



## HAPPINESS IN THE CELEBRATION OF CHINESE NEW YEAR

Hermina Sutami

University of Indonesia

[h\\_sutami@yahoo.com](mailto:h_sutami@yahoo.com); [amh.sutami@gmail.com](mailto:amh.sutami@gmail.com); [a.hermina@ui.ac.id](mailto:a.hermina@ui.ac.id)

### Abstract

Gong xi facai is a Chinese New Year greeting that is commonly spoken, heard, and written by people. Even if we don't know what it means, we guess the meaning must be good. The problem is what is the meaning of each word and the meaning of the sentence as a whole so that it can be concluded that the sentence is an expression of a joyful? Are there no other feelings? Since the sentence is considered a text, it will be examined which words express emotion, what kind of emotions they are. The goal is to express clearly what is meant by that sentence. To find out what kind of emotions it contains, Santangelo's theory (2000) will be used to detect which words express emotion and belong to which class. The data are Chinese Lunar New Year greetings written in Han characters. There is Indonesian-language data in the form of Chinese New Year pantun. Based on the analysis of the meaning components of emotions, the data are classified into several domains, such as Chinese New Year greeting, success in business, health, family, education, etc. The novelty of this research is to analyze the meaning components of emotional sentences so that emotional content can be identified precisely. This research will enrich research on emotions in the field of greetings for the Chinese New Year that has not been done much.

**Keywords:** Chinese Lunar New Year, greetings, emotion, P.Santangelo

### 1 Introduction

Ada rayap makan bakpao

Mohon maaf engga ada angpao

Anak tokek makan bakpia

Biar bokek yang penting sincia

Daun waru daun kucai

'Met tahun baru, Gongxi facai

There are termites eating buns

Sorry no *angpao* (money wrap in a red paper)

Gecko chicks eat *bakpia* (a kind of buns)

Although no money, *sincia* is important (Chinese New Year)

Leaves of *waru*, leaves of chives (a kind of tree)

Happy New Year, *Gongxi facai* (congratulation to become rich)

The above pantun expresses a sense of humor and emotion of joy in welcoming the Chinese New Year. This humorous sense and positive emotion can be seen from the sentence *sorry no angpao*, *sincia is important*. It means, without money, we can still celebrate New Year. Chinese New Year is an important occasion for all family members. It is time for reunions. On New Year's Eve, all family members sit at the round table, eating together, talking about each other's experiences, joking, etc. For this occasion, harsh words, insults, anger are very taboo. Everything must be in a good atmosphere, happy and full of friendship.

There are many greetings expressing one's joy and happiness feeling for the Chinese New Year. This research aims to detect which words of those greetings contain joyful emotion. Those words belong to what kind of positive emotions and belong to which domains? The purpose of this research is to provide guidance to people who do not understand Mandarin so they do not give wrong congratulations. Which ones are the main, and which ones are additional, and to whom the greeting is addressed? We often read and hear *Gongxi Facai*—also in the above pantun—as New

Year's greeting. Does *gongxi facai* means 'Happy New Year'? Is it appropriate to address *Gongxi Facai* to grandmother or grandfather?

To find out what kind of emotions those greetings contain, Santangelo's theory (2000) will be used to detect which words express emotion and belong to which class. That classification will be sorted based on meaning; whether they belong to the family, health, business domain, etc. A semiotic theory that considers greetings as symbols will clarify the relationship between symbols and the meaning they represent. The novelty of this research is to analyze the meaning components of emotional sentences so that the emotional content can be identified precisely. This research will also enrich research on emotions in the field of greetings for the Chinese New Year that has not been done much.

## 2 Literature Review

### Greetings as Symbol

Chinese New Year's greetings can be in the form of a greeting card or *angpao* (money wrapped in a red envelope). It can be written on a piece of paper taped to a shop glass as decoration or hanging from the ceiling. The whole word of greetings card is considered a sign. According to C.S. Peirce in his article "On a New List Categories" (1867), "*the symbol is representation, that is that it stands for something, but also it stands to something, namely to its interpretant, and that the sign therefore contains information ...*" (Oehler, 1987: 2). Peirce used term "symbol" to name what latter to be called "sign". It consists of three components: representamen, object and interpretant having logic relation among them. Peirce defined that relation as "*...a sign is something that stands for something in a relation to something*" (Oehler, 1987:13).

Peirce's semiotic theory was developed by linguists, also by logicians. Ogden & Richards (1923: 11) concretized Peirce's three-component relationship into a semantic triangle, that is **symbol**, **thought or reference** and **referent**. Symbol symbolizes thought or reference; thought refers to referent. I apply this semantic triangle to *angpao*, New Year's greeting cards, or other ornaments that written in Han characters to find out their meaning as sign. For *angpao*, people usually name it "angpao" without the word *envelope* although it is actually an envelope. The reason is that *pao* means 'package', *ang* means 'red', thus *angpao* literary means 'red package'. *Angpao* is in Hokkian language, a member of Han Language.

#### Picture 1. Front side of angpao



(This image is a private collection of the author)

The picture on the left is front cover of *angpao*, which will be filled with money in it. Four Han characters on the sheet held by the rabbit can be written *Gongxi Facai* in Hanyu Pinyin. Those four characters constitute one sentence consisting three words. Based on semantic triangle by Ogden & Richards, we consider this *angpao* is a **sign** consisting of **symbol** (sentence on the picture and rabbit), **thought** (meaning behind the sentence and the picture of rabbit) and **referent** (*angpao*). *Angpao* is something that exist in the real world. That is the way how to interpret a sign consisting picture and Han characters or alphabet.

### 3 Methodology

#### Emotion and States of Mind

In this research, data expressing happiness and joy for the celebration of the Chinese New Year were taken from greeting cards and *angpao*. The Han characters written on it form a sentence that is considered a symbol. To understand which part of a sentence conveying emotion and states of mind, the sentence is considered as a text. Santangelo specifically examines emotion from literary sources that are different from what psychologists do. According to him, emotion and states of mind are two things that can not be separated. Emotion is purely related to feeling, whereas states of mind also contain cognition, such as joy and amazement. Joy is associated with feeling happy. Amazement, in addition to feeling there is also an understanding of why to admire something. In this paper, both are used, but when talking about pure feelings, only emotion term is used.

Emotion and states of mind in literary sources is defined by (Santangelo, 1995:103) as follows:

*“Emotion or the state of mind in the meaning of affective long-lasting experience to be communicated through symbolic means, above all through language [...]*

Words that express emotion are long-lasting affective experiences that are communicated words and sentences. This is the difference between emotional research by Santangelo using literature sources as the data and research conducted by psychologists. Furthermore, he provides a definition of emotions related to culture (1995:104):

*“Temporary states of agitation of the mind or body that accompany the perception of a sense of desirability or aversion of tension or relaxation, in which the flow of consciousness is organized and motivated in the light of the modules of communication of a given culture.”*

From the above definition, it can be understood that emotion is not permanent, but temporary. The temporary condition can be seen from the turmoil of the heart and mind which creates a feeling of tension and relaxation. This can be observed from the unusual behavior carried out by the person concerned, which arises bodily sensations such as cold sweat, scratching his head, embarrassment, smiling to himself, and so on. This emotion study focuses on social phenomena in a certain culture written in literary works or other written forms such as greeting cards. The aim is to describe how to manifest emotion based on different cultural backgrounds through words. Thus, according to Santangelo *“language is doubly important because constitutes evidence of an emotive reality but also plays a creative and educational role in the emotional sphere”* (pp.105). Furthermore, he suggests that literary works are not the only sources, we can use other sources as long as it expresses emotion and states of mind. This research use words and sentences from Chinese New Year’s greeting cards and *angpao*.

Santangelo divides emotions into 5 groups (1) positive expectation and interactions (love-interest-desire-hope-complex) or 'positive attitude and expectation'; (2) satisfactory affects (joy-pride complex) or 'satisfaction'; (3) negative projections (fear-fright-suspicion-worry complex) or 'negative projection'; (4) aggressive-opposing emotions (anger-aversion-disgust complex) or 'aggressive emotional resistance'; and (5) unsatisfactory affects (sadness-regret-shame complex) or dissatisfaction. The first two classes relate to this research, namely positive expectation, and interactions, and satisfactory affect. From these two classes, analysis of meaning components was carried out to determine each greeting cards’ emotion componential meaning.

### 4 Results and Findings

#### Miscellaneous of New Year’s Congratulation

All 33 data, according to their componential meanings, can be classified into nine classes. Each data belongs to positive emotion because congratulations contain good intentions and hopes. They have a common component meaning [positive expectation] and [hope]. According to

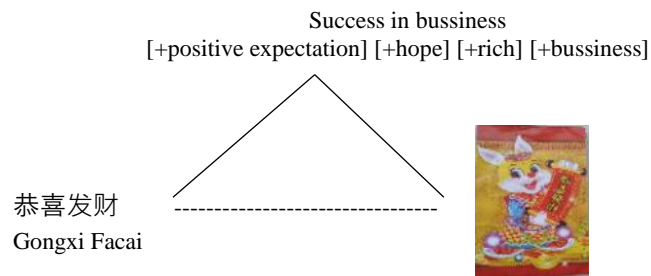
Santangelo’s emotion theory, this meaning belongs to positive expectations and interactions classification. Greetings involve at least 2 interlocutors: sender and receiver. The recipient could be more than one person. The sender usually shows his/her feeling of joy, happiness which belong to the satisfactory affects classification. The componential meanings are [joy], [happiness] [satisfy]. Greetings’ main wishes are the positive expectation and hope something good and better will come. Nearly all of the data show these two classes of emotions. One data, *pantun*, shows one emotion, that is happy feeling and joyful.

After determining common component meaning, we do diagnostic components analysis (Nida, 1979:33). This analysis serves to distinguish one meaning from other meanings in the same positive emotions. The result is obtained nine domains:

1. Chinese New Year greetings, Welcome the Chinese New Year
2. Success in life
3. Success in business
4. Job, career
5. Family
6. Health
7. Education
8. Peace
9. Joy, happiness

In the theory of signs, congratulations are a symbol, thought or reference is a semantic component of the symbol, the referent is greeting card or *angpao*. This relation can be seen from this semantic triangle below:

**Figure 1. Semantic triangle of 恭喜发财 Gongxi Facai**



The semantic component of 恭喜发财 *Gongxi Facai* as a sign consists of the sentence 恭喜发财 (symbol), the meaning behind that sentence (thought), and the *angpao* envelope. Because this saying means hope, happy, it is examined from the point of view of the emotions. It contains [+positive expectation] [+hope] [+rich] [+bussiness] meaning components. This kind of analysis will apply to other data.

Among those ten domains which one is the main or the exact congratulation for New Year? We often hear or read “Gongxi facai” as New Year’s greeting. Does *Gongxi Facai* means “Happy New Year”? To explain it, we can make an analogy on birthday greetings. To greet someone for his birthday, first, we say "Happy Birthday", then say additional greeting, such as “success in your study”, “have a bright future”, etc. The way to greet in Chinese is not different. First, we congratulate the New Year, then followed by additional congratulation, such as Happy New Year, Hope your business will success. But when someone says *Gongxi Facai*, literary means ‘congratulation, get rich’, can be translated ‘Hope you will get rich’. *Gongxi Facai* is an additional wish to “Happy New Year”, not the main wish. Next, I will describe the meaning of each domain.

**Tabel 1. Semantic meaning of each domain**

| No | Thought                               | Data  | Common component meaning  | Diagnostic component meaning                      |
|----|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1  | Welcoming New Year or Spring Festival | 1. 过年好 Guo Nian Hao<br>'Happy for the New Year'   | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope] [+joy]<br>[+happiness]               | [- 年 <i>nian</i> 'giant']<br>[+satisfy] [+secure] |
|    |                                       | 2. 春节好 Chunjie Hao<br>'Happy Spring Festival'   |   | [+spring festival]                                |
|    |                                       | 3. 新年快乐 Xin Nian Kuaile<br>'Happy New Year'   |   | [+new year]                                       |
|    |                                       | 4. 新年好 Xin Nian Hao<br>'Happy New Year'   |   | [+new year]<br>[+good]                            |
|    |                                       | 5. 新年进步 Xin Nian Jinbu<br>'Have progress in the New Year'   |   | [+new year]<br>[+progression]                     |
|    |                                       | 6. 恭贺新春 Gonghe Xinchun<br>'Congratulation for The New Spring'                                       |   | [+new spring]                                     |
|    |                                       | 7. 新春吉祥 Xinchun Jixiang<br>'Good Luck for The New Spring'   |   | [+new spring]                                     |
|    |                                       | 8. 恭贺新禧 Gonghe Xinxi<br>'Congratulation for the New Happiness'                                      |   | [+new auspicious]                                 |
| 2  | Success in life                       | 1. 年年大吉 Nian Nian Da Ji<br>'Every year has a big luck'  | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope] [+satisfy]<br>[+lucky] [+happy life] | [+lucky]<br>[+every year]                         |
|    |                                       | 2. 连年好运 Lian Nian Haoyun<br>'In successive years have good fortune'                                 |   | [+good fortune]                                   |
|    |                                       | 3. 马到成功 Ma Dao Chenggong<br>'Horse comes, then success'   |   | [+great spirit]                                   |
|    |                                       | 4. 阳光灿烂 Yangguang Canlan<br>'Very bright sunshine'  |   | [+bright]<br>[+sunshine]                          |
|    |                                       | 5. 步步高升 Bu bu Gao Sheng<br>'Step by step go up'   |   | [+slowly]<br>[+ go up]                            |
|    |                                       | 6. 吉祥如意 Ji Xiang Ruyi<br>'Good luck comes as you wish'  |   | [+desire]   |
|    |                                       | 7. 心想事成 Xin Xiang Shi Cheng<br>'one's heart wish to, then it happens', 'what is desired comes true' |   | [+desire]<br>[+happen]                            |
|    |                                       | 8. 万事如意 Wan Shi Ruyi<br>'Thousand matters come as you wish'   |   | [+numerous]                                       |
|    |                                       | 9. 吉星高照 Ji Xing Gao Zhao<br>'Lucky stars shining from the above', 'Have a good luck'                |   | [+ bright stars]<br>[+ shining]                   |
| 3  | Success in business                   | 1. 恭喜发财 Gongxi Facai<br>'Congratulation, to get rich',<br>'Hope you become rich'                    | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope] [+rich]<br>[+bussiness]              | [+treasure]                                       |



|   |                |  |  |   |
|---|----------------|--|--|---|
|   |                | 2. 财源广进 Caiyuan Guangjin<br>'Source of treasure enter without hindrance'   |  | [+treasure]<br>[-hindrance]                         |
|   |                | 3. 金银满屋 Jin Yin Manwu<br>'The room full of gold and silver'  |  | [+treasure]<br>[+full]<br>[+room]                   |
|   |                | 4. 招财进宝 Zhao Cai Jin Bao<br>'To invite treasure to enter a friend's family'  |  | [+treasure]<br>[+a friend's family]<br>[+to invite] |
|   |                | 5. 生意兴隆 Shengyi Xinglong<br>'Growing business'   |  | [+to grow]  |
|   |                | 6. 大吉大利 Da Ji Da Li<br>'Big fortune big profit'  |  | [+profit]   |
| 4 | job, career    | 1. 升官发财 Sheng Guan Facai<br>'to be promoted then became rich'  | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope] [+career]<br>[+success] | [+rich]<br>[+position]                              |
|   |                | 2. 平步青云 Pingbu Qing Yun<br>'Flat step to green cloud', 'to be promoted peacefully'   |  | [+steady]<br>[+high]                                |
|   |                | 3. 工作顺利 Gongzuo Shunli<br>'Success in working'   |  | [+job]  |
|   |                | 4. 事业成功 Shiye Chenggong<br>'Success in career'   |  | [+job]  |
|   |                | 5. 龙马精神 Long Ma Jingshen<br>'Dragon horse spirit', 'Have a huge spirit'  |  | [+strong animal]                                    |
| 5 | Family         | 1. 阖家幸福 He Jia Huanle<br>All Family happiness  | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope]                         | [+happiness]  |
|   |                | 2. 富贵有余 Fu Gui You Yu<br>'Treasure and honor is still there'   |  | [+rich]<br>[+respect]                               |
|   |                | 3. 花开富贵 Hua Kai Fu Gui<br>'Flowers bloom bring rich and respect'   |  | [+bloom]  |
|   |                | 4. 年年有余 Nian Nian You Yu<br>'Every year has surplus'   |  | [+surplus]  |
| 6 | Health         | 1. 身体健康 Shenti Jiankang<br>'Healthy body' 'Have a good health'   | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope] [+healthy]              |   |
| 7 | Education      | 1. 学习进步 Xuexi Jinbu<br>'succeed in learning'   | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope] [+learning]             | [+progression]                                      |
|   |                | 2. 金榜题名 Jinbang Timing<br>'Having title in gold list'  |  | [+title]  |
| 8 | Peace          | 岁岁平安 sui sui ping'an<br>The whole year is in peaceful  | [+positive expectation]<br>[+hope] [satisfy]               |   |
| 9 | Joy, Happiness | Ada rayap makan bakpao<br>Mohon maaf engga ada angpao<br>Anak tokek makan bakpia<br>Biar bokek yang penting sincia<br>Daun waru daun kucai<br>'There are termites eating buns'<br>'Sorry no <i>angpao</i> (money wrap in | [+positive expectation]<br>[+joy] [+happy]                 |   |

|  |  |   |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|
|  |  | a red paper)<br>‘Gecko chicks eat <i>bakpia</i> (a kind of buns)’<br>‘Although no money, <i>sincia</i> is important (Chinese New Year)’<br>‘Leaves of <i>waru</i> , leaves of chives (a kind of tree)’<br>‘Happy New Year, <i>Gongxi facai</i> (congratulation to become rich)’ |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|

**Picture 2. Three greetings in one card**



The main greeting on the left card is on the right side 新春吉庆 *Xinchun Ji Qing* ‘Welcome the Fortune New Spring’, follows by the second main greeting 迎春接福 *Yingchun Jifu* ‘Welcome the Happiness Spring’, then the additional one 恭喜发财 *Gongxi Facai* ‘Hope you become rich’. This greeting is suitable for business partners, not for children as in this picture. For children, we say 学习进步 *Xuexi Jinbu* ‘Succeed in learning’, or 金榜题名 *Jinbang Timing* ‘Having title in gold list’ to graduate student or lecturer.

To greet a person who is already working, we say 工作顺利 *Gongzuo Shunli* ‘Success in working’ or 事业成功 *Shiye Chenggong* ‘Success in Career’. And, for old people, we wish them 身体健康 *Shenti Jiankang* ‘Have a good health’. We use

additional greetings based on to whom this greeting is to be aimed.

(This image is a private collection of the author)

Domain 1-8 (table 1) shows a combination of positive expectation and happiness or joy, except the *pantun*. This humorous *pantun* has a message, namely celebrating New Year without *angpao* is not important, the important thing is to celebrate *sincia* (the name of New Year in Hokkianese). It means having fun, gathering, chatting, joking is more important than having *angpao*. That is why during New Year people say no harsh words, anger, fighting. People should be happy, talking about good things to welcome treasure enter house without hindrance 财源广进 *caiyuan guangjin*.

## 5 Conclusion

Giving congratulations is an interaction between sender and receiver. A sender greets someone with good hope, positive expectation for a receiver’s life; the receiver will accept that greeting with pleasure, joy, and happiness. Joy is the happy atmosphere that exists during Chinese New Year celebration. The joy can be directed to a person who celebrates it by sending New Year card. Greeting cards convey happiness meaning, good intentions because they represent senders’ hope and expectation. To find out the meaning of positive emotions, greeting cards are considered as a sign containing thoughts. Then, to find out the exact meaning of positive emotions, the meaning component analysis was carried out to determine the specific meaning of each card.

This kind of analysis can help the readers to know the exact meaning of greeting cards to avoid giving a wrong greeting and know exactly each word or sentence meaning, especially when using a foreign language. Nowadays people use *Gongxi Facai* instead of *Guo Nian Hao* or *Chunjie hao* for greeting Chinese New Year. It is better to understand the meaning of *Gongxi Facai* before uttering this greeting or sending a card.

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