



An Empirical Study on the Translation of Political Texts — A Study on the English Version of *The Governance of China* from the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization

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Abstract— In recent years, metaphor research on key Chinese political discourses has attracted extensive attention, especially works represented by *The Governance of China*. The metaphors adopted in such works help highlight national ethos and state-governing philosophies. Drawing on Lakoff's metaphor theory and Venuti's domestication-foreignization translation theory, this study employs Nvivo15 to analyze metaphorical expressions and translation strategies in the source text and its English translation. The findings reveal that the text contains 13 main types of metaphors, and foreignization is the dominant strategy adopted in the English translation, dominated by literal translation and word-for-word translation. This paper aims to explore how to convey the in-depth implications of the source text in cross-cultural communication and facilitate the effective international communication of Chinese political discourse.



Keywords— *metaphor, domestication and foreignization, national image, international communication-oriented translation*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping made important arrangements for enhancing the communication capacity and influence of Chinese civilization. He stressed the need to strengthen the development of international communication capabilities

and comprehensively improve the effectiveness of international communication. Against this backdrop, political external-propaganda texts have become a research hotspot at home and abroad. As one of the key works in this field, *The Governance of China* undertakes the mission of publicizing the ideology and state policies of the Communist Party of China and shaping China's national image. Political metaphor, as one of the most

prevalent expressive devices in political discourse, profoundly manifests various dimensions of Chinese political discourse and reflects the connotations behind such discourse (Yin Donghao, 2008).

In recent years, domestic scholars have carried out extensive research on metaphorical expressions in political discourse. For instance, taking General Secretary Xi Jinping's speeches delivered since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as research corpus, Yang Lin (2019) focused on the frequently-employed political metaphors carrying ideological implications in these speeches. This comprehensive study points out that metaphor constitutes a conceptualization model of human experiential experience, as well as a new perspective for observing political life. Wang Jingzhi and Yang Zhong (2012) note that cognitive metaphor theory has a short developmental history and awaits further theoretical refinement. In particular, research on political metaphors needs in-depth exploration. Nevertheless, domestic conceptual-metaphor research has attracted growing attention and boasts great potential and room for development from cross-cultural Chinese-foreign comparative perspectives. Evidently, further exploration is still required to tap into the theoretical depth and practical application value of domestic metaphor research.

Targeting Government Work Reports issued between 1978 and 2011, Wang Weimin and Huang Ya (2012) analyzed conceptual metaphors identified in these documents and found that architectural metaphors and journey metaphors were the most widely-adopted metaphor patterns across successive Reports. Adopting theories and classification approaches similar to those of other relevant studies, their paper fails to conduct in-depth or innovative investigations into metaphorical expressions in the English translations of political discourse.

Although numerous studies have examined metaphors in political discourse, particularly the classification of conceptual metaphors, there remains a lack of systematic

and in-depth research on metaphor translation strategies in the English version of The Governance of China. Most existing studies focus on the classificatory analysis of metaphors. Against the backdrop of international communication, nevertheless, research on textual metaphors within political discourse translation is still insufficient.

Drawing on Venuti's domestication and foreignization translation strategies, this paper adopts a mixed-method discourse-analytical approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct an in-depth analysis of metaphorical expressions and the English translation strategies for metaphor-laden phrases in The Governance of China.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

As a cognitive mechanism and mental tool, metaphor is widely employed in political discourse. In their classic work *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson first established the theoretical system of conceptual metaphor. They categorized the theory into three core models: structural metaphor (e.g. Argument is war), orientational metaphor (e.g. Happy is up), and ontological metaphor (e.g. Inflation is an entity). This taxonomy will also be adopted for discussion in this study.

In his monograph *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti made the first systematic distinction between two translation strategies: foreignization and domestication. This theoretical framework clarifies that the foreignization strategy stresses the faithful reproduction of cultural features in the source-language text and the author's intentions, requiring translators to preserve the linguistic alterity of the original to the maximum extent. By contrast, the domestication strategy is oriented toward target-language readers' reception habits and achieves fluency and readability of the translation through cultural adaptation. Each strategy bears its own strengths:

domestication facilitates readers' comprehension and acceptance of translations, whereas foreignization fosters pluralistic cultural exchanges. Accordingly, grounded in metaphors in political texts, this paper explores the possibilities of "bringing the reader to the author" and "bringing the author to the reader". It aims to assist readers in grasping the profound implications of political texts, bridging cultural disparities, and enriching the interpretive dimensions of source texts.

When investigating metaphors embedded in political texts, this paper first elaborates on the theoretical backdrop of conceptual metaphor as well as domestication and foreignization translation strategies. It then draws on concrete examples from political texts to conduct an in-depth analysis of how these theories and strategies can be applied. For illustration, the metaphorical expression "water without a source" is identified in the book. Its English translation "water without a source" is a literal

translation representative of the foreignization strategy. This strategy effectively retains the original unique imagery, enabling international audiences to directly appreciate the cultural nuances embodied by metaphors in Chinese political texts and building a bridge for cross-cultural communication. Analyses of such examples can further uncover how the above-mentioned theories and strategies can be utilized to accurately capture and represent the rich connotations and values of metaphors within political texts.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, 18 thematic chapters from *The Governance of China* are selected as the scope for corpus retrieval. These chapters cover various genres including leaders' speeches, conversations, and congratulatory letters. Detailed information of the themes is presented in Table 1 below:

No.	Theme (Word Count)	Text Genre
1	Upholding and Developing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (13,441 words)	Theoretical Exposition
2	The Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation (14,047 words)	Theoretical Exposition
3	Comprehensively Deepening Reform (20,958 words)	Policy Discussion
4	Sustained and Sound Economic Development (10,362 words)	Policy Discussion
5	Advancing the Rule of Law in China (8,173 words)	Policy Discussion
6	Building a Great Socialist Cultural Country (15,174 words)	Policy Discussion
7	Advancing Social Programs and Reforms in Social Governance (6,635 words)	Policy Discussion
8	Promoting Ecological Progress (2,173 words)	Policy Discussion
9	Modernizing National Defense and the Armed Forces (2,904 words)	Policy Discussion
10	Enriching the Practice of "One Country, Two Systems" and Advancing National Reunification (7,811 words)	Policy Discussion
11	Following the Path of Peaceful Development (9,238 words)	Policy Discussion
12	Forging a New-Model of Major-Country Relations (6,239 words)	Policy Discussion
13	Pursuing Good-Neighbor Diplomacy (5,931 words)	Policy Discussion

14	Strengthening Solidarity and Cooperation with Developing Countries (8,696 words)	Construction & Development
15	Actively Participating in Multilateral Affairs (18,095 words)	Construction & Development
16	Forging Close Ties Between the Party and the People (8,672 words)	Party-Building and Anti-Corruption
17	Promoting Anti-Corruption Campaigns (5,922 words)	Party-Building and Anti-Corruption
18	Enhancing the Party's Leadership Capacity (11,698 words)	Party-Building and Anti-Corruption

As can be seen from the above table, architectural metaphors, journey metaphors and human-oriented metaphors account for the largest proportions. The following section comprehensively presents and analyzes the three most-frequently-used metaphor types and their corresponding expressions.

(1) Architectural Metaphor

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff points out that metaphorical concepts are reflected in linguistic vocabulary. Take the typical conceptual metaphor THEORY IS A BUILDING as an example. Its cognitive mechanism is manifested as cross-domain mapping from the source domain (architectural categories) to the target domain (theoretical systems). In this process, architectural terms such as “foundation” and “framework” are metaphorically projected onto the domain of theoretical construction. Different from tangible objects such as high-rises, tables and chairs that can be perceived through sight and touch, architectural metaphors are employed by state leaders to articulate abstract concepts difficult for audiences to conceptualize, such as the state, international relations and agreements. The meanings of architectural metaphors are closely tied to the Party's philosophies and the real-world context of national development. Several metaphorical expressions have been identified in *The Governance of China*.

WWJ-01-01: Socialism with Chinese characteristics was pioneered in the new era of reform and opening-up, and it

is built on the foundation of the Party's long-term endeavors.

WWJ-08-01: Strive to build a Beautiful China.

WWJ-01-01: New requirements for achieving the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

In the examples above, the source-domain concept of construction is mapped onto the target domain. Literally, the Chinese character “jian” means the practice of building-construction. Here, nevertheless, it conveys the meaning of developing Chinese society. The development of socialism with Chinese characteristics can be analogized to the process of erecting a high-rise edifice, which calls for scientific planning and coordinated efforts from designers to guarantee structural stability.

The value of such architectural metaphors lies in the following: state leaders provide the developmental framework analogous to architectural blueprints, while the general public acts as the practical subject. Within the dynamic balance of construction and development, the two parties jointly drive the iterative upgrading of society.

(2) Human-Oriented Metaphor

According to the definition of conceptual metaphor, personification falls within the cognitive operational system of ontological metaphor. Its cognitive mechanism lies in attributing human properties and characteristics to inanimate or abstract entities. In *The Governance of China*, personifying human-oriented metaphors are mainly applied to Party and government institutions, policy mechanisms and other subjects. In the speeches, the state

is endowed with human-like features, behaviours and even emotions. The most plausible explanation is that human bodies and behaviours are familiar to readers, which enables more convenient and intuitive perception of abstract concepts. Therefore, human bodies and behaviours can serve as the source domain to help audiences comprehend unfamiliar fields. Several personification metaphors extracted from the book are presented below:

WWJ-01-06: We must promote institutional innovation through theoretical innovation built on practice.

WWJ-07-06: Help impoverished areas shake off poverty and achieve prosperity.

WWJ-02-06: Labour is the fundamental force driving the progress of human society.

In Chinese, the character “tui” (push) originally refers to the physical act of humans exerting force outward or forward with hands to displace an object. In the examples cited above, “institutional innovation” and other items are abstract concepts rather than tangible physical objects, yet they are treated as entities that can be pushed. This linguistic phenomenon corresponds to the theory of conceptual metaphor.

Scholars have also studied the linguistic realisations of the conceptual metaphor THE STATE IS A PERSON. For instance, Alan Cienki has analysed the use of metaphors such as kin-term vocabulary in political debates and found that metaphors can reflect specific modes of thinking and political intentions. Similarly, the metaphors discussed here are intended to help audiences grasp complex political concepts more intuitively. Meanwhile, they demonstrate the common feature of political discourse: employing metaphors to strengthen expressive effects and communicative power.

(3) Journey Metaphor

From a Chinese linguistic perspective, a journey generally refers to the spatial-displacement trajectory between two points. When talking about travel, people

tend to think of travellers, means of transportation and so forth. In this book, state leaders compare national development to a journey, intending to convey that the country’s “journey” cannot be accomplished overnight; instead, it is long-term and arduous. Relevant metaphors can be found in the texts, for example:

WWJ-01-05: We must ensure that the fruits of development benefit all people more equitably and forge ahead steadily toward common prosperity.

WWJ-15-05: Strengthening cooperation with BRICS countries has always been one of the priorities of China’s foreign policy.

Before embarking on a journey, one must first select a destination to set a general direction. Similarly, a country needs to define its goals before pursuing national development and work toward them purposefully. In a study of conceptual metaphors in People’s Daily over 60 years, Li Yu (2013) notes that journey metaphors rank among the most-frequently-occurring types, and they serve, to some extent, to orient the direction of national development. Therefore, journey metaphors are particularly vital for disseminating Chinese culture within political discourse, and continued efforts are required for China to achieve socialist modernization.

To sum up, conceptual metaphors in political discourse possess distinctive and vital features, which enhance the discourse’s emotional appeal and intelligibility. In international-communication-oriented translation, metaphors can transcend cultural and linguistic barriers. By drawing on concepts familiar to international audiences, they convey China’s development philosophies and objectives and boost communication effectiveness.

In terms of national-image construction, metaphorical expressions demonstrate China’s resolve and endeavours to pursue socialist modernization. They project a proactive and enterprising national image, enable the international community to gain intuitive insights into China’s

development, secure understanding and recognition, facilitate the dissemination of positive messages, and elevate China's international discourse power and soft power.

5. An Analysis of Translation Strategies for Metaphorical Expressions in the English Version of *The Governance of China*

Metaphor translation is essentially culture-oriented translation. When rendering metaphors embedded in political discourse, translators must give serious consideration to the underlying cultural elements. Accordingly, this study explores strategies adopted in metaphor translation through an analysis of translation methods. The translator ought to guarantee accurate

transmission of semantic meaning while complying with the reception norms of target-language audiences. Domestication and foreignization are target-language-oriented and source-language-oriented respectively, offering in-depth insights into practical translation approaches.

Several methods including literal translation and free translation are adopted in the book to pursue precise information transfer and conform to target-readers' expressive conventions. For statistical analysis, the author extracts 1094 metaphor-containing sentences from the volume. The overall statistical distribution of domestication and foreignization is presented below:

Table 3 Domestication and Foreignization Translation Strategies

Translation Strategy	Translation Method	Frequency	Proportion
Domestication	Free translation	151	13.8%
	Imitative translation	132	12.1%
Foreignization	Literal translation	468	42.7%
	Word-for-word translation	343	31.4%
Total		1094	100%

Table 3 shows that for English renderings of metaphors in this book, two translation methods are adopted under the domestication strategy: free translation and imitative translation, while literal translation and word-for-word translation are employed under the foreignization strategy. The study indicates that the foreignization strategy is widely applied in *The Governance of China*. In the following chapters, we will draw on metaphor theory and dig deep into connotations against the background information of relevant discourse. Translation methods will then be summarized from the perspectives of these two strategies.

(1) Domestication Strategy

When examining metaphor-translation strategies in the English version of *The Governance of China*, this study identifies an approach analogous to metaphor shift, namely the domestication of metaphors. Similar to metaphor shift, the source text and target text adopt different metaphor realizations. The merit of the domestication strategy lies in producing more natural and fluent target-language texts, lowering comprehension barriers for target audiences and facilitating the accurate transmission of cross-cultural information.

1. Free Translation

When there is a conflict between the deep-seated semantic structure and the literal form of a text, translators should give priority to free translation to effectively

resolve communicative barriers arising from differences in linguistic conventions. The Governance of China contains numerous words and expressions with Chinese characteristics. Under certain circumstances, free translation can also be adopted to faithfully and fluently convey source-text information and realize cross-cultural transmission of the core values of the target text, as illustrated below:

ST1---当今世界，人类生活在不同文化、种族、肤色、宗教和不同社会制度所组成的世界，各国人民形成了你中有我、我中有你的命运共同体。

TT1---Today, we live in a world with different cultures, ethnic groups, skin colors, religions and social systems, and all people on the planet have become members of an intimate community with a shared destiny.

Free translation occupies a pivotal position in Chinese-English translation practice. Chen Daliang (2023) offers a precise definition of free translation in his paper, stressing that free translation neither distorts nor misinterprets the source text, nor does it arbitrarily omit content to convey the main idea. Instead, it produces smooth and elegant target text while fully preserving the original meaning.

Take the widely-used Chinese expressions “you have me in you” and “I have you in me” as an example. When describing the close bonds among peoples of various countries and international solidarity and cooperation, these expressions not only deliver literal meaning but also carry a container metaphor that subtly reflects the tight connections between nations. Nevertheless, given their distinct Chinese cultural features, a crude literal rendering such as “you have me, I have you” may easily cause comprehension ambiguities for foreign readers unfamiliar with Chinese cultural backgrounds.

Under such circumstances, the free-translation treatment of rendering “你中有我” and “我中有你” as

“you have me” and “I’ve got you” retains the profound connotation of the source text, greatly improves the fluency of the target text, and effectively overcomes comprehension barriers caused by cultural differences. It fully demonstrates the significant value and positive effects of free translation in cross-cultural translation.

2. Imitative Translation

Scholars hold that translation is a communicative activity. On this basis, translators are supposed to adopt “set-phrase translation” whenever target-language conventional expressions are available, so as to achieve good correspondence between the target text and the source text. Where set-phrase translation is not feasible, “imitative translation” should be employed to approximate the stylistic features of the source text to the greatest possible extent (Zhu & Zhang, 2021).

There are several instances of imitative translation in The Governance of China. To conduct an in-depth analysis of such renderings and explore how China disseminates its domestic ideas and culture in a smooth and natural manner, some examples extracted from this book are presented below.

ST2---共建“一带一路”是论坛发展的新机遇新起点。

TT2---Jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative is a new opportunity and starting point for the development of the forum.

In the Chinese context, “the Belt” and “the Road” are core concepts. In concise language, they succinctly summarize the major forms of two major cooperation initiatives: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. The English rendering “Belt and Road” directly adopts this structural pattern. “Belt” corresponds to “带” and “Road” corresponds to “路”. It preserves the figurative feature of the Chinese expression, enabling international audiences to intuitively

grasp the literal meaning of the concept and demonstrate the uniqueness of China's political ideas.

2. Foreignization Strategy

Yuan Xiaoning (2010) reflected on domestication and foreignization. She pointed out that foreignization refers to taking the source language as the basis when dealing with target-language linguistic conventions and cultural traditions, and highlighting the exotic flavor of the source language in the target text, namely "accepting the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text and transporting the reader to the foreign scenario".

In the English translations of China's political discourse, the rational application of foreignization helps better present the favorable national image.

1. Literal Translation

Chinese narrative conventions are generally built on its unique characteristics of temporal logic, so the sequencing of Chinese discourse follows certain rules. When the syntactic structures in works by Chinese leaders enjoy high compatibility with the target language, literal translation can be adopted, namely translating in accordance with the original word-order and lexical meanings. By preserving the original word-order structure and semantic relations, literal translation maximizes the faithfulness to the source text and fulfills the principle of fidelity to the greatest extent.

ST3---求同存异，就是要本着同舟共济的精神，发挥政治智慧，聚集和扩大推动两岸关系发展的共识，妥善处理 and 管控分歧。

TT3--- Seeking common ground while reserving differences demands that both sides give full play to their political wisdom, reach and expand a consensus for enhancing cross-Straits relations, and properly handle and control their differences in the spirit of sharing and mutual assistance, as passengers in the same boat.

"Pulling together in the same boat" serves as a typical example of literal translation. As a Chinese idiom, it

originally refers to people crossing a river in one boat. Later, it acquired figurative meanings of unity and mutual assistance, joint efforts to overcome difficulties, and shared interests. Its literal meaning and metaphorical connotation are easy to understand. A direct literal translation will not cause comprehension barriers for target-language audiences, and can fully convey both its semantic meaning and metaphorical implication.

Similarly, when discussing domestication and foreignization strategies for Chinese-English idiom translation, scholars cite literally-translated idioms such as "Blood is thicker than water" and "to be on thin ice". Studies indicate that retaining the figurative images, national features and linguistic styles of idioms in translation can not only preserve the cultural characteristics of the source text, but also enrich the target text, broaden readers' cultural horizons and offer them knowledge and insights. Such translation techniques play a vital role in promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding (Huang Xiaolin, 2009).

2. Word-for-Word Translation

Word-for-word translation refers to translating source-language words and expressions in isolation one by one strictly following the original sequence, without taking into account the linguistic norms and usage habits of the target language at lexical, syntactic and semantic levels.

ST4---愿同各方建设好上合组织环保信息共享平台，携手促进经济高质量发展和“绿色复苏”。

TT4---We will work with other parties to ensure the success of the SCO Environment Information Sharing Platform and jointly promote high-quality economic development and green recovery.

In this case, "green recovery" adopts word-for-word translation and contains two metaphors concerning color and plants. In the color metaphor, green symbolizes a sound environment and vigorous development; "recovery" means regaining vitality, and in this context it refers to

rapid economic growth through friendly cooperation among countries. Word-for-word translation here can convey China's philosophy of coordinated economic and environmental development in its original flavour. The neat and well-organized target text also helps improve the accuracy and fluency of information for international audiences.

To sum up, this study focuses on the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in metaphor translation. Its findings are of great significance for improving the effectiveness of international publicity translation and contributing to national image building. Translations of expressions such as “you are in me and I am in you” and “pulling together in the same boat” enable international audiences to gain an in-depth insight into China's discourse system and modes of thinking, injecting cultural depth into the multi-dimensional shaping of national image. It not only enriches the corpus for global cultural exchange, but also enhances the recognizability and influence of Chinese culture in international contexts. By contrast, domestication strategies target the cultural background and linguistic habits of target-language audiences. Through free translation, imitation translation and other approaches, domestication removes comprehension barriers caused by cultural differences, improves the fluency and acceptability of information transmission, facilitates effective cross-cultural communication, and lays a foundation for the wide dissemination and positive perception of national image.

Against the backdrop of globalization, the rational application of domestication and foreignization in international publicity translation enables the target text to strike a balance between cultural transmission and information communication. It helps construct a comprehensive, objective and vivid national image, promotes the better integration of Chinese culture into the world, and enhances China's international discourse power and soft power.

6. Conclusion

By examining metaphorical expressions and their translation strategies in the English version of The Governance of China, this study reveals the great value of metaphorical expressions in political discourse. Proper application of metaphors helps political leaders build discourse systems, translate abstract governance concepts into ideas accessible to the public, and strengthen connections with the public to achieve political goals. Furthermore, the study finds that the foreignization-oriented translation strategies adopted in the English version preserve source-cultural images via literal translation, which facilitates the international communication of Chinese culture and the shaping of China's cultural image. Therefore, metaphor in political discourse deserves due attention in translation research and practice, so as to promote the building of China's national image and political discourse.

Nevertheless, this study has its limitations. Restricted by linguistic complexity and the researcher's competence, it fails to fully explore the connotations of the relevant work. Besides, the small-sized database and manual collection and analysis may affect the accuracy of research results. Follow-up studies should deepen the reading and interpretation of the work and carry out panoramic research.

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