen, Chua, and Li (2014) explored the basic themes and the images in Bread and Wine and abstracted the focal thoughts, including "divinity beyond madness," "mythological aestheticism," and "the reconciliation of black and white". Stone (2011) also proposed the solution of the nature's way of being to the human/nature dualism. However, cognitive research on Hölderlin's poetry has received considerably less scholarly attention than poetic language itself. The lack of study is due in part to the insufficient emphasis on the cognitive mechanism of the meaning construction of poetic discourse (Gavins & Steen, 2003; Stockwell, 2002), and few studies have only focused on the neurocognitive basis of literature reception (Jacobs, 2015).

On this ground, this paper aims to explain the cognitive models in Bread and Wine from a cultural-linguistic perspective, offering insight into the cognitive process in the meaning construction of poetic discourse. This may provide new possibilities to interpret Hölderlin's meditative thinking and make reflections on the underlying cognitive models that govern his poetic language.

4. ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE MODELS IN BREAD AND WINE WITHIN COGNITIVE CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Propositional Model

Propositional models specify elements, their properties, and the relations holding among them, and people can project the propositional models to understand their embodied experience in the world (Lakoff, 1987). For instance, a scenario as a whole may be structured by elements such as an initial state, a sequence of events, and a final state that are connected through certain relations (Lakoff, 1987). In Bread and Wine, propositional models reflect the poet's intention and construal of inner experience. Interpretations of the propositional model thus form the basis for revealing the meaning construction of poetic language.

Grounded on human experience with the surrounding environment, the title of the poem Bread and Wine may stimulate the propositional model of RESOURCE. This model could further generate sub-models of FOOD, COOKING, PARTY, and HUMAN DESIRES. While entering into the emergent meaning of the poem and concerning the relative cultural elements, readers may update these initial models. For example, in the first stanza, the scenario of city life, along with people's tiredness by day and night, spurs readers' model of HUMAN DESIRES to interpret the poetic meanings. That is, the desires of human beings for bread and wine are similar to wandering awkwardly at night. While in the third stanza:

> *Thus, playful madness may mock mockery itself.*
> *Seizing singers suddenly in the holy night.*
> *Then let's be off to the Isthmus! There, where.*
> *The open sea roars at Parnassus, and the snow.*
> *Shines around the Delphian cliffs.*
> *There in the land of Olympus, on Cithaeron's peak,*
> *Under the pines, amid vineyards, from which.*
> *Thebes and Ismenos roar in the land of Cadmus.*
> *The approaching god comes from there, and points back.*

Images of cultural embodiments manifested as "holy night," "Isthmus," "Parnassus," "Olympus," "Thebes and Ismenos," and "the approaching god" illustrate the poet's appeal to the return of all gods and remembrance of the divine at the holy night. The geographical names establish a holy space where holy Greece resides, which "reawakens the sense of the holy, the awe, and wonder in the presence of the divine earth" (Magrini, 2014). These images transform readers' previous model of human desires to the emerging model of ancient Greece, which reflects their accumulative cultural understandings of Greek, potentially arousing ancient memories about the spirits of Apollo and Dionysus. Holderlin has a strong yearning for ancient Greece, which "separates him from the rest of his contemporaries, who are content to live within their own time and space," and this gave reason to the poet's "profound alienation and solitude" (Most, 1986).

As the projection of cognitive models, images are intimately connected with the poet's cognitive ability to construct the situated reality. On the basis of the propositional model, readers could encounter Holderlin's living world in the imaginative sphere. In Holderlin's letter to Boehlendorf in 1802, he wrote that the highest form of reasoning for the Greeks is reflexivity, which unveils the truth of being. Therefore, the recalling of "Greek" elements does not merely entail the thought of Greek times but the "retrieval of a possibility for thinking that is lost" (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2004). Holderlin's poetic language for recalling all gods is in nature reflections of the self-concealing, pure divinity that has already been shadowed by the darkness of human desires, which block human beings' path to their foundation of existence. Therefore, the model of human desires first extends to the ancient Greek model and further

concerns the divinity model, revealing the cultural cognitive process in the meaning construction of the poem Bread and Wine.

4.2. Image-Schematic Model

Image schema is the preconceptual structure that organizes human understanding of different experiences. It emerges through human perceptual experience with the surrounding environment, based on which categories and structural concepts are formed. Image-schematic models "specify schematic images, such as trajectories or long, thin shapes or containers" (Lakoff, 1987). For example, the container schema is based on human perceptual experience of breathing or moving in the world, where structural elements such as the interior, the boundary, and the exterior exist as the ground information. According to (Lakoff, 1987), several common schema types mainly include container, source-path-goal, link, part-whole, center-periphery, up-down, and front-back. These schemas can embody structural meanings and form complex conceptions for human beings.

In Bread and Wine, Holderlin constructed poetic meaning mainly through the UP-DOWN and the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema. The UP-DOWN schema is based on human perceptual experience of keeping the body erect, and the upper part of the head serves as the measurement of the world, which signifies human general cognitive ability. Additionally, the experiential foundation also involves the sky with boundless height. In Bread and Wine, images such as "stranger over the mountain tops," "the highest god," "temples that rise above the banks of the waters," "the gods that live up over our heads," and "those who made our lives happy, who climbed upwards" are adopted by Holderlin as the praise of the highest divinity. The Up-Down schema shows the poet's destiny to unveil the divine space where the highest god lives. It reveals the existential significance with its silence in the boundlessness, appealing to human beings to encounter their destiny in the pure space.

Another image-schema in Bread and Wine concerns the source-path-goal schema, which is common in events such as journeys, ball throwing, and goal realization. Holderlin has written the following lines to demonstrate the role of a true poet: *What use are poets in times of need? But you'll say they're like holy priests of the wine god, moving from land to land in the holy night.* Poets are born as the priests to bridge the human being with divinity. It is the destinal force that triggers the poet's choice to return to the homeland. The poet as the "vessel of being" would thus imply a character beyond subjectivity (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2004) that has the natural proximity to be contained within the divine. In the poetic discourse of Holderlin, homeland is not only a representation of the locale of birth but, in a deeper sense, a space invoking people's feelings of "at home". The poet's path to home or the journey to the soul is to approach the mysterious origin that exists neither in the beginning nor in the end. The SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema could arouse readers' bodily experience to enter into the poetic text and understand the meaning construction process of the poetic meanings by integrating the situated meaning with the emergent meanings, so that they could visualize the journey to divinity through the sense produced by embodied movement. The application of the image schemas thus helps readers to connect the abstract spiritual journey with their experience within the surrounding environment.

4.3. Metaphoric Model

Metaphoric models refer to the mappings from a propositional or image-schematic model in one domain to a corresponding structure in another domain. For instance, the source and target domains, structurally represented by the container schemas, could be mapped through the south-path-goal schema (Lakoff, 1987). The application of the metaphoric model may reveal poets' conceptual attitudes and creative motivations (Holland, 1988). In Bread and Wine, we found the metaphoric mapping from the source domain of part-whole schema to the target domain of "divine

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reconciliation". In the last three stanzas, Holderlin wrote: "Yes, they say rightly that he reconciles day with night, and leads the stars of heaven up and down forever". The images of day and night are frequently present in Holderlin's poem. During the day, people struggled for physical satisfaction, whereas they were constantly caught by divine memories underground at night. Only the highest god could reconcile day and night and overcome the duality to establish unity, and such divine reconciliations, which exist beyond time and space, could not be named. In this line, we could illustrate that the source and the target domain share the same image-schematic structure (see Figure 1).
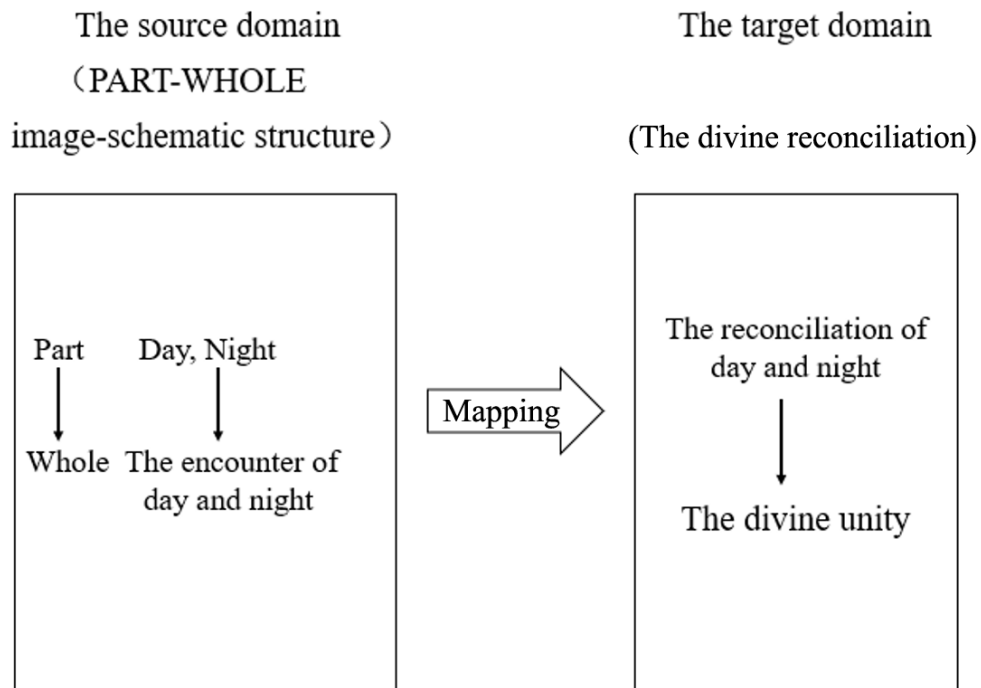

Figure 1. Metaphoric model.

The poetic value and the communicative effectiveness of the metaphorical expressions governed by the metaphoric model are partly rooted in the poets' felt sensations of their bodies in action, and many of the source domains reflect patterns of human bodily experience (sight, sound, full-bodied kinesthetic action, etc.) with the surrounding environment (Gibbs Jr, Lima, & Francozo, 2004). The metaphoric unity model applied by Holderlin is grounded on the cultural perceptual experience of lightness with the surrounding environment. The image of night is the carrier of human memory of sleep, darkness, silence, meditation, and oblivion, and the day has largely signified the human daily routines and the ignorance of all gods. Additionally, the comprehension of such images is tightly linked with the collective German romantic cultural space represented by Schelling and Novalis, in which darkness represents the mystical sphere that reflects the fundamental truth of Being and the Western destiny where all gods are absent in the loss of meaningfulness. It is largely under the influence of Holderlin that Schelling claimed the highest form of human spirituality lies in the unity between subject and object (Schelling, 1975). This also provides an approach for Holderlin to overcome Kant's dualism of the natural and the moral world with the divine force (Hölscher, 2006). In Bread and Wine, Holderlin uses the metaphoric model to illustrate such poetic meaning that the divine reconciliation between the material and the spiritual would not present itself until human beings first encounter the existential mystic beauty of the night and then integrate day and night, and that is the time for the torchbearer of the Highest when "Titans dream more softly, asleep in the arms of the earth and even jealous Cerberus drinks and falls asleep". It is also the philosophical situation that when there is danger, there is salvation in Heidegger's terms.

4.4. Metonymic Model

Metonymy refers to the cognitive process in which one conceptual entity provides a mental route to another. The metonymic mapping occurs within a single conceptual domain, which is structured by an ICM (Lakoff, 1987). Metonymic models facilitate human understanding of the world. In Bread and Wine, numerous names can be found to establish the route from the tenor to the vehicle, thus forming the sign ICM. In this ICM, the forms represented by language serve as the medium connecting reality and the imaginative world, carrying the intentional meaning of poetic discourse.

In the third stanza of the poem, we have seen holy names as "Isthmus," "Parnassus," "Delphian cliffs," "Olympus," "Cithaeron's peak," "Thebes and Ismenos," and "Cadmus" for the praise of all gods in ancient Greek times. The impetus to name as the poetic form was eccentrically contributing to the sense of dissolution. In the last stanza, we could also find the following lines.

> *Meanwhile, the Son, the Syrian, comes down among.*
>
> *The shadows, as torchbearer of the Highest.*
>
> *Holy sages observe it; a smile shines out from.*
>
> *The imprisoned soul; their eyes thaw in the light.*
>
> *Titans dream more softly, asleep in the arms of the earth—*
>
> *Even jealous Cerberus drinks and falls asleep.*

The poet seeks salvation by following the torchbearer of the Highest, and that is the time when Titans and Cerberus fall asleep gently. Researchers have made discussions on the identity of the Syrian. According to Hu et al. (2014), a Syrian refers to a person who is recognized by his miracle in Syria. It could either be Dionysus born in Thebai or Jesus Christ in Berkeley. Bread and wine serve as the priceless bestowal from the Gods in their wandering as a miracle. The unity between bread and wine brought by the Syrian would reconcile day and night and make human beings approach the essence of homeland, in which the hostile and destructive force represented through the image of Titans would be transformed by such an unbound force. Based on the sign ICM, the tenor of the Syrian activates the conceptual domain of "reconciliation of differentiations" or the philosophical unity between the subject and object. The linguistic form is, therefore, the shelter for the poetic transcendence, based on which readers could interpret the poetic discourse thoroughly by the integration of situated meanings and emergent meanings.

5. DISCUSSION

The cultural and cognitive approach to the poem Bread and Wine reveals that the poetic discourse's meaning is greatly shaped by human cognitive structures and cultural contexts. The fundamental cognitive mechanisms of the propositional model, image-schematic model, metaphoric model, and metonymic model govern the core process of meaning construction in the poetry Bread and Wine. Cultural factors, based on the poet's interaction with the environment, such as Christianity, Romanticism, and philosophical idealism, provide meaningful experiential elements to these cognitive models. The cultural cognitive model thus also offers a tool to interpret the poet's writing intentions, which provides a route to explore the meaning construction process of the culturally constructed imagery. In the poetic discourse of Bread and Wine, the cultural conceptualizations of imagery are deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of the poets as a cultural group, communicating their specific cultural cognition. For Holderlin, it was the "modern German mood of nihilistic despair" (Magrini, 2014). The poet's remembrance of Greek gods awakens the holy source of human existence, which has long been forgotten by his contemporaries. The linguistic act of recalling gods' names made the divine melt into human beings' existence to attain the state of "meaning and being meet in equilibrium" (Pöggeler, 1974). For Heidegger, Holderlin's name on the Holy in his poetry evokes being, through

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which we can answer the question of who we really are. It also serves as the preparation for the Gods' new coming in an unholy time (Grossmann & Goodwin, 2004). In combination with cognitive models, readers may understand the influences of cultures on poets' selections of propositions, metaphors, image schemas, and metonymies to construct poetic meanings and attain a comprehensive understanding of the shared subconsciousness of that cultural group.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper aims to analyze the cognitive process of the meaning construction of the poem Bread and Wine from a cultural linguistic perspective. We found that the propositional model, image-schematic model, metaphoric model, and metonymic model could serve as significant tools for the poet to construct meanings in Bread and Wine and for the readers to interpret the cognitive and collective cultural knowledge of the poetic text. Further research is expected to explore a more comprehensive cultural linguistic model that governs the meaning construction of poetic discourses.

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