

Metaphor Translation in *China's Green Development in the New Era*: A Study from the Perspective of Emotional Equivalence

Haidi Feng

Qingdao University, Qingdao, China

Abstract

This paper examines metaphorical expressions in the white paper *China's Green Development in the New Era* as carriers of policy concepts, national sentiments, and values. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory and the principle of emotional equivalence, it systematically analyzes seven metaphor types and their translation strategies. Using HanLP for sentiment analysis, the study compares the emotional polarity of metaphorical expressions in the Chinese and English versions to determine whether the translation preserves the source language's positive emotional connotations and whether target readers can achieve comparable emotional resonance. Findings reveal a systematic link between metaphor translation strategies and emotional conveyance, with the degree of emotional equivalence significantly shaped by the cultural specificity of source-language metaphors. By offering cognitive insights and empirical evidence, this paper aims to contribute to the global dissemination of China's cognitive frameworks and political discourse.

Keywords

China's green development in the new era; conceptual metaphor; metaphor translation; emotional equivalence; political discourse.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Context

China has been implementing the development concept that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", placing ecological protection at the forefront of its pursuit of sustainable development. As China accelerates the comprehensive green transformation of its economic and social development to build a modern framework for the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature, the Chinese government released the white paper *China's Green Development in the New Era* (hereinafter referred to as "the white paper") in January 2023 against the backdrop of promoting ecological civilization and achieving the "dual carbon" goals. This text systematically expounds the concept, practices and results of China's green development in the new era. As a crucial policy document for interpreting China's development concepts and shaping the national image, the quality of its translation is directly related to the enhancement of China's international discourse power.

Like many political documents, the white paper makes extensive use of metaphors, conveying those abstract and grand concepts of green development to the public in a vivid and powerful way. In 2024, Sun Yi and Zhou Tiantian^[1] put forward that metaphors having potent cognitive functions are frequently used in state discourse. These metaphors help uphold national narratives and convey policy warmth. From "a community of life" to "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", metaphors are frequently applied in China's green development story logic, serving as a core linguistic strategy that carries national sentiments and value orientations.

1.2. Research Questions

This study examines the white paper *China's Green Development in the New Era* and its official English translation. Guided by conceptual metaphor theory, it is intended to address the following questions.

1. What types of metaphors predominate in the text of *China's Green Development in the New Era*? How do these metaphors construct the concept of green development?
2. How do the metaphors appearing in the white paper convey positive emotional connotations such as hope, determination, harmony, responsibility, and vitality?
3. What strategies does the official English translation employ to handle these metaphors? Does it achieve cognitive equivalence in conveying meaning and reproducing emotional connotations?
4. Can readers of the target language text experience emotional resonance comparable to that of readers of the source text?

1.3. Research Significance

Emotion, as a crucial element for understanding and evaluating texts, has become a profound way for readers to acquire the meaning of the text. It also serves as an emotional bond which sustains literary reading and creates new interpretive spaces for aesthetics, narration, and poetics^[2]. This research extends metaphor translation studies from traditional semantic equivalence to emotional equivalence and deepens our understanding of the effectiveness of political discourse translation by introducing the evaluation dimension of readers' emotional resonance. Grounded in the distinction between metaphors on translation and the translation of metaphors, this research analyzes the strategies and outcomes of translating metaphors within the text. Within the framework of the national translation practice theory, it offers a specific case study for the research on the external translation of political discourse, which has practical reference value for enhancing the development of the national translation ability.

2. Conceptual Metaphors, Translation Strategies and Emotional Cognition

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor and Deliberate Metaphor Theory

The starting point for this paper is Lakoff and Johnson's^[3] conceptual metaphor theory, which distinguishes between structural metaphors, orientational metaphors and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphors construct one idea in terms of another and involve different structural relations. Orientational metaphors connect spatial directions, while ontological metaphors treat abstract events, activities, or feelings as entities or substances. Metaphors are not only linguistic phenomena, but also a basic way for humans to understand an unknown or abstract target domain by using a known and concrete source domain. For example, "journey" is used as a structural metaphor of "green development," and "ecological civilization" is treated as a "building", which represents an ontological metaphor. Zhou Xiang and Huang Huaxin^[4] use metaphor as a rhetorical device to systematize and orderly construct our knowledge about policy, conveying that we understand the unknown abstract target domain via a known concrete source domain. Furthermore, Steen's^[5] deliberate metaphor theory suggests that political metaphors are used intentionally by the speaker in order for the hearer to project their cognition or emotions from a certain perspective. As a representative of national discourse, the white paper deliberately employs metaphors to persuade international audiences to embrace China's green development concept, thereby underscoring the inevitability and significance of emotional transmission in translation.

2.2. Strategies and Methods for Metaphor Translation

The issue of how to translate metaphors has been widely studied by researchers. Traditional methods including literal translation (retaining metaphorical elements), conversion/replacement (replacing metaphorical elements), and free translation/explanation (omitting metaphorical elements)^[6] are further refined into seven prescriptive metaphor translation methods by Newmark^[7]. Schäffner^[8] used the concept of frames to develop methods like identification of matching figures and enriching those figures by tags, eliminating source language rhetorical devices, adding new rhetorical devices in the target language. In Lu Weizhong and Chen Hui's^[9] analysis of the English translation of *Keywords for China*, they summed up translation strategies into four specific operational ways which are keeping metaphorical elements (including directly keeping and adjusting to keep), replacing metaphorical elements, omitting metaphorical elements, and adding metaphorical elements. These four methods systematically cover the two main categories of metaphor translation: one is to convert the metaphors in the source text into the metaphors in the target text; the other is to convert the non - metaphorical forms in the source text into the metaphorical forms in the target text. The taxonomy will serve as a basis for analyzing the English translation of the white paper and this study is one such case.

The choice of translation strategy is basically made by striking an appropriate compromise between the cultural specificity of the source language and its acceptability in the target language, which will determine the degree of emotional equivalence achievable. When the metaphor of the source language is based on commonly shared bodily experiences and cognitive schemas, the retention of the metaphorical element often activates similar emotional associations in the target language, thus resulting in a high degree of emotional resonance. However, when the metaphor of the source language is rooted in a specific historical and cultural context, simply retaining the metaphor element may create difficulties for target language readers in understanding or may lead to unexpected emotional associations. Under such circumstances, translators may have to make use of strategies like replacement, omission, or even addition of metaphorical elements. Selecting these methods is not simply a reduction in meaning but an active choice made by the translator based on insight into the emotional connotations of the two languages and cultures with the purpose of maximizing the overall communicative effect. Therefore, the evaluation of emotional equivalence needs to be considered within the specific context of strategy selection.

2.3. Metaphor as a Vehicle for Cognition and Emotion: The Principle of Emotional Equivalence

The complexity of metaphor's dual process of cognition and sentiment is pointed out by Sun Yi and Zhou Tiantian^[1], who underline their deep connections which lie in the history of culture and form a basis for national reality. When exploring component analysis, Hu Zhuanglin^[6] also mentions that words not only contain the basic semantic elements of conceptual meaning but also contain the secondary semantic elements of connotative meaning. When we understand the relationship between human and nature through the metaphor of "community of life", it is not only that we obtain a cognitive framework of "organic connection", but also that positive emotional experiences like "a sense of belonging" and "instinct of protection" are activated as well. So then the core challenge of metaphor translation lies in retaining that cognitive schema in the target language and also successfully conveying that profound emotional resonance.

This research proposes "emotional equivalence" as the core principle that is employed for evaluating the effectiveness of metaphor translation. For emotional equivalence, it refers to that the translated text needs to accurately convey the cognitive meaning of the source language metaphor and also create a similar emotional experience and resonance among the target audience. To attain such equivalence, it relies on whether the translator has carefully

considered the emotional weight of the source language metaphor and the emotional association of the corresponding expressions in the target culture when making the choice of the translation strategy.

2.4. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method design combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. The data are drawn from the white paper China's Green Development in the New Era and its official English translation. Metaphors are identified based on conceptual metaphor theory^[3] and classified according to source domains following Lu Weizhong and Chen Hui^[9].

For emotional analysis, this study employs HanLP, a Chinese natural language processing tool, to measure sentiment polarity in both the source and target texts. Representative metaphorical expressions are selected and compared across languages. This procedure ensures replicability by clearly defining text selection, metaphor identification, and analytical tools.

3. Metaphor Type Analysis and Emotional Equivalence Assessment

The metaphors in the white paper are summarized into seven categories: color metaphors, wealth metaphors, journey metaphors, body/life metaphors, architectural metaphors, war metaphors, and kinship metaphors. Each category is analyzed in terms of its cognitive function, emotional connotation, translation strategy, and degree of emotional equivalence.

3.1. Color Metaphors

Original text: 绿色是生命的象征、大自然的底色。

Translated text: Green is the color of nature and the symbol of life.

Example 1 positioned at the beginning of the White Paper and serves to set the tone. It conceptualizes the abstract concept of "绿色" into two concrete entities - "生命" and "底色" and endows it with perceptible material attributes. According to Lakoff and Johnson^[3], the core cognitive function of this kind of metaphor lies in "enabling us to refer to, quantify and identify specific aspects of the abstract concept", forming an entity metaphor within the ontological metaphor system. Through the metaphorical marker of "symbol", the source domain "life" is mapped onto green development. The base color, which is the first hue placed on the canvas and allows other colors to be shown, demonstrates that green is the fundamental element and a necessity for all developments. Metaphor retention strategies are adopted in translation: "symbol of life" successfully retains the original associations enabling English readers to quickly grasp the meaning and achieving basic equivalence at the cognitive level. "Color of nature" is a bit different from the original "底色" because this term in English only denotes surface colors referring to a kind of surface attribute.

3.2. Wealth Metaphor

Original text: 绿水青山就是金山银山。

Translated text: lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.

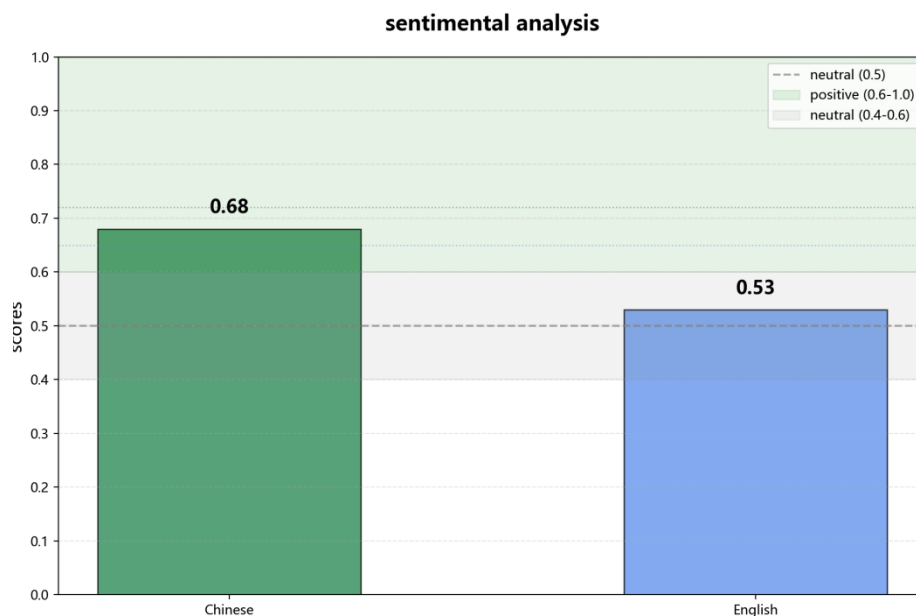


Figure 1. Contrast in emotional polarity between Chinese and English versions of “Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets”

Example 2, which is in the first chapter of the white paper, is a core expression of President Xi Jinping’s ecological civilization thought and has a programmatic position throughout the text. This sentence belongs to the structural metaphor category as defined by Lakoff & Johnson^[3], which makes use of the well-structured conceptual domain of "assets and the wealth" to grasp and construct the abstract concept of "the ecological environment". This example systematically conceptualizes the ecological environment as a kind of wealth that is quantifiable, assessable, and inheritable. This metaphor's core cognitive function is to move ecological conservation from the traditional "moral obligation" domain into the "economic rationality" domain, thus creating a logical chain in the public's cognition, that is the one where ecological priority can bring economic benefits. Through the HanLP sentiment analysis (as shown above), the Example 2 in the original Chinese presents quite obvious positive sentiment polarity. In the Chinese context, this expression not only represents an ecological principle but also embodies development visions, political commitments, and public welfare concerns, all of which carry strong positive emotional resonance. The English translation is tending towards a neutral state. While making efforts to accurately convey the economic metaphor of "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", the translation abandons the original policy appeal and cultural pride and appears relatively objective and plain. Specifically, "金山银山" creates a concrete and intuitive image of wealth which resonates with the basic longing of the common people for material abundance; conversely, the word "invaluable" in the translation "invaluable assets" elevates this sentiment from the tangible image of gold and silver to a sense of awe for absolute value intensifying the feeling that this concept is immeasurable. The translation has adopted a metaphor substitution strategy, substituting the specific image of "mountains of gold and silver" in the source text with the more general economic term "assets" in the target language. This substitution makes use of the common understanding of "assets" as value carriers among English readers and the addition of "extremely precious" enhances the emotional intensity, ensuring that the core meaning of "an ecosystem with absolute value" is fully conveyed. English readers can accurately grasp the proposition of "nature is wealth" and then experience emotional resonance of cherishing and protecting it, thereby achieving a relatively high overall emotional equivalence.

3.3. Journey Metaphor

Original text: 坚定不移走生态优先、绿色发展之路。

Translated text: prioritized eco-environmental conservation and green development.

In the first chapter of the white paper, this example concerns China's green development action plan. This sentence integrates a combination of the position metaphor and a structural metaphor: "走 之路" forms a classic journey metaphor (structure metaphor), conceptualizing the concept of "development" as "moving forward" and the "policy direction" as "a path"; "resolutely" belongs to the "stability" mapping in the position metaphor, expressing a firm will through the spatial stability of "unwaveringly". They jointly construct a composite cognitive framework of "progress-stability". as Zhou Xiang and Huang Huaxin^[4] observed, the journey metaphor in political discourse is rather systematic and frequently appears along with concepts like "goals," "paths," and "speeds". In this example the "path" of the source domain endows development with directivity, processuality, and purposiveness; and "坚定不移" strengthens the willpower and determination of the actor. The overall emotional tone conveys a spirit of firm progress one that has a clear view of the goal is very resolute in action is not afraid of difficulties and at the same time has an unshakable belief in the correct path. The translation has employed an omission strategy, completely omitting the core journey image of "taking the path of...". However, it retains the substantive policy proposal of "prioritized...green development". As Lu Weizhong and Chen Hui^[9] mentioned, when the source metaphor may bring an interpretation burden to the target audience, the abandonment strategy is indeed feasible. However, in this situation the "path" or "road" is rather common in English political discourse. Although the discarding of journey imagery can guarantee policy accuracy, the inherent sense of direction, process features and firm driving force of the metaphorical "road" itself are given up. Although target readers can grasp the policy intention of "giving priority to green development", they find it difficult to perceive the complete emotional panorama of "steadfastly taking the right path". This then gives rise to an obvious emotional gap, leading to only a moderate level of emotional equivalence.

3.4. Body/Life Metaphors

Original text: 山水林田湖草沙是生命共同体。

Translated text: Mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grasslands and deserts are communities of life.

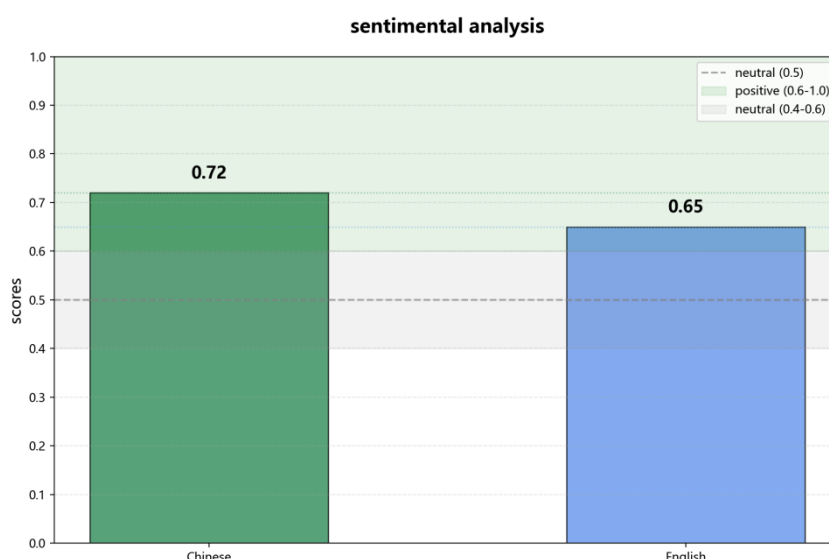


Figure 2. Emotional polarity comparison between Chinese and English versions of "Mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grasslands and deserts are communities of life"

Example 4, which is within the second chapter of this white paper, has carried out a systematic elaboration on China's ecological concepts. This is the combination of ontological metaphors, specifically the combination of entity metaphors and personification. The term "community of life" conceptualizes diverse natural elements mountains rivers forests farmlands lakes grasslands and deserts as an organic whole with life characteristics thus endowing scattered geographical entities with a unified vitality. Hu Zhuanglin ^[1] pointed out when discussing cultural studies that body and life metaphors often carry the deepest-level cultural values because life constitutes the most primitive experiential basis of human beings. The term "community" will at the same time arouse associations related to social organizations, combining natural elements and interpersonal networks to form a cognitive framework where "humans and nature belong to the same life system". The core cognitive function of this metaphor lies in dismantling the mechanical worldview of "binary opposition between man and nature" in modern Western society and establishing a holistic way of thinking centered on "the organic connection between man and nature", thereby providing a philosophical foundation for the construction of ecological civilization. Emotionally, "life" can arouse the compassion and protection instinct towards organisms while "community" can stir up the feelings of belonging intimacy as well as common destiny thus creating an emotional combination that is warm profound and responsible. The translation has adopted the strategy of retaining metaphors "life community" precisely seizes the core image of "life community" and "community" retains the connotation of belonging and collective identity in English. The phrase "of life" causes the abstract concept to seem as if it is a thing that has an entity like life. Analysis using HanLP reveals that both the original text and its English translation exhibit a fundamentally positive emotional tone, as shown in Figure 2. This shows that English readers can distinctly perceive the emotional foundation behind "Nature is not a storehouse of resources but a life companion", which is a metaphor having a strong emotional equivalence and based on universal human cognitive experiences.

3.5. Architectural Metaphor

Original text: 筑牢中华民族永续发展的根基。

Translated text: strengthen the foundations for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation.

Located within the second chapter of the white paper regarding ecosystem protection and restoration, it emphasizes the long-term significance of ecological development. This sentence functions as an example of a structural metaphor within the ontological metaphors: both "reinforcement" and "foundation" stem from the construction field. The foundation, which is the load-bearing base of a building, determines its stability and durability, and "reinforcement" denotes the process of strengthening and consolidating this base so as to increase its sturdiness. These terms in combination turn the abstract goal of "sustainable development" into a tangible, constructible and consolidable architectural entity. The core cognitive function of this metaphor lies in endowing development with the qualities of stability, system integrity, and inheritance—just as the foundation of a building determines its ability to resist storms, the foundation of ecological civilization determines whether the Chinese nation can achieve inter-generational sustainable development. Emotionally speaking, "foundations" evokes positive feelings like security, reliability, and trustworthiness. And "fortify" conveys a sense of definite action and engineering quality. Altogether, this forms a rational, steady, trust-filled, and responsible-over-generations emotional atmosphere. The translation has adopted a metaphor retention strategy: "foundations" in English has established metaphorical connections with both the construction and the conceptual system, precisely reproducing the core image of "foundation"; "strengthen" corresponds to the action connotation of "consolidating and reinforcing". The emotional tone within the sentence "Development is a century-long

undertaking that requires a solid foundation" can be perceived by English readers - this metaphor, which is based on universal human building experiences and cultural cognitions, has attained a high degree of emotional equivalence.

3.6. War Metaphors

Original text: 渤海综合治理攻坚战。

Translated text: ...the comprehensive management of the Bohai Seawater environment.

In the second chapter of the white paper, Example 6 is about the important projects for protecting and restoring key ecosystems, and it specifically expounds on the intensity of environmental governance. In structural metaphor theory, this sentence makes use of a war metaphor. When analyzing The Resolution, Sun Yi and Zhou Tiantian^[1] pointed out that the war metaphor is systematically and frequently used in political discourse because war represents the most intense collective action mode of human beings. The so-called "arduous battle" originally refers to the military operation of attacking heavily fortified enemy positions, like cities, passes, fortresses or outposts. Here, the governance of the environment in the Bohai Sea area is regarded as an action which has clear objectives and needs concentrated efforts to address. The core cognitive function of this metaphor lies in constructing the urgency of the problem and the collectivity of action - the "arduous fighting battle" conveys the psychological presupposition that the task is arduous, requires whole-hearted devotion and allows no failure, elevating environmental governance from daily work to the level of strategic action. Emotionally, this combination conveys solemnity, urgency, a sense of power and collective resolve, reflecting the unswerving determination of the Chinese government to "declare war on pollution". The translation has adopted an omission strategy, completely removing the core war image of "the tough battle" and only keeping the objective factual expression of "comprehensive management". This method is in close agreement with the cases observed by Lu Weizhong and Chen Hui^[9] because the "fight against poverty" corresponds to "alleviating poverty" and the reason lies in the complex understanding of the "war on" metaphor. For English readers, excessive use of war metaphors may lead to negative militaristic implications and may even be misinterpreted as radical ideological expressions. Although the translation ensures information accuracy and political security, it sacrifices the firm spirit and urgent feeling embodied in the "hard battle". English readers are able to understand the policy content of "comprehensive governance", however they can scarcely experience the "fighting will" and "unswerving belief in victory" of the Chinese government in environmental governance. There exists a rather low degree of emotional equivalence with obvious emotional gaps present.

3.7. Kinship Metaphors

Original text: 长江是中华民族的母亲河。

Translated text: The Yangtze River is the mother river of the Chinese nation.

Example 7 is excerpted from Chapter 2, which is related to the matter of promoting green development in key areas. It shows the special status that the Yangtze River has in Chinese culture, which in ontological metaphor terms belongs to an anthropomorphic metaphor, specifically a metaphor of kinship. In his discussion of cultural studies as cited by Hu Zhuanglin^[6], the metaphors of kinship relations that carry the deepest cultural emotions are those because families form the most fundamental emotional units of human beings. "Mother" is a symbol representing the source of human life and gestation. Conceiving the Yangtze River as the "mother river" endows this natural geographical entity with agency and also endows it with emotional relational attributes, turning it from an objective existence into an existence with emotions. The core cognitive function of this metaphor is to establish emotional identification between people and the river-the Yangtze River is not simply a hydrological name in geography textbooks, but a life source and cultural cradle that has nurtured the Chinese

nation for five thousand years. Every Chinese person and this river share the "inseparable connection". Emotionally, the term "mother" evokes feelings such as gratitude, attachment, respect and protective urges thus causing a profound emotional connection to take place. The modifier "Chinese nation" takes individual feelings and transforms them into collective memory and ethnic identity thereby changing river conservation from a technical matter into a moral obligation. The translation has adopted a literal translation approach and retained the core of the metaphor. Although "mother river" is not a fixed idiom in English, its structure is quite clear. Readers can grasp the metaphorical meaning of the river nourishing the land like a mother, as it evokes the common associations of motherhood: nourishment, protection, and unconditional love. This approach successfully retains the cultural particularity of the source text and does not create comprehension obstacles, which can be seen as a successful implementation of metaphor retention. English readers can perceive the unique position of the Yangtze River within the framework of the Chinese national emotional structure and can achieve a high level of emotional equivalence.

3.8. Summary of Metaphor Type Analysis

Through a systematic analysis of the seven main metaphor categories in the white paper, the following preliminary conclusion can be drawn: the achievement of emotional equivalence is rather obviously influenced by different translation strategies. Specifically, the replacement strategy is to adjust the metaphors with cultural specificity in the source language into expressions familiar to the target language readers while retaining the core metaphorical meaning. This approach, while adapting to cognitive habits can also maintain a fairly strong emotional intensity and produce relatively high emotional equivalence. However, the omission strategy is usually applied to those figurative types that are indeed highly culturally specific. In order to guarantee the accuracy of information and political security, the parts of metaphors are frequently discarded by the translators while the core semantic meanings are kept. This approach usually causes a considerable weakening of emotional intensity, resulting in emotional differences of different degrees between the source text and the target text. In general, the degree of emotional equivalence attained is inversely proportional to the cultural particularity of the source metaphor: the higher the cultural shareability, the easier it is to attain emotional equivalence; the stronger the cultural particularity, the larger the risk of emotional loss.

4. Conclusion

This paper, based on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory and Lu and Chen's classification of translation strategies, examines metaphor types and their English translation strategies in the white paper *China's Green Development in the New Era*. It proposes emotional equivalence as a key principle for evaluating metaphor translation in political discourse. Through analyzing seven metaphor types—color, wealth, journey, body/life, architectural, war, and kinship metaphors—the study draws the following conclusions.

First, these metaphors collectively shape a conceptual framework for China's green development. Each type reinforces the others, presenting core principles from different angles: color metaphors position green development as a hallmark of Chinese modernization; wealth metaphors frame ecological protection as economic value; journey metaphors convey direction and perseverance; body/life metaphors link humanity and nature emotionally; architectural metaphors suggest stability and continuity; war metaphors reflect resolve in environmental governance; and kinship metaphors deepen the human-nature bond. Together, they form a coherent narrative from vision to action.

Second, translation strategies for different metaphor types correlate with the level of emotional equivalence achieved. For metaphors grounded in universal bodily experiences, preserving

original imagery often activates similar emotions in the target language, achieving high equivalence. For metaphors with moderate cultural specificity, replacing certain elements can align with target audience cognition while retaining core meaning, sometimes even enhancing emotional impact. For highly culture-specific metaphors, translators may omit metaphorical components to ensure accuracy and political safety, though this often reduces emotional intensity.

Third, emotional equivalence is negatively correlated with cultural specificity. Translation strategy selection involves balancing cultural uniqueness with target language acceptability. Universally experienced metaphors tend to retain imagery, supporting emotional equivalence. Culture-specific metaphors, however, often require omission, increasing the risk of emotional loss. This underscores the need for translators to weigh cultural fidelity against reader acceptance and apply compensatory strategies when needed.

Fourth, the emotional equivalence principle offers a fresh lens for evaluating political metaphor translation. Traditional studies have emphasized meaning equivalence, yet metaphors also function as emotional carriers. Their cognitive and emotional roles are intertwined—understanding through metaphor involves both framing and feeling. Successful metaphor translation, therefore, requires not only accurate meaning transfer but also equivalent emotional reproduction.

This study highlights the importance of integrating emotional dimensions into metaphor translation research, particularly in environmental political discourse. Future research may incorporate reader-response studies to further examine how target audiences perceive and emotionally engage with translated metaphors across cultural contexts.

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