

РАЗДЕЛ III. ЯЗЫКИ НАРОДОВ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ СТРАН  
SECTION III. LANGUAGES OF PEOPLES AND NATIONS OF THE WORLD

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FROM BOUNDARY TO TERRITORY: CULTURAL CATEGORY  
“sì-hǎi” AND THE CHINESE CULTURAL GROUP

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**Abstract:** This research attempts to study the cultural cognations embedded in the spatial oriented cultural category “sì-hǎi”, and the relationship between the cultural category “sì-hǎi” and the Chinese cultural group, with data obtained from the contemporary East Asian Culture of China from Cultural Linguistic perspectives. This research focuses on the evolution of the cultural conceptualizations of the cultural category “sì-hǎi” from a diachronic perspective, and claims that the cultural category “sì-hǎi” is a notion of the spiritual territory which is closely related to the Chinese cultural groups.

**Key words:** cultural category “sì-hǎi”; cultural conceptualizations; Cultural Linguistics; cultural schemas; Chinese cultural group.

### 1. Introduction:

As a multidisciplinary area of linguistic research, Cultural Linguistics explores the relationship between language, culture and culturally constructed conceptualization [14] [22] [23] [25]. In fact, scholars with interest in both cognition and culture have been exploring the relationship between culture, cognition and other systems such as language for a long time [1] [2] [4] [26] [27].

As pointed out by Sharifian, [24] Cultural Linguistics was born as a new and promising field of academic enquiry thanks to the work of Palmer, [1] a linguistic anthropologist who foresaw the advantages of a multi- and interdisciplinary approach to research.

Broadly, cultural conceptualizations are described as ‘the ways in which people across different cultural groups construe various aspects of the world and their experiences. These include people’s view of the world, thoughts and feelings’ [22, P.38]. More technically, they are defined by Sharifian as consisting of cultural schemas, categories and metaphors that are shared largely by members of a specific cultural group [18] [21] [22] [23] [24].

According to Cultural Linguistics, culture, cultural conceptualizations (cultural cognition) and language are entity. Cultural cognition, which can be instantiated by cultural conceptualizations, is composed of

cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors that can be described as patterns of distributed knowledge across the cultural group [2] [3] [7] [10] [16] [31].

This research employs the analytical tools of cultural conceptualizations in Cultural Linguistics to examine Cultural Category “sì-hǎi”, the cultural cognations such as the cultural schemas embedded in it, and the relationship between the cultural category “sì-hǎi” and the Chinese cultural group.

## 2. Sì-hǎi: A Chinese Cultural Category

In mandarin, Sìhǎi, which can be translated literally as “four seas”, can be easily considered as a spatial oriented notion. People who are not familiar with Chinese linguaculture may correlate this concept with the four seas near China in reality: the Bohai Sea, the Huanghai Sea, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea.

In fact, sìhǎi has three dictionary meanings including: (1) the four seas; (2) the whole country; (3) the whole world; ~shēng píng: peace in the world; ~wèi jiā: make one's home wherever one is; ~zhī nèi jiē xiōngdì: within the four seas all men are brothers. (*Modern Chinese-English Dictionary*) It can be seen that according to the dictionary, the concept Sìhǎi can be interpreted as a broad existence. It can be four seas in a narrow sense (but it's hard to tell which four seas are), it can also be the scope of a big country (China), or the scope of the whole world. For people outside of Chinese linguaculture, it is still difficult to determine the specific meaning of this notion through these dictionary explanations, although this notion is so widely and frequently used in today's Chinese language.

In fact, we claim here in this research that in most cases, sìhǎi is not a purely geographical category, but more of a cultural category, which is related to rich cultural conceptualizations such as cultural metaphors and cultural schemas in Chinese context. It is consistent with the conceptualizations of the

term “sea” in a global level, for “sea” is often referred to as something extremely large and kind of eternal in different cultures, including Chinese. However, although categorization seems to be a universal human faculty, the ways in which people across different cultural groups categorise their experiences may differ.

Different cultural groups may not only conceptualize such categories differently but may also use different ‘concrete experiences’ as the basis for conceptualizing these categories, and these categories may not have tangible referents in the external world [22]. Accordingly, different cultural group may create worldview differently, which may include all the natural objects, artifacts, phenomena, activities and events within a certain cultural group, and the spatial-temporal or qualitative-quantitative dimensions that are constantly inherent in it [29]. From this perspective, we claim here that the notion “sì-hǎi” can particularly convey Chinese cultural conceptualizations in many cases that embody a Chinese unique worldview with its distinctive account of land, seas and particularly lives of the Chinese cultural group, as well as the cultural values related to the Chinese cultural group.

## 3. From “Physical” to “Spiritual”: The Original Meaning of the notion “sì-hǎi”

The notion “sì-hǎi” first appeared in the book “Shi-Jing” (“The Book of Songs”), which is the very fountainhead of Chinese poetry and also the earliest anthology of Chinese poems. It is written there in the poem “Xuán niǎo” that “bāng jī qiānlǐ, wéi mín suǒ zhǐ, zhào yù bǐ sì-hǎi”, means “the territory of the country can be thousands of miles, the people of the country all live in peace, and the vast territory of the country can reach the four seas”. This poem is probably written by the ancestors of the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 B.C.) in ancient China, which means that the notion “sì-hǎi” has an extremely long history. It is believed that the ancestors of the Shang Dynasty lived in the coastal areas of eastern

China today. From today's perspective, the scope of their lives can be viewed as a very limited area, and accordingly, the ancestors can hardly understand the full picture of the land they lived in. Therefore, as the ancestors lived in the seashore of eastern China, and they may have the thought that the land they lived in may be all surrounded by the seas, that is, there are seas in all four directions around their homeland. This is a kind of simple worldview by the Chinese ancestors affected by the environment and the body experience, and the term of "sì-hǎi" (four seas) may be accordingly derived from this history.

As time elapsed, the Chinese ancestors gradually deepened their understanding of the land they lived in. The inaccurate geographic information pointed out by the "sì-hǎi" was gradually revised and had some new connotations which become more and more symbolic. For example, a very representative connotation in ancient China of the notion "sì-hǎi" appeared in the book "Er-Ya", which is believed to be the first systematic monograph explaining the meaning of words in China, including the exegetical materials from the pre-Qin period (21st century B.C. to 221 B.C.) to the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-8A.D.). According to "Er-Ya", the notion "sì-hǎi" refers to the surrounding area inhabited by other ethnic groups. Here, the notion "sì-hǎi" has lost its previous literal meaning as "four seas" and has been reconceptualized as the living place for other ethnic groups. These areas are distributed around the living areas of the Chinese ancestors. Ever since then, the saying "within sìhǎi" appeared and the Chinese ancestors started to use this word to refer to the whole area of their cultural group, that is, the territory of China.

What needs special attention here is the way how the Chinese ancestors distinguish other ethnic groups from themselves. They believed that the surrounding ethnic groups

have "unique ways to live, eat, and dress", and that "people from different ethnic groups have different languages and customs". (see "Li-Ji: *The Book of Rites*") What we want to emphasize here is that, from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, these views of the Chinese ancestors about other ethnic groups are actually the evidences that they believe those people from other ethnic groups are not part of the same cultural group as themselves. Therefore, thanks to the term "cultural group", the notion "sì-hǎi" has been given the cultural attributes in addition to that of the "physical space", so that its connotation gradually transcends the range of "physical space" and enters the "spiritual space" of the Chinese cultural group.

In the following section, we will list empirical materials from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, and will attempt to explore and analysis the cultural cognitions, cultural conceptualizations which are related to the cultural category "sì-hǎi".

#### 4. Linguistic Evidence: "sì-hǎi" as a Spatial Oriented Cultural Category of the Chinese Cultural Group in Today's Chinese Context

Most of the linguistic data in this section come from the BCC corpus, which can be viewed as one of the largest in China. The corpus data have different sources such as written, spoken and web language, which can provide us with the most authentic, lively and persuasive linguistic evidence in order to identify how the cultural conceptualizations of the notion "sì-hǎi" instantiated in today's Chinese linguaculture.

According to the BCC corpus, we found some empirical materials related to the cultural category "sì-hǎi", many of which can lead to the same understanding as a notion with a meaning of *Territory*. For example, the following linguistic expressions are clear instantiations of such understanding:

(1)	Wǔgōng chuán <b>sì-hǎi</b> —— jì rèxīn chuánbò wǔshù de Guō Ruixiáng
	Chinese Martial Art spread across <b>sì-hǎi</b> ——Guo Ruixiang: a man who is passionate about propagating martial arts.

Table 1 Wǔgōng chuán sì-hǎi

(2)	Suīrán DLY zài mǒu xiē jīngjì fādá dìqū shēngchǎn xìngnéng biǎoxiàn bùcuò, dàn jué bù kěyǐ zuòwéi “yàngbǎn” ér fàng zhī “ <b>sì-hǎi</b> ”.
	Although DLY (a commercial brand) has performed well in some economically developed regions, it can never be used as a “model” and put it on all the “ <b>sì-hǎi</b> ”.

Table 2 Fàng zhī sìhǎi

(3)	huā gong, huā shīmen, bùjǐn dài què yānlíng de huāmù zhǒng yǎng jìshù, tóngshí yě shǐ yānlíng míng chuán <b>sì-hǎi</b> .
	The florist and flower masters have not only brought the planting technology to Fuling (a name of a Chinese city), but also made the name of Fuling spread all over the “ <b>sì-hǎi</b> ”.

Table 3 míng chuán sì-hǎi

(4)	Wǒmen dōu shì láizì <b>wǔ-hú sì-hǎi</b> , wèile yīgè gòngtóng de mùbiāo zǒu dào yī qǐláile
	We are all from <b>wǔ-hú sì-hǎi</b> (five lakes and four seas), coming together for a common goal.

Table 4 wǔ-hú sì-hǎi

Through the analysis of the above examples, we can vaguely get an understanding of the cultural category “sì-hǎi”, that is, it refers to a kind of territory, the characteristics of which may be instantiated as follows:

A. This territory is so extensive in Chinese cultural cognition that:

a. it's hard for a person to go all over the “sì-hǎi”; if a person achieved this (to go all over the “sì-hǎi”), then he is a very successful person;

b. a person's reputation is hard to spread throughout the “sì-hǎi”.

c. different regions of the territory of “sì-hǎi” have distinct geographical and spiritual characteristics, the same rule or norm cannot be applied to all territory of “sì-hǎi”.(see (2))

d. it's a very rare situation for people from all over the “sì-hǎi” to get together.

B. This concept of the “sì-hǎi” has

multi-dimensionality. It can sometimes refer to a country (in general it refers to China in this sense), and sometimes it can refer to the whole world (as the example (1) shows), but more often, we can't tell how big and which exactly territories it refers to.

C. On the other hand, this territory which the concept “sì-hǎi” refers to is on an obvious cultural group level. Although it seems to be vague, it means no randomness. All the places it covers are related to the Chinese cultural group. In (1), “wǔgōng” (Chinese kongfu) is obviously a typical part of Chinese culture. The commercial brand in (2) and the planting technology in (3) also closely related to the Chinese cultural group, while the people from all over the world coming together for a common goal in (4) can give a perfect illustration of the concept “cultural group”.

In (4), another cultural category “wǔ-hú sì-hǎi” is teased out, which can be literally

illustrated as “five lakes and four seas”, which is widely used as a synonym of “sì-hǎi”, in which the concept “wǔ-hú”(five lakes) can be viewed as another similar spatial oriented cultural category of the Chinese cultural group as “sì-hǎi” with an obviously narrow sense. “wǔ-hú” can be seldom used separately, while “wǔ-hú sì-hǎi” gives a semantic meaning of “all over the world”,

which can also be viewed as “inside and outside the territory of the cultural group” at a cultural level.

The following two idioms can give us a deeper illustration from the perspective of diachronic text to illustrate “Sì-hǎi” as a notion of spiritual territory for the Chinese cultural group.

(5)	四	海	一	家
	Sì	Hǎi	yī	Jiā
	Four	Seas	one	family
All people belong to one family; The whole country is united.				

Table 5 Sì hǎi yī jiā

(6)	四海之内皆兄弟			
	Sìhǎi	zhī nèi	jiē	xiōngdì
	Four seas	Within	all	brother
Within the “sì-hǎi” all people are brothers.; All people between the “sì-hǎi” should be brothers!; All within the “sì-hǎi” are brothers.				

Table 6 Sìhǎi zhī nèi jiē xiōngdì

In the explanation of the above two idioms, “all people” frequently appeared. According to our previous analysis, it is of course impossible to simply understand these “all people” on a universal level. As cultural salient idioms, the “all people” here refers to “all people of OUR cultural group”, that is, all people from the “sì-hǎi” are all members of the Chinese cultural group. It is also a further illustration of the cultural category “sì-hǎi” as a notion of spiritual territory for the Chinese people as members of a cultural group live, which is more at the spiritual level.

Accordingly, another important Chinese cultural cognition reflected by these two idioms is that in the Chinese culture, the Chinese cultural group associated with the “sì-hǎi” can be regarded as a FAMILY and all People within the “sì-hǎi”, that is, all people from the Chinese cultural group, can be regarded as members of the same big FAMILY.

## 5. Discussion: Cultural Category “sì-hǎi” and the Chinese Cultural Group

According to Cultural Linguistics, cultural groups are formed not just by the physical proximity of individuals but also by relative participation of individuals in each other’s conceptual world. Although it is admitted that the locus of conceptualization may be the individual, a large proportion of conceptualizations are ultimately ‘spread’ across a cultural group [22]. Therefore, cognition can be viewed as a property of cultural groups, which is an emergent system (e.g. Johnson, 2001) resulting from the interactions between the members of a cultural group across time and space. Under the framework of Cultural Linguistics, we can claim that conceptualization and language are two integral aspects of this kind of collective cognition derived from a cultural group, which can be called cultural cognition.

In this regard, we can claim that all the status of conceptualizations such as schemas and categories, can be initiated in individuals’ cognition, and they may also emerge at a

group level, which can be called *cultural conceptualizations* as parts of cultural cognitions. As mentioned above, we use the term *cultural conceptualizations* in this research to refer to the units of conceptual knowledge such as cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors, which are widely spread and shared by a cultural group through time and space.

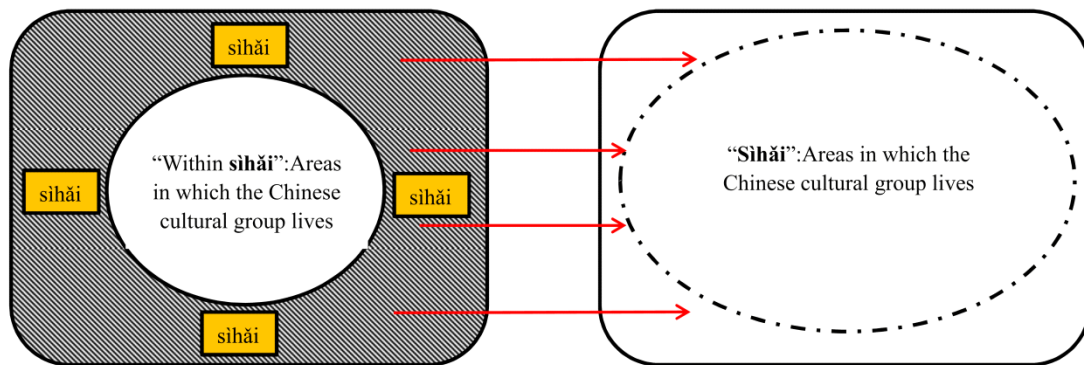
Accordingly, the notion “sì-hǎi”, which is initially a inaccurate physical space term, has become more and more related to the cultural psychology of the Chinese ancestors, and has gradually become a cultural category with rich cultural cognations leading to a *symbolic spiritual space* related to the Chinese cultural group. The notion “sì-hǎi” in Chinese linguaculture is initially referred to the seas in the natural sense around the areas where the Chinese ancestors lived, and then becomes a general notion leading to the living area where those surrounding cultural groups lived. In this sense, the notion “sì-hǎi” exist as the boundaries between the Chinese cultural group and the surrounding ones. The meaning of this “boundary” is not limited to the boundary in the physical and geographical sense, but also as the “boundary” of the Chinese cultural group and the related cultural cognition.

Another important notion “Sihǎi zhī nèi”(“within sihǎi”) which is related to “sì-hǎi” , can therefore give a meaning of the areas in which the Chinese cultural group lives, which can evoke a feeling of unified cultural identity of the Chinese cultural group to a large extent, as well as a series of certain cultural conceptualizations, as we will discuss in the following sections. The notion “Sihǎi zhī nèi”(“within sihǎi”) is so widely used in

Chinese traditional linguaculture, that it caused another development in the semantics of the notion “sì-hǎi”.

As a notion of BOUNDARY in both physical and cultural sense, “sì-hǎi” is initially a spatial oriented term which point to the meaning of “*the space outside the boundary*”, for example the seas around the area where the Chinese ancestors lived, and the living area where those surrounding cultural groups lived. However, due to the usage habits of the Chinese character, Chinese people sometimes prefer to use two-syllable collocations (such as “sì-hǎi”) to stand for the related four-syllable ones (such as “sìhǎi zhī nèi”, with a coincidence part “sì-hǎi”) in their daily life, and accordingly people use the notion “sì-hǎi” partly instead of the notion “Sì-hǎi zhī nèi” (“within sì-hǎi”) in many cases, in other words, “*the space within the boundary*”, which can also stand for the area in which the Chinese cultural group lives.

This linguistic phenomenon can also reflect the features of the notion “sì-hǎi” at a cultural cognitive level as mentioned above, for it can evoke a feeling of unified cultural identity and a series of certain cultural schemas and cultural metaphors of the Chinese cultural group. In today's Chinese linguistic expressions, the notion “sì-hǎi” has basically no longer referred to the “*outside the boundary*” space, but mostly refer to the BOUNDARY itself and the “*within the boundary*” space, (see **fig.1.**) which is related to the lives of the Chinese cultural group and the related Chinese cultural cognition. The “boundary” and “space” here are not only at the geographical level, but also at a more spiritual and symbolic level.



**Figure 1 From BOUNDARY to TERRITORY: the Chinese Cultural Category “sì-hǎi”**

As the linguistic evidence shows in previous section, in many contexts of today’s Chinese linguaculture, the cultural category “sì-hǎi” refers to an extremely vast and symbolic space, in which the Chinese people as members of a cultural group live, both at the geographical and the spiritual level. In other words, the notion “sì-hǎi” has gradually changed from a cultural category of referential boundary to a category that refers to a *TERRITORY* in which the Chinese cultural category lives, at a more spiritual and symbolic level.

From the perspective of the notion “cultural group”, “sì-hǎi” as a “space” is both at physical and spiritual levels under the frame of cultural cognition and cultural conceptualizations, on which the cultural group based. This makes the concept “sì-hǎi” becomes a extremely complex one, with rich connotations and cultural conceptualizations that related to the Chinese cultural group, which needs to be explored and analyzed from different empirical linguistic materials and a perspective of mult-angles in future studies.

## 6. Conclusion

The notion “sì-hǎi” in today’s Chinese linguaculture can be viewed as such a cultural category that represent an extremely vast and symbolic space, in which the Chinese people as members of a cultural group live, both at

the geographical and the spiritual level. The territory can be illustrated partly as following sentences, which can be viewed as a series of cultural proposition-schemas:

a. it’s hard for a person to go all over the “sì-hǎi”; if a person achieved this (to go all over the “sì-hǎi”), then he is a very successful person;

b. a person’s reputation is hard to spread throughout the “sì-hǎi”.

c. different regions of the territory of “sì-hǎi” have distinct geographical and spiritual characteristics, the same rule or norm cannot be applied to all territory of “sì-hǎi”.

d. it’s a very rare situation for people from all over the “sì-hǎi” to get together.

e. it is hard to tell how big and which exactly territories the “sì-hǎi” refers to.

f. all people from the “sì-hǎi” are members of the Chinese cultural group, which can be regarded as a big FAMILY.

It should be emphasized here that the above sentences are just partial, linguistic representations of the schemas related to the cultural category “sì-hǎi”. Clearly, conceptualizations that encompass worldviews and ideologies that have been constructed and developed over centuries may not be faithfully captured in single sentences. The above schemas also show that the cultural category “sì-hǎi” has a clear relationship with another Chinese key cultural category FAMILY, which can provide a strong

support for the assertion that “Chinese marine culture has entered the core region of Chinese culture” and it is worthy of further research in the future.

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