

# An Intercultural Approach to English Translation of Political Metaphors With Chinese Characteristics

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This research delves into the English translation of political metaphors with Chinese characteristics from the Government Work Report. It investigates the strategies for translating these metaphors, considering the cultural and linguistic nuances necessary for effective cross-cultural transmission. The study uses intercultural communication and cognitive linguistic theories to categorize metaphors and explore translation strategies like cultural compensation, borrowing, substitution, and omission, to guide the accurate and nuanced rendering of Chinese political metaphors.

*Keywords:* intercultural communication, political metaphor, translation strategies

## Introduction

Within the Belt and Road initiative and the pursuit of a shared future for humanity, political metaphors are pivotal for international communication, fostering cultural understanding and self-assurance. The Report on the Work of the Government, embodying the state's will and governance philosophy, is crucial for conveying China's development narrative to the international community. Its English translation is essential for global audiences to grasp China's progress, necessitating careful consideration of metaphor interpretations across cultures.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live by*, introduced the theory of conceptual metaphors, highlighting their role as cognitive devices and a universal mode of thought essential for human survival. These metaphors are instrumental in making complex political concepts more accessible, thus becoming a prevalent strategy in political discourse. Accuracy is key for intercultural understanding, particularly in translating Chinese political metaphors. Scholars, such as Qvale (2014) and Snell Hornby (1988), regard translation as a bridge for cross-cultural communication, emphasizing that it is a cultural exchange and involves more than language conversion. This perspective underscores the complexity of translating political metaphors, which must consider linguistic, cultural, and political nuances.

This study aims to identify translation strategies for conceptual metaphors in Chinese political discourse within the English version of the Report on the Work of the Government. Adopting an intercultural perspective, the research considers various influential factors in translation method selection. The goal is to improve the quality of translated political texts, foster Sino-Western cultural exchange, and facilitate the global communication of China's political narrative.

## **Literature Review**

Metaphor is ubiquitous in daily life, extending beyond mere language to encompass thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The study of metaphors has a rich history, with Aristotle's early work in ancient Greece emphasizing their rhetorical value. Over time, the understanding of metaphors has evolved, with modern theories like Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory highlighting their cognitive significance in shaping how we think and communicate. This theory has been particularly influential in analyzing political discourse, where metaphors are used to convey complex ideas and ideologies. Scholarly attention in conceptual metaphor studies has often focused on analyzing how politicians employ these metaphors to articulate and bolster their ideological positions (e.g., Jing-Schmidt & Peng, 2017; Wang & Yang, 2012).

Scholars, including Newmark (2001) and Schäffner (2004), have advanced the field of metaphor translation by proposing strategies, such as literal translation, substitution, and paraphrasing. The translation of political metaphors demands a nuanced understanding of both language and culture, extending beyond lexical conversion to encompass the cultural significance embedded within metaphors. Effective intercultural communication is crucial for bridging cultural divides and ensuring comprehension across different cultural contexts (Sun, 2008). This is particularly relevant for metaphors with distinctive Chinese cultural and historical connotations, which may require additional interpretation and adaptation for foreign audiences to grasp fully.

Translation, as a bridge for intercultural communication, aids in navigating cultural boundaries (Qvale, 2014; Koskinen, 2004). Recent research highlights translating Chinese culture, emphasizing its role in political discourse, and shaping China's national image. Intercultural communication theory is crucial for comprehending the nuanced cultural elements in Chinese political metaphors, enabling intercultural analysis. However, translating these often highly symbolic metaphors poses challenges in preserving their cultural and political significance, with current practices occasionally compromising accuracy for audience acceptance. Principles ensuring both fidelity and comprehension are needed. Despite its importance, the intercultural dimension of translating political metaphors remains underexplored in China, necessitating research expansion. A nuanced approach respecting the source culture while enhancing accessibility and meaning for the target audience is crucial. This requires a profound understanding of cultural contexts and the intricate relationship between language and culture.

The translation of political metaphors should not only realize the understanding and transmission of metaphorical meanings, but also uphold the rhetorical persuasion function of political discourse. However, there are several challenges facing political metaphor translation from the perspective of intercultural communication. Key challenges include: (a) lack of direct linguistic equivalents due to cultural and historical specificity; (b) reliance on traditional Chinese philosophy, literature, and history, unfamiliar to foreign audiences; and (c) political sensitivity and varied connotations across cultures, exemplified by metaphors like “老虎” and “苍蝇” for corruption, and “保护伞” for corruption protectors. Translators must possess a deep understanding of both cultures, incorporating historical and cultural contexts to ensure sensitive and accurate communication of metaphorical meanings.

### **Theoretical Framework for Translating Political Metaphors With Chinese Characteristics**

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), asserts that metaphors are fundamental cognitive tools that shape our comprehension and experience of the world. By bridging abstract

concepts with tangible experiences, metaphors impact thought and communication. This influential theory has broadened our understanding of metaphor's role in cognition, extending to political discourse, where it uncovers cultural nuances and ideological foundations. The theory comprises two cognitive domains: source and target. Its operational mechanism involves cross-domain mapping, projecting elements and structures from the concrete source onto the abstract target within a conceptual framework.

Translation is integral to intercultural communication, facilitating language comprehension and cultural understanding. In translating political metaphors, preserving cultural essence while ensuring accessibility to diverse audiences is paramount. This intricate process involves transferring linguistic expressions and their cultural connotations, necessitating sensitivity to cultural nuances to accurately convey the intended message. Linguistic and structural differences complicate this task, often requiring creativity to bridge metaphorical meanings across cultures.

This study integrates CMT and intercultural communication theory, particularly the high-context/low-context model, to examine political metaphor translation (see Figure 1). CMT aids in interpreting metaphors through source-to-target domain mapping, ensuring cultural essence retention. The intercultural framework addresses cultural disparities in metaphor comprehension, enabling tailored translations for diverse audiences. Strategies like cultural compensation, borrowing, substitution, and omission are proposed to overcome translation challenges and foster intercultural understanding.

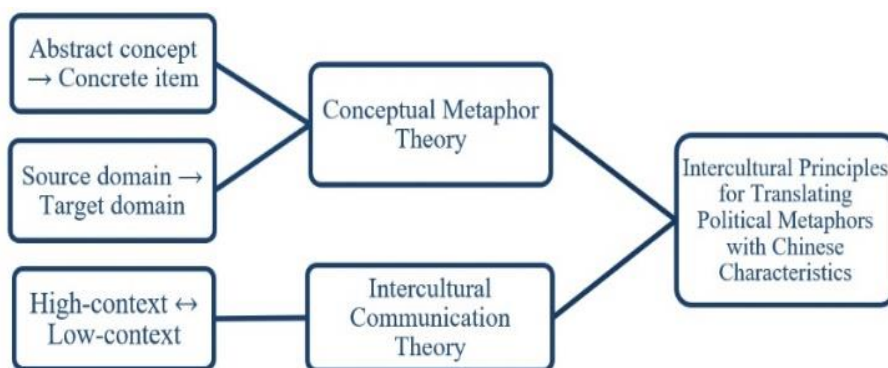


Figure 1. The theoretical framework for translating political metaphors with Chinese characteristics.

### Major Intercultural Strategies and Principles for Translating Chinese Political Metaphors

This section explores translation strategies and principles for political metaphors in the Report on the Work of the Government, emphasizing cultural essence preservation. It confronts challenges in conveying cognitive and persuasive meanings sans direct equivalents. Proposed strategies include domestication, foreignization, and principles like cultural compensation, borrowing, substitution, and omission to communicate metaphors' original intent and cultural context effectively.

1. Domestication: This approach prioritizes the target culture, aligning translations with its norms to ensure fluency and a native-like reading experience. It entails minimizing cultural differences, adjusting the original text for target audiences, eliminating linguistic and cultural barriers, prioritizing clarity, and averting ambiguities. For instance:

Chinese: 始终不懈地把14亿多中国人的饭碗牢牢端在自己手中。

English translation: We have fully secured the food supply of more than 1.4 billion people.

“饭碗” here represents the food security of the Chinese people, so if it is simply translated as “rice bowl”, the meaning of the original text cannot be achieved. So, “food supply” expresses the original meaning very well from the perspective of foreigners.

2. Foreignization: The approach focuses on the source culture, assimilating its linguistic features and expressions. It aligns closely with the author, adopting source language idioms to convey original content. The goal is to respect cultural disparities, preserve national characteristics, and maintain an exotic flavor for target readers. For instance:

Chinese: 坚定不移贯彻“一国两制”。

English translation: Resolutely implement the policy of One Country, Two Systems.

“一国两制”, as a unique policy of China, is a specific conceptual term that has been disseminated internationally for a long time, and this translation is capable of conveying the essence of the original term while simultaneously disseminating the culture of the source country without affecting the overall fluency of the text.

3. Cultural compensation: Due to cultural disparities between authors and readers, translation must employ cultural compensation strategies to address understanding difficulties. This involves adapting the target language to align with the source’s cultural context, facilitating the effective transmission of cultural nuances. For instance:

Chinese: 保障国家粮食安全, 实施乡村振兴战略。

English translation: We ensured China’s food security and vigorously implemented the rural revitalization strategy.

The “乡村振兴” strategy is China’s unique policy and initiative. When translated into English, to give readers a better understanding, the translator can interpret it as “rural revitalization”, so that English readers can more easily understand the purpose and meaning of this policy. This principle of cultural compensation ensures the accuracy and readability of the translation.

4. Cultural borrowing: That is, borrowing expressions from the source language in the target language refers to a kind of cultural transposition in which the expression of the source language is transferred word by word to the target language, because a suitable equivalent form cannot be found in the target language. For example:

Chinese: 保产业链供应链稳定。

English translation: Stable industrial and supply chains.

“产业链供应链” belongs to the machine metaphor. As this is a unique policy of governance in China, the literal translation of it into “industrial and supply chains” by borrowing the metaphor of the source language is helpful for the target language readers to comprehend China’s political ideas and promote the external dissemination of the national narrative discourse.

5. Cultural substitution: Refers to replacing the unfamiliar things in the original culture with functionally identical words in the target language, which can reduce the comprehension barriers caused by cultural differences for the target readers but also lose the aesthetic significance and connotation of the original culture to a certain extent. For example:

Chinese: 绿水青山就是金山银山。

English translation: Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.

“金山银山” is a typical expression in Chinese and has no corresponding phrase in English. It seems too rigid if we translate it into “gold and silver mountains”, and it is easier for foreigners to understand as “invaluable assets”.

6. Cultural omission: Metaphors are not all meaningful, and in political texts, they may sometimes be used simply to reinforce tone and preserve form. If the metaphor is meaningless, mechanical literal translation will only appear redundant and can be considered deleted in translation.

Chinese: 加强城市基础设施建设。

English translation: Urban infrastructure was improved.

“Urban infrastructure” has the meaning of “construction”, so there is no need to add the “construction” following the urban infrastructure. The translation of the report should exclude Chinese-specific place names to enhance understanding among English readers. Utilizing universal concepts to express policy content improves cross-cultural comprehension and acceptance.

### Conclusion

This study pinpoints key political metaphors in the Report on the Work of the Government and advocates intercultural translation principles for enhanced communication. Strategies and principles like domestication, foreignization, cultural compensation, borrowing, substitution, and omission are proposed. Limitations lie in subjective analysis and incomplete metaphor exploration. Future research should adopt an objective approach, expand data analysis, and focus on optimizing translation strategies’ impact across diverse audiences.

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