



An LLM-Assisted Study on Translating Conceptual Metaphors in China's Women's Development Discourse

Qianrou Lu* and Yazhi Yao

School of Languages and Communication Studies, Beijing Jiaotong University, Beijing, 100044, China

*23321068@bjtu.edu.cn

Abstract. This study examines how conceptual metaphors in the white paper titled *China's Achievements in Women's Well-Rounded Development in the New Era* are rendered in its official English translation. Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study analyzes 387 aligned Chinese-English sentence pairs and 127 metaphorical expressions identified through a Large Language Model (LLM)-assisted but human-validated procedure. The findings indicate that the Chinese source text primarily draws on source domains of building, journey, and action to frame women's development as a progressive, structured, and practice-oriented process. The English translation mainly adopts three strategies: literal retention, image transformation, and demetaphorization with semantic compensation. Their distribution suggests a domain-sensitive pattern: metaphors that are conventional and cross-linguistically accessible are more likely to be retained, whereas culturally marked or rhetorically condensed expressions tend to be reformulated. This study contributes to research on metaphor translation in Chinese policy discourse by extending it to the relatively underexplored area of women's development discourse. It also introduces a transparent small-scale methodological model that combines LLM-assisted identification with manual validation.

Keywords: Conceptual metaphor, Translation strategy, Women's development discourse, Chinese policy discourse, International communication

1 Introduction

Government white papers are important sites for observing how policy meanings are framed, legitimized, and communicated across languages. As official documents addressed to both domestic and international audiences, they not only present information, but also construct interpretable narratives about national development, social progress, and governance priorities. ^[1] In this process, conceptual metaphor plays a significant role. By mapping abstract policy issues onto more familiar experiential domains, metaphor helps organize complex ideas, shape evaluative positions, and improve communicative accessibility across contexts. ^[2] In the discourse of women's development in particular, metaphor can frame policy goals and social change in ways that are cognitively salient and rhetorically persuasive.

Existing studies have examined metaphor use and metaphor translation in political and policy discourse, including Chinese diplomatic, military, and economic texts.^[3] However, relatively little attention has been paid to women's development discourse in official Chinese policy translation. In addition, previous studies have often focused either on qualitative discussion of selected examples or on broad descriptive categorization, whereas fewer studies have combined source-domain distribution, translation-strategy analysis, and a transparent identification procedure within a parallel Chinese-English corpus.

To address these gaps, this study investigates conceptual metaphors in the Chinese white paper *China's Achievements in Women's Well-Rounded Development in the New Era* and examines how they are rendered in its official English translation. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and a Large Language Model (LLM)-assisted but human-validated identification procedure, the study analyzes the distribution of source domains in the Chinese text and the translation strategies adopted in the English version. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What source domains are most prominent in the Chinese text of the white paper?
2. What translation strategies are most frequently adopted in the official English version?
3. Do different source domains show different tendencies in translation-strategy selection?

This study contributes to research on metaphor translation in China's women's development discourse and offers a transparent small-scale model for combining LLM-assisted identification with manual validation in a parallel corpus. By linking source-domain analysis with translation-strategy analysis, the study aims to offer a more fine-grained account of how metaphorical framing is selectively preserved, reshaped, or reduced in the international communication of Chinese policy discourse.

2 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which treats metaphor not merely as a rhetorical device but as a cognitive mechanism for understanding abstract concepts through more concrete or embodied experience.^[2] Conceptual metaphor involves systematic mappings from a source domain to a target domain, thereby shaping perception, reasoning, and evaluation.^[4]

In policy discourse, such mappings help make abstract agendas more intelligible and persuasive.^[5] In the present study, women's development is treated as the central target domain, and metaphorical expressions in the Chinese text are examined in terms of their source domains. Attention is paid to source-domain distribution because differences in conventionality, cultural embeddedness, and cross-linguistic accessibility may affect metaphor translation.

2.2 Analytical Framework for Metaphor Translation

Translation strategy refers to the set of principles and procedures adopted in the translation process to achieve specific purposes. [6] For translation analysis, this study adopts a strategy-based framework informed by Newmark [7] and subsequent research on conceptual metaphor translation in Chinese policy discourse. [8] On this basis, three principal strategies are identified: literal retention, image transformation, and demetaphorization with semantic compensation.

2.3 Corpus Construction and Analytical Procedure

Corpus Construction and Processing. The study adopts an LLM-assisted but human-validated procedure for metaphor identification and coding. The bilingual corpus was drawn from the Chinese and English versions of the white paper *China’s Achievements in Women’s Well-Rounded Development in the New Era*. To facilitate parallel analysis, the two texts were aligned at the paragraph and sentence levels, and each aligned unit was assigned a corresponding code. As shown in Table 1, the analysis is based on a small parallel corpus of 387 aligned sentence pairs.

Table 1. Corpus and coding overview

Category	Item	Value
Corpus	Chinese source text length (tokens)	20,134
Corpus	English target text length (tokens)	13,753
Corpus	Number of aligned sentence pairs	387
Identification	Candidate metaphorical Chinese expressions flagged by LLM	218
Identification	Number of expressions retained after manual validation	140
Identification	Number of expressions included in final analysis	127
Reliability	Second-coded sample size	26
Reliability	Share of data double-coded	20.5%

Metaphor Identification and Coding Procedures. Metaphor identification was conducted in two stages. First, the Chinese source text was processed sentence by sentence with the assistance of a large language model (ChatGPT-5.4) to retrieve potentially metaphorical lexical items or phrases. [9] The LLM was used only for candidate retrieval and preliminary source-domain suggestion; it was not involved in final identification or strategy classification. Second, all candidates were manually reviewed with reference to the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) [10]. A lexical item or phrase was treated as metaphorical when its contextual meaning could be understood in comparison with a more basic meaning grounded in concrete or embodied experience, and when the relation between the two involved a cross-domain mapping. Highly conventionalized policy expressions were included only when their metaphorical motivation remained analytically salient in the context.

Following identification, each retained instance was coded for source domain and translation strategy. Source-domain coding captured recurrent conceptual patterns in the Chinese text, while strategy coding examined how metaphorical meaning was

rendered in the translation. Ambiguous, weakly metaphorical, or irrelevant cases were excluded. To improve reliability, 20.5% of the dataset was independently reviewed by a second coder, and disagreements were resolved through contextual discussion.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Distribution of Source Domains and Translation Strategies

Table 2. Distribution of translation strategies across source domains

Source do- main	Literal retention n (%)	Image transformation n (%)	Demetaphorization with compensation n (%)	Total
Building	13 (48.1%)	2 (7.4%)	12 (44.4%)	27
Action	2 (8.7%)	8 (34.8%)	13 (56.5%)	23
Journey	17 (73.9%)	5 (21.7%)	1 (4.3%)	23
Others	31 (57.4%)	2 (3.7%)	21 (38.9%)	54
Total	63	17	47	127

Table 2 displays a clear domain-sensitive pattern in translation-strategy choice. Overall, metaphorical framing is more likely to be preserved in the English version when the source-domain imagery is conventional, cross-linguistically accessible, and compatible with English policy discourse. By contrast, metaphorical expressions that are more rhetorically condensed, culturally marked, or less idiomatic in direct transfer are more likely to be reformulated or demetaphorized.

Journey metaphors demonstrate the highest rate of literal retention (73.9%), suggesting that they are more readily preserved in translation. A plausible reason is that mappings such as development as a journey, progress as forward movement, and achievement as a milestone are highly conventional in both Chinese and English policy discourse. This strong cross-linguistic accessibility makes direct transfer both semantically clear and rhetorically natural.

By contrast, action metaphors show the lowest rate of literal retention (8.7%) and the highest rate of demetaphorization with semantic compensation (56.5%). This pattern indicates that many action-based expressions in the Chinese text rely on compact, embodied, or idiomatic imagery. Therefore, the English translation tends to recast the metaphor into more abstract, institutionally neutral formulations.

Building metaphors fall between these two patterns, with literal retention (48.1%) and demetaphorization (44.4%) being at similar rates. Some building imagery is readily transferable, while other expressions are more closely tied to Chinese political rhetoric and thus more likely to be translated in less metaphorical terms.

These findings suggest that metaphor translation strategy in the white paper is not governed by a uniform preference for metaphor preservation or reduction, but by the interaction of source-domain conventionality, rhetorical density, and target-language discourse norms. Given the small dataset, the results are best understood as descriptive tendencies rather than as statistically generalizable patterns.

3.2 Analysis of Major Translation Strategies

Literal Retention. Literal retention is adopted when the target text preserves a metaphorical expression that corresponds closely to the source-text image or source domain. This strategy is most likely to occur when the underlying conceptual mapping is conventional in both languages and can be transferred without causing semantic opacity or stylistic awkwardness.

Example 1. “中国式现代化的新征程上，每一个人都是主角。”

“On the new journey of Chinese modernization, every individual plays a key role.”

Example 2. “会议通过的《北京宣言》和《行动纲领》成为全球性别平等事业的里程碑。”

“The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the conference has since become a milestone for global gender equality.”

In these examples, the Chinese expressions “新征程” and “里程碑” are rendered as “new journey” and “milestone” respectively. The source-domain imagery is preserved with minimal adjustment, and the corresponding conceptual metaphors remain intact in the English translation. This strategy not only maintains semantic correspondence between the source and target texts, but also reproduces the rhetorical framing of development as movement and achievement as a marked point along that movement. The relatively high frequency of such cases in the corpus is consistent with the strong translatability of journey metaphors noted in Section 3.1.

Image Transformation. Image transformation occurs when the target text retains a metaphorical expression but reformulates the images through a different source domain or a different lexical realization. In such cases, the original metaphor is not directly reproduced; instead, it is reshaped into a form that is more idiomatic, vivid, or rhetorically effective in English.

Example 3. “.....需要凝聚亿万妇女力量。”

“This requires pooling the strength of hundreds of millions of women.”

In Example 3, the source expression “凝聚” conveys the idea of bringing dispersed strength together into a unified force. The English rendering “pooling” introduces a more explicit metaphorical image associated with the gathering of liquid resources. The source-text image is therefore not literally retained; instead, it is reformulated through an alternative metaphorical resource that is more idiomatic in English while still conveying the intended sense of concentration and mobilization.

This strategy shows that metaphor translation is not limited to either literal retention or complete removal of imagery. In some cases, translators may adopt a different metaphorical resource in the target language in order to preserve rhetorical effect while enhancing readability and naturalness. Image transformation, in this sense, is best understood as a form of adaptive metaphorical reformulation rather than simple substitution.

Demetaphorization with Semantic Compensation. This strategy is used when the source-text metaphor cannot be effectively reproduced through a comparable metaphor

in the target language. In such cases, the metaphorical image is reduced or omitted, while the core propositional meaning is retained through a more explicit or abstract formulation.

Example 4. “她们在科技创新前沿阵地啃‘硬骨头’，破‘卡脖子’难题，潜心攻坚。”

“They are tackling tough problems and achieving breakthroughs in pioneering fields.”

In Example 4, “啃硬骨头” and “卡脖子” are both conventional conceptual metaphors. The former draws on the bodily experience of gnawing a hard bone to map the effort required to overcome difficult problems, while the latter uses the image of physical constraint to represent technological bottlenecks. In the translation, neither image is preserved separately. Instead, they are compressed into the more abstract formulation “tackling tough problems”, which conveys the core meaning of confronting and overcoming difficulty. The phrase “achieving breakthroughs” further compensates for part of the source-text meaning by restoring an implication of progress and successful resolution, even though the original bodily imagery is omitted. Compared with literal retention, this strategy reduces rhetorical vividness; however, it improves clarity, concision, and stylistic compatibility with English policy discourse. This helps explain why demetaphorization is especially frequent in the translation of action-based metaphors, as shown in Table 2.

4 Conclusion

This study examined conceptual metaphors in the Chinese white paper titled *China’s Achievements in Women’s Well-Rounded Development in the New Era* and their rendering in the official English translation. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and an LLM-assisted but human-validated identification procedure, it analyzed source-domain distribution in the Chinese text and translation strategies in the English version. The findings show that journey, building, and action are the major source domains framing women’s development in the source text. In the translation, three main strategies were identified: literal retention, image transformation, and demetaphorization with semantic compensation. Their distribution suggests that strategy choice is domain-sensitive: conventional and cross-linguistically accessible metaphors are more likely to be retained, whereas rhetorically dense or culturally marked expressions are more often reformulated.

The study extends metaphor translation research to the relatively underexplored field of women’s development discourse in official Chinese policy translation and illustrates the value of combining source-domain analysis with translation-strategy analysis in a small parallel corpus.

The study is limited by its focus on a single white paper and a relatively small dataset, so the findings should be understood as descriptive tendencies rather than broadly generalizable patterns. Future research may expand the corpus, compare policy genres, and incorporate audience-oriented or corpus-based approaches.

References

1. Ma, L., & Crosthwaite, P. Constructing China's national image through political discourse: A corpus-based diachronic analysis of government work reports (2001-2025). *Applied Corpus Linguistics*, 100179. DOI: 10.1016/j.acorp.2025.100179 (2025)
2. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/M/bo3637992.html> (2008)
3. Sun, Y., Kong, D., & Zhou, C. ECONOMY or ECOLOGY: metaphor use over time in China's Government Work Reports. *Language and Cognition*, 15(3), 551-573. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/langcog.2023.18> (2023)
4. Shu, D. F. On the cognitive function of metaphor. *Foreign Language Research*, (2), 28-31. (in Chinese) DOI: 10.13978/j.cnki.wyyj.2001.02.006 (2001)
5. Juszczak, K., Konat, B., & Fabiszak, M. The heart attack of the Polish health service: metaphors, arguments, and emotional appeals in political debates. *Language and Cognition*, 17, e12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/langcog.2024.35> (2025)
6. Xiong, B. Conceptual confusion in translation studies: A case study of "translation strategies," "translation methods," and "translation techniques." *Chinese Translators Journal*, 35(3), 82-88. (in Chinese) (2014)
7. Newmark, P. *A textbook of translation*. Prentice-Hall International. <https://search.worldcat.org/title/A-textbook-of-translation/oclc/794689057> (1988)
8. Yuan, W. A. Study on the translation of metaphors in China's poverty alleviation discourse: A case study of the English translation of the white paper Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution. *Foreign Language and Literature*, 41(05), 129-141. (in Chinese) DOI: 10.26922/j.cnki.waiguoyuwen.2025.05.013 (2025)
9. Yu, D., Li, L., Su, H., & Fuoli, M. Assessing the potential of LLM-assisted annotation for corpus-based pragmatics and discourse analysis: The case of apology. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 29(4), 534-561. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.23087.yu> (2024)
10. Steen, G. J., Dorst, A. G., Krennmayr, T., Kaal, A. A., & Herrmann, J. B. A method for linguistic metaphor identification. Permalink: <http://digital.casalini.it/9789027288158> (2010).
11. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (2025, September 19). *China's Achievements in Women's Well-Rounded Development in the New Era*. https://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/zfbps_2279/ (All examples come from the white paper.)

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

