



A Corpus-based Study on Colligation and Semantic Prosody in Chinese Government Work Reports: The Case of “V + Reform”

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Abstract. This paper explored the colligation of “V + Reform” and the semantic prosody of “reform” in the corpus of *Chinese Government Work Reports* (GWRs) from 2013 to 2022 built with 146087 tokens, and then contrasted the results with those in *American State of the Union Addresses* (SOTUs) with the purpose of disclosing the subjective and objective reasons that influence its semantic prosody. All the collocation patterns of the colligation are extracted and analyzed in groups based on the theory of lexical priming. The major findings include (1) compared to the English native text, the “path” metaphor pattern and the “Ongoing” stage of “reform” are overwhelmingly prevalent in GWRs, while the proportions of “Before” and “Beginning” stages are relatively low. (2) The multi-dimensional connotations of the word “reform” itself and the historical actions of the Chinese government contribute to the unusually high proportion of the “Ongoing” semantic prosody of the word “reform.” (3) The deliberate use of non-native collocations in the official translation of GWRs reflects China’s political intention of shaping its national image and “convey the voice of China to the world.”

Keywords: Semantic prosody; *Chinese Government Work Reports*; Colligation; Collocation; Path metaphor; Lexical priming

1 Introduction

Government work reports are the annual official policy agenda of governments at all levels in China, including a review of government work in the previous year and the work plan for the current year. The Chinese Government Work Reports (GWRs) are delivered by the Premier to the deputies of the “Two Sessions” -- the National (local) People’s Congress and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference -- for their review and approval.

Reform is an essential process for promoting progress and development in various fields, including politics, economics, society, and culture. For China and Chinese people, “reform” holds rich connotations. The “Reform and Opening-up” policy launched in 1978 has been a game-changer for China’s development, as it shifted the country from a centrally planned economy to a more market-oriented and globally

integrated one, with significant improvements in the many fields. Many specific reform policies are planned and implemented in the GWRs. Therefore, it's authoritative and representative to study the connotations of the word "reform" through analyzing the texts of GWRs.

Semantic prosody refers to the inherent connotations or associations of a word or phrase that are evoked in a particular context or through its frequent co-occurrence with certain words. However, current academic research on semantic prosody is increasingly limited to the positive and negative aspects of textual emotional attitudes, and there is less research on other types of semantic prosody conveyed by the text. Causative verbs are words that make the object perform a certain action, be in a certain state, or possess certain qualities through the action of the subject. ^[1] This study will analyze the semantic prosody of "reform" in the colligation of "V + Reform" through classifying different stages of the causative verb's behavior, such as "Beginning", "Ongoing" and "Finishing", which can help to investigate China's official attitude and practices towards the behavior of "reform". By comparing GWR & BCC (Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus Center) and SOTU (American State of the Union Address) & COCA (The Corpus of Contemporary American English) corpora, the study will also analyze diverse connotations of the concept of "reform" in the Chinese and American contexts, revealing its unique connotations in Chinese texts.

Lastly, the author will use the theory of lexical priming to interpret the statistical results, analyzing the underlying reasons for the emergence of "V + Reform" colligation from a socio-psychological and historical perspective and the political intention of Chinese government. Besides, the high proportion of "Ongoing" stage reflects the "path" metaphor pattern that are frequently employed in GWRs. The author will also propose the viewpoint that the mechanism of lexical priming can mutually influence among different countries and language cultures.

2 Literature Review

Semantic prosody has methodological significance in revealing the semantics of discourse and the attitudes of language users and it was widely used in the discourse research of political documents. Tang Qingye (2018) conducted research on the construction of discourse on the "Belt and Road Initiative" by analyzing the semantic prosody of reports from some influential media such as The New York Times and she studied the differences in discourse construction on the "Belt and Road Initiative" among mainstream media in various countries, changes in emotional attitudes, and their underlying reasons. ^[2] Pan Feng (2017) researched the collocation and semantic prosody features of the keyword "development" in the Chinese-English interpretation of press conferences by the Premier of the State Council of China and made a comparison with the source spoken language of the press conferences held by the US government. The research findings indicated significant differences between the two, which the paper attributed to the closely related ideological and discursive motivations of the leaders of the two countries. Moreover, it further utilized critical discourse

analysis theory to provide an explanation. [3] The above research on semantic prosody in political texts mainly focuses on the emotional attitudes of vocabulary or collocations (positive, negative, or neutral), and infers the speaker's or official's stance towards something based on it. In fact, the connotation of semantic prosody is not limited to this aspect. John Sinclair (2004) put forward that the semantic prosodies express attitudinal and pragmatic meaning; they are the junction of form and function. [4] Therefore, academic research on the pragmatic meaning of semantic prosody is relatively weak, especially in the field of political literature, and has strong research value.

The author attempted to conduct research on the semantic prosody of Chinese Government Work Reports, which has long been a hot topic in the Chinese and global academic field. The first step is to find the starting point of the research, which is to identify the vocabulary or collocations that have research value. Li Xiaoqian (2017) studied the English translations of GWRs from 2000 to 2014, with a focus on analyzing the collocations of the high-frequency words "development" and "improve". The results showed that the collocational patterns of "development" in the translations were not significantly different from those in the British National Corpus (BNC). However, the collocations of "improve" exhibited a strong "Chinese characteristic," as they included collocations with modal verbs, adverbs, and nouns that were not found in the BNC. It was pointed out that the use of the "improve + NP (noun phrase)" structure created a positive semantic prosody in the entire sentence. This structure, when combined with moderate or high modal verbs, vividly reflected the Chinese government's attitude and determination towards future work deployment. [5] Wei Naixing (2002) pointed out that colligation is a grammatical structure and framework where words occur together. A colligation represents a collocational class. "V+N" is a type of colligation, which is referred to as the "V+N collocational class" in research. [6] For example, the collocations of "make progress", "pay attention" and "implement reform" all belong to the "V+N" collocation class, which can also be called "V+N" colligation. By establishing colligations and using data-driven methods, it is possible to summarize and describe the semantic prosody of keywords. [6] This study employs the above-mentioned method to analyze the colligation of "V + Reform", which is an effective means to investigate the semantic prosody of "reform" in GWRs.

Tang Yijun conducted a survey on the English translation of the Chinese political document Xi Jinping: The Governance of China and found that there was no collocation "deepen reform," which is popular in the Chinese translation community but does not exist in native English. As a conclusion, the word collocations in the English translation of the book are authentic, fluent, and natural, ensuring the quality of the translation. [7] However, statistic results of the following research indicate that the collocation "deepen + reform" holds the largest proportion among all "V + Reform" collocations. The author holds the opinion that the contradiction in the statistical results only indicates that different translation strategies were employed by the Chinese authorities in translating GWRs and the aforementioned political document. It does not, however, prove that the translation quality of GWRs is lower and there are some mistakes in its translation. This issue will be deeply discussed in the following text.

Path metaphor, an important metaphorical pattern in political discourse, refers to metaphorical expressions that involve roads, movement, and related activities and characteristics as the source of metaphor. ^[8] As for the collocation “deepen + reform” in Chinese political documents, the word “deepen” implies going further or delving into a particular aspect, while “reform” suggests making significant changes or improvements. Together, they create a metaphorical image of a journey or path that needs to be followed in order to bring about transformative reforms and advancements. Consequently, it is a highly typical example of “path metaphor” in Chinese political documents.

Finally, it is necessary to study the reasons for the formation of the above-mentioned semantic prosody phenomenon. Michael Hoey (2005) put forward the concept of lexical priming and suggested that our understanding and use of words are not isolated events but are influenced by the larger linguistic and situational context. This context includes not only the immediate textual surroundings but also our past experiences, knowledge, and cultural background. By examining patterns of language usage and the associations between words, Hoey proposes that language users develop a set of “primings” that shape their linguistic behavior. ^[9] As is mentioned before, colligation is a grammatical structure and framework where words occur together, for example, grammatical structures such as “make a NOUN”, “VERB + coffee” and “walk ADV” are all colligations. Colligation is one specific manifestation of lexical priming, where the generation of colligation stems from its underlying mechanisms of lexical priming. Consider the verb “take” in English. Lexical priming influences the collocational patterns that the verb “take” tends to occur with. Some colligation patterns that arise from this are “take a shower”, “take a break” or “take a seat.” Moreover, by analyzing the mechanisms of lexical priming, we can explore the specific reasons for the emergence of colligation.

3 Data and Methodology

3.1 Research issues

1. In GWRs, what are the collocations of “V + Reform” colligation? What are the semantic prosodies (especially the different stages) of the action “reform?”
2. All the four corpora--the GWR, BCC, SOTU and COCA--have “V + Reform” colligation, what are the similarities and differences in terms of collocations and semantic prosodies? Analyze the reasons for the differences.

3.2 Text data sources

To ensure the authority of the corpus and the accuracy of the research, the author selected parallel official C-E bilingual corpora of the *Chinese Government Work Reports* (GWRs, 2013-2022) and *American State of the Union Addresses* (SOTUs, 2013-2022) in English, respectively, from *Chinese Bilingual Documents Website* (http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/node_7245066.htm) and *The American Presidency Project Website* (<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/presidential->

documents-archive-guidebook/annual-messages-congress-the-state-the-union). The corpora contain a total of 175,623 Chinese characters and 212,667 English tokens. In addition, to conduct in-depth research, corpora include *Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus Center* (BCC, <http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn/>), *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA, <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>) and *United Nations Digital Library* (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/>) are needed.

3.3 Research tools

This study adopts a corpus-based research approach and uses the N-Gram function of *Antconc* platform to extract different collocations and frequencies of “V + Reform” colligation in GWRs and SOTUs. The KWIC function is used to analyze the specific contexts of each item and to mark the semantic prosody of the action “reform”, including “Before”, “Beginning”, “Ongoing” and “Finishing”. BCC and COCA corpora are used for comparative research to analyze the use of “reform” collocations in different kinds of texts. In addition, *Modern Chinese Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary* are used to search for the definitions of “*gǎi gé*/reform.”

4 Results and Analysis

4.1 Statistics of Reform’s Semantic Prosody

The author gathered the collocations of “V + Reform” colligation in GWRs (English version) from 2013 to 2022. The statistical results sorted by frequency in descending order are shown in Table 1. Due to space limitations, only collocations with a frequency of 2 or more will be displayed here.

Table 1. Collocations of “V + Reform” colligation in GWRs (Freq \geq 2)

Collocation	Stage	Freq	Collocation	Stage	Freq
deepen + reform	Ongoing	151	focus on + reform	Beginning	6
advance + reform	Ongoing	66	speed up + reform	Ongoing	5
carry out + reform	Beginning	33	move forward with + reform	Ongoing	4
implement + reform	Beginning	12	press ahead with + reform	Ongoing	4
promote + reform	Ongoing	10	expand + reform	Ongoing	4
intensify + reform	Ongoing	8	launch + reform	Beginning	4
accelerate + reform	Ongoing	7	strengthen + reform	Ongoing	2

further + reform	Ongoing	7	push forward + reform	Ongoing	2
pursue + reform	Beginning	7	introduce + reform	Before	2
push ahead with + reform	Ongoing	6	conduct + reform	Beginning	2
continue + reform	Ongoing	6			

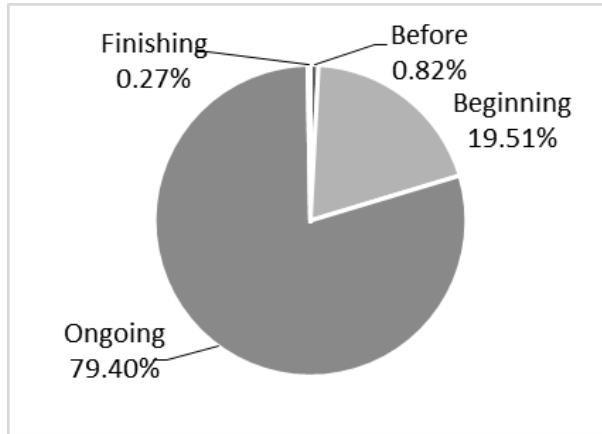


Fig. 1. Proportion of "reform" stages in GWRs

There exist 37 different types of collocations of "V + Reform" colligation in the texts of GWRs, each of them is matched with unique verb, such as advance, deepen, etc. Through observing them and analyzing their semantic prosodies, the author classified them into four stages in the "reform" behavior: "Before", "Beginning", "Ongoing" and "Finishing". For the collocation that cannot easily distinguish its actual stage, the author analyzed its context and classify it into corresponding stage. From the perspective of word frequency (Figure 1), "Ongoing" stage has the highest frequency and accounts for 79.40% in all stages; "Beginning", "Before" and "Finishing" stages account for 19.51%, 0.82% and 0.27%, respectively.

GWRs mainly reflect the stance of the Chinese government. In order to expand the representative scope of the corpus, the author continued the research by using the Chinese comprehensive corpus. BCC is a large full-text retrieval corpus with multiple languages, including Chinese and other languages as well. It is an online data system with a size of about ten billion words, ideal as a data source for studies in linguistics as well as applied linguistics.^[10] Therefore, BCC has a strong representative role in the use of Chinese language in comprehensive contexts. The author conducted a statistical analysis of collocations of "V + *gǎi gé* (reform)" colligation. A total of 78,167 results were retrieved, and the author selected collocations with a frequency greater than 200 and filtered out those that did not meet the search criteria. The results are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2. Collocations of “V + *gǎi gé* (reform)” colligation in BCC

Collocation	Stage	Freq	Collocation	Stage	Freq
<i>shēn huà</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (deepen + reform)	Ongoing	12965	<i>tóu shēn</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (devote to + reform)	Ongoing	512
<i>tuī jìn</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (advance + reform)	Ongoing	3153	<i>fā zhǎn</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (develop + reform)	Ongoing	440
<i>jiān chí</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (adhere to + reform)	Ongoing	2369	<i>miàn duì</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (face to + reform)	Ongoing	286
<i>shí xíng</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (implement + reform)	Beginning	1664	<i>zǒng jié</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (conclude + reform)	Finishing	280
<i>yào</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (need + reform)	Before	1477	<i>tí chū</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (put forward + reform)	Before	265
<i>jiā dà</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (intensify + reform)	Ongoing	1262	<i>bǎo zhàng</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (safeguard + reform)	Ongoing	236
<i>shì yìng</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (adapt to + reform)	Ongoing	1001	<i>zēng qiáng</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (strengthen + reform)	Ongoing	230
<i>tuī dòng</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (promote + reform)	Ongoing	722	<i>jì xù</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (continue + reform)	Ongoing	230
<i>wéi hù</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (maintain + reform)	Ongoing	554	<i>lián xi</i> + <i>gǎi gé</i> (link to + reform)	Ongoing	225

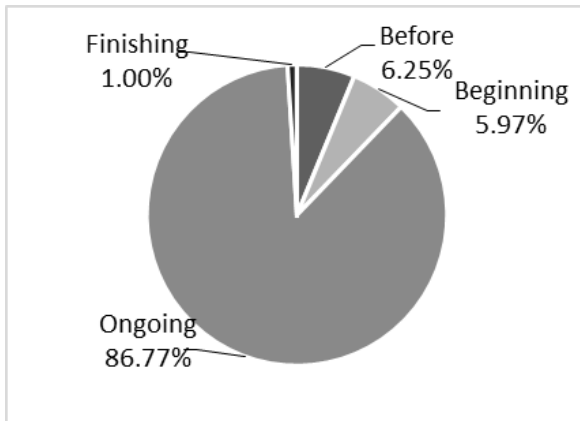


Fig. 2. Proportion of “*gǎi gé* (reform)” stages in GWRs

As shown in the above tables and figures, although the proportion of “Beginning” stage in BCC has decreased compared to GWRs, the “Ongoing” stage still accounts

for the vast majority. The semantic prosody of “V + *gǎi gé* (reform)” appears to be roughly the same in both GWR and BCC.

Table 3. Collocations of “V + Reform” colligation in SOTUs

Collocation	Stage	Freq	Collocation	Stage	Freq
support + reform	Before	3	get down + reform	Beginning	1
enact + reform	Beginning	2	develop + reform	Beginning	1
push for + reform	Beginning	2	implement + reform	Beginning	1
pass + reform	Beginning	2	talk about + reform	Before	1
offer + reform	Ongoing	1			

The State of the Union Address (SOTU) is an annual speech given by the President of the United States to a joint session of Congress. In the speech, the President typically outlines their legislative agenda for the upcoming year and provides an assessment of the country's current stage. ^[11] Both GWR and SOTU are authoritative political documents of the official government in China and the United States, covering comprehensive fields and having strong comparative value. The statistic showed that, however, the vast majority of the verbs in the “V + Reform” colligation in the counterpart- SOTUs belong to the **Beginning** stages (Table 3). One thing that should be mentioned specifically is “support + reform” collocation. The semantic prosody of this collocation cannot be determined solely based on itself, because “support” can refer to specific measures during the implementation stage of reform, or to the support of various parties’ positions before the reform began. Only by analyzing the interaction between compound lexical items and their external context can we describe the semantic prosody of compound lexical items more accurately. ^[12] Therefore, the author expanded the scope of its analysis to include the “external context,” which are as follows:

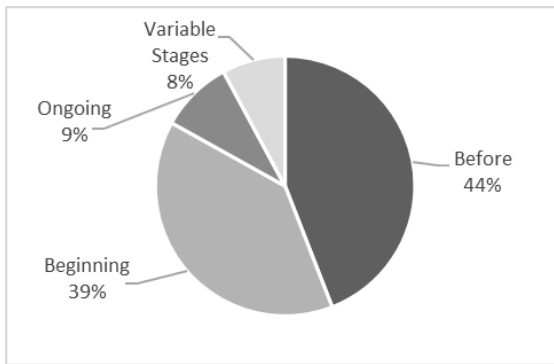
1. “...and to enact police reform in George Floyd's name that passed the House already... The country **supports this reform**, and Congress should act—should act.”
2. “The country **supports immigration reform**. We should act. Let's argue over it, let's debate it, but let's act.”

We cannot classify them into “Beginning” stage, because as is shown in the contexts: “should act”, which means these reforms haven’t even started, and they are just visions of the future. Therefore, the author listed the “support + reform” collocation into “**Before**” stage (the stage before the actual implementation of reform, including the need for reform, the development and proposal of reform plans, and commitments to reform, etc.).

In order to further improve the reliability of the data analysis results, the author expanded the sample range and statistically compared the results with the similar colligation shown in COCA corpus. The top ten most frequent types are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Collocations of “V + Reform” colligation in COCA

Collocation	Freq	Stage	Collocation	Freq	Stage
need + reform	74	Before	institute + reform	14	Beginning
implement + reform	46	Beginning	make + reform	14	Beginning
enact + reform	25	Beginning	introduce + reform	13	Before
making + reform	23	Ongoing	propose + reform	13	Before
support + reform	20	Variable Stages	promise + reform	12	Before

**Fig. 3.** Proportion of “reform” stages in COCA

The Figure 3 presents statistical results similar to those of SOTUs: the vast majority of the types belong to the “**Before**” and “**Beginning**” stages, and there is only one type “making + reform” has the “Ongoing” stage. This proves that the differences between the texts of GWRs and SOTUs on “V + Reform” colligation are not accidental factors. Consequently, the author raises the question: what are the underlying reasons for such differences to exist?

4.2 Analysis of Reform’s Semantic Prosody

4.2.1 The Definitions of “*gǎi gé*” and “reform”

To begin with, the author looked up the Chinese word “*gǎi gé*” (usually translated as “reform” in English) and the English word “reform” to confirm whether they refer to the same thing. Only by first satisfying this prerequisite can the subsequent further research be meaningful. The chosen dictionaries are *Modern Chinese Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary*, both of them are widely regarded as the most authoritative dictionary of Chinese and English, respectively. The definitions of “*gǎi gé*” and

“reform” from *Modern Chinese Dictionary* and *Oxford English Dictionary* are as follows:

3.gǎi gé: To change the old and unreasonable parts of things into new ones that can adapt to the objective situation.

4.reform: Change that is made to a social system, an organization, etc. in order to improve or correct it.

As is shown in the above two definitions, the words “*gǎi gé*” and “reform” have basically the same core implication: “change for the better”, and neither of them particularly emphasized the stages to which “reform” belongs. Therefore, we can acknowledge that translating “*gǎi gé*” as “reform” has basically achieved the functional equivalence. All of the above also demonstrate that the definitions of “*gǎi gé*” and “reform” themselves do not affect the stages of the “V + Reform” colligation. The emphasis on the different stages of “reform” in GWRs and SOTUs should be considered in light of other factors.

4.2.2 The Collocations of “*shēn huà + gǎi gé*” and “deepen + reform”

As is shown in the above tables and figures, the “V + Reform” colligation in GWRs (English version) shows different collocations and different “stage” proportional structures from those in SOTU and COCA. It is likely that comparing the source text of GWRs (Chinese version) with the two mentioned above would yield similar results. The author verified this hypothesis through the following method.

Based on the collocation “*shēn huà + gǎi gé*”, whose literal meaning “deepen + reform” is the most frequent collocation of “V + Reform” colligation in GWRs, the author compiled and summarized the various translations of it in the text, as shown in the Table 5.

Table 5. Translations of “*shēn huà + gǎi gé*” in GWRs (Chinese version)

Translation	Freq	Translation	Freq	Translation	Freq
deepen + reform	154	intensify + reform	2	introduce + reform	1
advance + reform	8	pursue + reform	2	undergo + reform	1
further + reform	6	push forward with + reform	1	speed up + reform	1
continue + reform	5				

The statistical results show that the majority of Chinese collocations “*shēn huà + gǎi gé*” are translated as “deepen + reform”, using a literal translation method. The author also conducted statistics on some other high-frequency Chinese collocations, which also demonstrate a consistent trend. This indicates that in the English version of GWRs, the characteristics of collocations of “V + Reform,” particularly the high proportion of “Ongoing,” directly result from the corresponding characteristics present in the Chinese source text of GWRs. In this regard, translators adopt a literal translation approach in the vast majority of cases.

In order to understand the usage of the collocation of “deepen + reform” in English native texts, the author used the “Collocate” function in COCA corpus, with “reform”

set as the node word, and a span of 2-0, to analyze the collocation strength between “deepen” and “reform.” The statistical results (as is shown in Figure 4) show that based on the aforementioned criteria, the co-occurrence frequencies of “reform” with “deepen” in COCA corpus is 20. However, it is evident from the statistics that the vast majority of its usage comes from Chinese official publicity materials, such as thechinatimes.com. The collocation “deepen + reform” is less commonly used in English native contexts. Therefore, why would translators of GWRs choose to use these “non-native” collocations? We will discuss this further in the following section.

1	2012	BLOG	...adiesfashionblog.com	📍📍📍	reform and opening new vitality to stimulate cultural development. In fact, deepen the reform and opening up is precisely the premise of innovation and tran
2	2012	BLOG	...adiesfashionblog.com	📍📍📍	innovation and transformation to achieve cultural undertakings, industry updates upgrade, need to deepen reform and opening new vitality to stimulate cultu
3	2012	BLOG	...adiesfashionblog.com	📍📍📍	premise of innovation and transformation, innovation in transition must be accompanied by further deepen reform and opening. Shanghai only by the # (liter
4	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	government that has scientifically defined functions and satisfies the people. We should deepen the reform of the system concerning matters subject to gover
5	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	public sector of the economy; allow public ownership to take diverse forms; deepen reform of state-owned enterprises; improve the mechanisms for managir
6	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	a mechanism for equitable sharing of proceeds from public resource transfers. We should deepen reform of the financial system and improve the modern fin
7	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	technology, and place greater emphasis on making innovation through collaboration. We should deepen reform of the system for managing science and techi
8	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	fair, and civilized way according to due procedures. We should continue to deepen reform of the judicial structure, uphold and improve the socialist judicial sy
9	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	officials are guided by law in both thinking and action in their effort to deepen reform , promote development, solve problems, and maintain stability. As the C
10	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	's own authority above the law or abuse the law. # 5. Deepen reform of the administrative system # Reform of the administrative system is a necessary requir
11	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	county-level cities directly under the jurisdiction of provincial governments where conditions permit, and deepen reform of the administrative system at the tr
12	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	is critical to inspire the cultural creativity of the whole nation. We should deepen reform of the cultural sector, release and develop cultural productive forces,
13	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	To ensure that the people share in the fruits of development, we must deepen reform of the income distribution system, and increase individual income in str
14	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	distribution mainly through taxation, social security, and transfer payments. We should deepen reform of the wage and salary system in enterprises, governm
15	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	, township and village levels and the system of urban community health services, deepen reform of public hospitals, and encourage the development of privat
16	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	farmland and systems for managing water resources and protecting the environment. We should deepen reform of prices, taxes and fees for resource produ
17	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	strict accordance with these principles and make them more transparent. # 4. Deepen reform of the system for the management of officials and personnel ar
18	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	promote officials who are outstanding in performance and enjoy popular support. We should deepen reform of the system for the management of officials ar
19	2012	BLOG	thechinatimes.com	📍📍📍	exercise of power by leading officials, especially principal leading officials. We should deepen reform of key areas and crucial links, improve the system of anti
20	1997	ACAD	AsianAffairs	📍📍📍	the most liberal speeches of his career, Jiang said the Party must “ deepen reform to eradicate obstacles to productivity.” (n1) Jiang vowed to follow in

Fig. 4. Search results of the collocations of “reform” with “deepen” in COCA

4.2.3 Reasons for Reform’s Semantic Prosody: From the Perspective of Lexical Priming.

Michael Hoey’s definition of lexical priming is: “As a word is acquired through encounters with it in speech and writing, it becomes cumulatively loaded with the contexts and co-texts in which it is encountered, and our knowledge of it includes the fact that it co-occurs with certain other words in certain kinds of context.” [9] The word “reform” would “prime” profound and diverse semantic prosodies for the Chinese government and the Chinese people. For the Chinese people, when the term “*gǎi gé*” (reform) is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is “*gǎi gé kāi fàng*” (*Reform and Opening-up* policy). It was first proposed at the *Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* in 1978. As a long-term fundamental national policy of China, it has provided policy guarantees for the subsequent rapid economic and social development in China. The living standards of the Chinese people have also seen significant improvements. The connotation of “*Reform and Opening up*” includes basic values such as promoting discourse construction and identity, enhancing ideological deepening and internalization, and promoting practical transformation and innovation. The Chinese government has formed a consensus on *reform and opening up* by constructing a “community of shared values.” [13] This

explains from a socio-psychological perspective why the “Ongoing” stage of reform has a high proportion in GWRs.

To explore why there exist differences between GWRs and English native texts in terms of the semantic prosody of “reform,” further in-depth analysis is needed. The “past experience” is also the mechanism of lexical priming. [9] According to Table 3, the stages of “reform” in SOTUs are mostly “Before” and “Beginning”. The author conducted a statistical analysis of the specific contents of reform in the “V + Reform” collocations and marked the year in which they occurred, as is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. “V + reform” collocations in SOTUs (sorted by years)

Year	Verb	Content of Reform	Stage	Year	Verb	Content of Reform	Stage
2013	pass	immigration reform	Beginning	2017	implement	legal reform	Beginning
	enact	medicare reform	Beginning		develop	tax reform	Beginning
2014	get down	immigration reform	Beginning	2021	support	immigration reform	Before
	offer	voting system reform	Ongoing			police reform	Before
	pass	patent reform	Beginning		enact	police reform	Beginning
2016	push for	election reform	Beginning		talk about	immigration reform	Before

Regarding the phrase “support immigration reform” in 2021, its context is “*The country supports immigration reform. We should act. Let's argue over it, let's debate it, but let's act.*” This means that in 2021, immigration reform hadn’t been implemented, at least as reflected in the text. Therefore, the author listed its stage as “Before”. However, with regards to “immigration reform,” in 2014, the specific context was as follows: “*So let's get immigration reform done this year. [Applause] Let's get it done. It's time.*” The two contexts contradict each other: in 2014, it was explicitly staged that immigration reform would be implemented that year, but by at least 2021, the reform was still in the conceptual stage. This indicates a contradiction and inconsistency between the two. It is possible that due to political, economic, and other factors, the immigration reform plan proposed in 2014 was not ultimately implemented that year. In light of this, the author has also compiled the KWIC (Key Words in Context) for “immigration reform” in multiple years of SOTUs, as shown in the Table 7:

Table 7. KWIC of “immigration reform” in SOTUs

Year	KWIC (Key Word in Context)
2013	So let’s get this done. Send me a comprehensive immigration reform bill in the next few months, and I will sign it right away.
2014	So let’s get immigration reform done this year.

- 2017 I believe that real and positive **immigration reform** is possible, ...
- 2018 Over the next few weeks, the House and Senate will be voting on an **immigration reform** package.
For more than 30 years, politicians have talked about **immigration reform**, and we've done nothing about it. It's time to fix it.
- 2021 The country supports **immigration reform**. We should act. Let's argue over it, let's debate it, but let's act.

As shown in the Table 7 above, “immigration reform” was mentioned in five out of the ten SOTUs from 2013 to 2022, with a promise to implement it as soon as possible. However, the immigration reform has not been implemented up to now. “Over and over, attempts have collapsed.”^[14] Proposed reforms that cannot be implemented due to various obstacles, such as the immigration reform, make it show a high proportion of “Before” and “Beginning” and a low proportion of “Ongoing” and “Finishing” in the overall stages of reform in SOTU and COCA corpora.

Through observation of the texts of GWRs, the author found that the stages of verbs or verb phases preceding the phrase “*zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé*” (reform of separating permits from the business license) have obvious diversity and are correlated with the year in which they appear, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Actions of “reform of separating permits from the business license” in GWRs

Year	Collocation	Translation	Action
2016	<i>kāi zhǎn zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé shì diǎn</i>	launch trials to separate operating permits and business licenses	launch trials
2017	<i>kuò dà zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé shì diǎn</i>	expand trials to separate operating permits and business licenses	expand trails
2018	<i>zài quán guó tuī kāi zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé</i>	rolled out nationwide the reform separating permits and certificates from business licenses	roll out nationwide
	<i>zài quán guó tuī kāi zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé</i>	implement nationwide the reform separating permits from the business license	implement nationwide
2019	<i>duì suǒ yǒu shè qǐ jīng yíng xǔ kě shì xiàng shí xíng zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé</i>	all operating permits required of businesses will be separated from the business license	implement to all operating permits
2021	<i>shēn huà zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé</i>	advance the reform for separating operating permits from business licenses	advance

As shown in Table 8, the “*zhèng zhào fēn lí gǎi gé*” (reform of separating permits from the business license) has different “actions” in different years, and there is a progressive relationship between these “actions”: from “launch trials” in 2016, “expand trials” in 2017, “roll out nationwide” in 2018, to “implement nationwide” and “implement to all operating permits” in 2019, until “advance” in 2021. These “actions” show us a comprehensive reform process. Actually, there are also other similar examples in GWRs, such as “V + reform of household registration system”. In 2013, China passed the “*Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensive Deepening of Reforms*”, which included “comprehensive deepening of reforms” in political documents and listed it as a key task for China’s economic and social development. This decision clarified the important stage of reform from the perspective of the country. ^[15] Additionally, the author combined the “*State Council Policy Document Library*” ^[16] on the “*China Government Website*” to conduct a statistical analysis on the X (i.e., the content of the reform) in the “V + Reform” colligation. It was found that more than half of the reforms had started before 2013, e.g., rural reform, tax system reform and price reform. As the corpus for this study only included government work report documents from 2013 to 2022, this also explains why many reforms in the statistical results have only “Ongoing” stage but no “Before” or “Beginning” stage. Based on the above research results, it can be inferred that the “V + Reform” colligation in GWRs covers various stages such as “Beginning”, “Ongoing”, and “Finishing”, and the proportion of “Ongoing” is relatively large. This is consistent with the actual data initially collected in the study. In recent years, Chinese government has formulated comprehensive plans for many reforms and has been continuously advancing them year by year. Therefore, in the Chinese context, mentioning “reform” is more likely to “prime” the words such as “deepen” and “advance”, whose semantic prosody is “Ongoing” stage. This fact also explains why the “Ongoing” stage has a high proportion in GWRs from a factual perspective.

Returning to the question we raised at the end of the previous section: why would translators of GWRs choose to use these “non-native” collocations? This can be explained by two reasons: first, there might be errors in the English translation of Chinese official documents, which did not consider the “nativeness” of the translation. However, this is unlikely since the translators selected by the Chinese government possess strong professional abilities. Second, the translator intentionally translated it this way to create certain specific effects.

Hoey’s (2011) research indicates that the triggering of equivalent words in the two languages may be vastly different, and the translator’s choice is a potential factor in causing changes to the lexical priming of the target language. Translation inevitably involves the use of translation strategies, and from the perspective of “lexical priming,” the question is whether to preserve the source language’s lexical priming or adopt the target language’s lexical priming. ^[17] In the Chinese context, “*gǎi gé*” (reform) is more likely to trigger words such as “deepen” and “advance,” while in the English context, “need,” “implement,” and “enact” are more closely associated with “reform.” From the perspective of metaphorical studies, “reform” in China is an ongoing journey that requires further exploration, and enhancement, the high proportion

of “Ongoing” stage indicates that it aligns with the notion of a “path” metaphor, where the abstract concept of reform is understood in terms of progress, movement, and continuous improvement along a specific trajectory or course. While in native English texts, the action “reform” tends to be a one-time event, which is corresponding to the statistic result shown in Figure 3. The translators of GWRs tend to preserve the lexical priming of the source language during translation, as shown in Table 5. Hoey also notes that preserving the source language’s lexical priming during translation can better preserve the linguistic features of the source language and sometimes have a creative effect. [17] The Chinese government emphasizes the “Chinese characteristics” in its foreign publicity materials to better distinguish itself and “convey China’s voice to the world.” [18] Translators of political documents play an important role in a country’s external communication. Huang Youyi, a Chinese expert translator in publicity materials, mentioned, “Helping foreign audiences understand China is by no means about abandoning Chinese elements, but rather carefully selecting and preserving the cultural background and linguistic characteristics of China.” [19] The use of collocations that do not conform to the lexical priming of the target language, such as “deepen reform”, can reflect the Chinese government’s political intention to preserve China’s own characteristics and shape its image. Moreover, the widespread use of the semantic rhythm of “Ongoing” stage can to some extent create a responsible great-power image of the Chinese government making solid progress in a series of reforms. This also reflects a shift in the translation strategy of Chinese authorities regarding political document translations: from pursuing authenticity and naturalness in line with target languages to creating more expressions that embody Chinese characteristics.

In fact, China’s official translation strategy has indeed achieved certain effects. The author has compiled data on the usage of the collocation “deepen + reform” in United Nations official documents over the past 30 years. Using the “Advanced Search” function on the *United Nations Digital Library* (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/>), the search scope was set to January 1st, 1993 to December 31st, 2022, and the “Partial phrase” search mode was selected. The author entered the query term “deepen reform”, and the frequency of this collocation in different year ranges is shown in Figure 5.

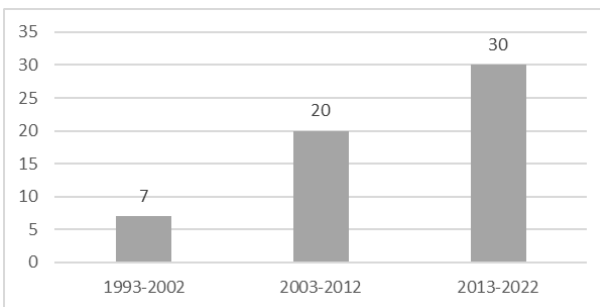


Fig. 5. Frequency of “deepen + reform” collocation in United Nations Digital Library

The above bar chart shows that the frequency of the collocation “deepen + reform” in official United Nations documents has steadily increased over the past thirty years. Although this collocation has strong Chinese characteristics, it has also been gradually accepted by the international community, and the lexical priming mechanism of “reform” in Chinese has had a certain effect on the corresponding triggering mechanism in other countries, thereby achieving the political intention of China’s official “voice of China” documents. It is noteworthy that the collocation of “deepen + reform” appears more frequently in United Nations official documents regarding some African countries, which also reflects China’s influence on these countries. The specific contexts are shown below:

5. “Stresses the need to adopt and **deepen reforms** to ensure adequate labour market flexibility and to remove distortions that encourage capital-intensive production techniques at the expense of labour-intensive ones.” (Economic Commission for Africa: annual report, 2010)

6. “V.2(a) **Deepen Reforms** and Liberalize Further” (Multilateral trading system impact on the national economy and external trade policy adaptation: Ghana, 2002)

In summary, based on the theoretical framework of “Lexical Priming”, the multi-dimensional connotations of the word “reform” itself, the historical actions and political intentions of the Chinese government, all contribute to the unusually high proportion of the “Ongoing” semantic prosody of the word “reform.”

5 Conclusions

This study established the corpora of the *Chinese Government Work Reports* (GWRs) and the *American State of the Union Addresses* (SOTUs) from 2013 to 2022, focusing on the colligation of “V + reform,” and analyzed its semantic prosody (especially the stages of the action “reform”, e.g. “Before”, “Beginning”, “Ongoing”) in these materials. The results showed that in GWR and BCC corpora, the stages of “reform” are mainly “Ongoing” and “Beginning,” while in SOTU and COCA corpora, “Before” and “Beginning” account for a large proportion, with a very small proportion of “Ongoing” state.

Based on the theory of “Lexical Priming”, the author concluded three major “primes” for the semantic prosody of “*gǎi gé*” (reform) in GWRs: 1. It has multi-dimensional connotations in Chinese context, especially the “*Reform and Opening up*” policy; 2. For several years, Chinese government has formulated comprehensive plans for reforms and has been continuously advancing them, causing the high proportion of “ongoing” stage in GWRs objectively. 3. Using “non-native” collocations such as “*shēn huà + gǎi gé*” (deepen + reform) in translation conforms to China’s political intention of showcasing its “Chinese characteristics” to the world and establishing China’s image, and the widespread use of the path metaphor pattern (“Ongoing” stage) can help to create a responsible great-power image of the Chinese government making solid progress in a series of reforms. Through analyzing United Nations official documents, it can be proved that this political intention has been achieved to some extent and has affected the “Lexical Priming” mechanism of the word “reform” in other countries and the United Nations.

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