

The Study of Conceptual Metaphors in Chinese Ecological Discourse: A Critical Metaphor Analysis Approach

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Abstract

China is committed to the environmental protection since Xi Jinping's come-into- power. "Beautiful China" is an initiative proposed in 2012 by the Communist Party of China, which was integrated into China's five-year development goal by president Xi Jinping. And in 2017, Xi stressed the importance of constructing beautiful China. Conceptual metaphor is a vital tool to convey people's thought and attitude, which have aroused substantial interest from modern language studies and research. This study addresses the gap in understanding how conceptual metaphors shape ecological discourse in Chinese media, particularly around the theme of "beautiful China." Despite the growing prominence of ecological concerns in China, there has been limited research on the types and functions of metaphors that influence public perception and policy framing in ecological narratives. By employing a critical metaphor analysis approach, this study investigates ecological discourses in Chinese news articles. The results reveal five dominant conceptual metaphors—Journey, Building, Money, Body, and Kin—that are identified through a corpus-assisted approach and the application of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and Steen's method. These findings emphasize the strategic role of metaphors in shaping ecological discourse, offering insights into the conceptual metaphors' functions used in Chinese media. The government's environmental ideology is reflected in the way metaphors persuade the public to support environmental protection, highlighting China's commitment to building an ecologically balanced nation.

Keywords: Conceptual metaphor, Critical discourse analysis, Ecological news discourses, Beautiful China initiative.

1. Introduction

With the degradation of China's ecological environment, the government has recognized the urgent challenges of resource scarcity, severe environmental pollution, and ecological imbalances. In response to these pressing issues, the concept of "Beautiful China" was introduced at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012. To drive ecological restoration, President Xi Jinping called for an accelerated pace of ecological reform. Newspapers play a crucial role in this effort by communicating the government's vision with clear and impactful language that resonates with the public.

People engaged so much through news in the press and television, besides the daily conversation interaction [1]. There are many studies have investigated the news discourse. For example, have explored the underlying ideologies and persuasive effects in political news; Santa Ana (1999) has studied the immigrant news discourse, etc. It could be seen that there are many sub-categories from news discourse can be analyzed from the news discourse. To make news reports accessible and perceivable by readers, it's indispensable to make use of metaphors strengthening the bond between the government and people.

Metaphors have long been viewed as rhetorical devices, but in 1980, Lakoff and Johnson expanded this concept significantly. They redefined metaphors as tools for understanding and

experiencing abstract or unfamiliar ideas by relating them to concrete and familiar notions. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) [2] conceptual metaphor "ARGUMENT IS WAR," from their book *Metaphors We Live By*, illustrates how daily expressions frame arguments (the target domain) in terms of war (the source domain).

Similarly, in ecological news reporting, metaphors are used to help readers grasp the importance of environmental protection. For example, the metaphor "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" conveys the idea that nature's elements are precious. Another instance is "kidneys of the earth," used to describe wetlands. This metaphor helps readers relate the ecological role of wetlands to the function of kidneys in the human body, emphasizing their essential role in maintaining the earth's health and the need for their protection.

While conceptual metaphor analysis has been widely used in various fields, there is limited research specifically applying this approach to ecological discourse in China. Much of the existing research focuses on broader environmental communication without delving deeply into the specific metaphors that frame ecological issues. For instance, Yubinbin (2021) [3] stated how China's new type urbanization declined the pollution emissions and increased energy efficiency from 2003 to 2017 [4] investigated China's efforts in air pollution control to show the success of Chinese ecological civilization construction; [5]

explains though eco-efficiency is low, the ‘resource curse’ doesn’t appear in the eco-efficiency area. Ecological discourse often highlights problems and solutions but lacks emphasis on raising public awareness of conservation. This study uses cognitive approaches to explore how language influences thought, aiming to build collective awareness to prevent ecological degradation.

Most studies emphasize government or official discourse, with insufficient attention given to how news articles represent the “Beautiful China” initiative through metaphors. For instance [6] investigated the effectiveness of ‘Beautiful China Initiative’ in 341 cities [7] explained the corresponding relationship between the BCI and land spatial planning [8] proved the profound impact of BCI on China’s air quality improvement. They have conducted empirical studies to examine the impact of the Beautiful China Initiative on air pollution, land planning, and energy efficiency. However, these studies often overlook how media outlets frame these ecological narratives. Thus, analyzing conceptual metaphors in ecological news discourse is crucial to understanding how metaphors influence public attitudes and the effectiveness of communication strategies in promoting environmental awareness.

To the knowledge of the researcher, there were few studies have been conducted on the ecological news discourses relating to the BCI using corpus assisted methods. Research by Yang, K., & Sun, Y. (2024) [9] on metaphor usage through corpus approaches could be useful for understanding how metaphors related to ecological issues are framed in Chinese media but lacks direct focus on BCI. Through analyzing the news discourses with the help of Wmatrix and identified by MIP and Steen’s methods, the conceptual metaphors and metaphor types can be sorted out.

The current study attempts to address the following research questions:

- (1) What conceptual metaphors are most commonly employed in ecological news discourse featuring the term ‘Beautiful China’?
- (2) How do these conceptual metaphors reflect underlying ideologies in the Chinese socio-political context?

2. Literature

The study of conceptual metaphors in ecological discourse has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly in the context of global climate change and environmental policy communication. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), posits that metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but cognitive tools that shape how individuals understand complex phenomena. In ecological discourse, metaphors help frame abstract environmental issues in more accessible ways, influencing public opinion and policy directions [10]. This review explores existing studies on metaphor use in ecological discourse, the specific case of Chinese media, and the critical metaphor analysis approach.

Metaphors in Ecological Discourse

Metaphors have been identified as central to communicating environmental issues in public discourse. Common metaphors

in ecological discourse include framing the Earth as a “fragile organism,” environmental degradation as “war” or “battle,” and sustainability as a “journey” [2]. These metaphorical frames serve to simplify complex ecological processes, making them comprehensible to a broader audience. The study by Koteyko, N., & Atanasova, D. (2016) [11] reveals that metaphors in ecological discourse continue to serve as powerful persuasive tools, shaping public perception and influencing attitudes toward environmental policies. Their findings highlight the critical role of metaphors in framing climate change, conservation, and sustainability as pressing, collective challenges that demand immediate and coordinated action.

Chinese ecological discourse is no exception to this global trend, though the specific metaphors used reflect the cultural and political context. Given the prominence of governmental initiatives like the Beautiful China Initiative (BCI), metaphors are employed not only to raise awareness of environmental issues but also to align public sentiment with national development goals. The use of metaphors in China’s ecological discourse is thus deeply intertwined with the country’s political ideology and vision for modernization and ecological harmony [12].

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and Environmental Communication

Building on conceptual metaphor theory, Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) provides a methodological framework for analyzing the ideological functions of metaphors in discourse. According to Charteris-Black (2004) [13], metaphors are integral to how individuals and societies construct meaning, and therefore, their use in media and political discourse often reflects underlying power dynamics and ideologies. In the case of environmental communication, CMA has been used to uncover how metaphors frame ecological issues in ways that either support or challenge dominant ideologies [14]; [15]. A significant body of research has examined the use of metaphors in Western media’s coverage of climate change and ecological crises [16]. These studies often focus on the prevalence of war metaphors (e.g., “fight against climate change”) and journey metaphors (e.g., “path to sustainability”), both of which highlight the urgency and moral responsibility associated with environmental protection. However, there is a noticeable gap in research concerning how ecological metaphors are employed in Chinese media, particularly in the context of state-led initiatives like the Beautiful China Initiative (BCI).

Chinese Ecological Discourse and the Beautiful China Initiative

The Beautiful China Initiative (BCI) is a central component of China’s environmental governance and sustainable development policy, introduced as part of the country’s broader goal of ecological civilization. The initiative emphasizes the integration of environmental protection into economic and social development, promoting the idea that economic growth and ecological preservation are not mutually exclusive [17]. As such, the BCI has become a recurring theme in Chinese media, often framed through metaphorical language that emphasizes harmony between humans and nature, progress, and national rejuvenation [6].

Research on Chinese media's portrayal of environmental policies has often focused on the strategic use of metaphors to shape public perceptions of government-led initiatives [9]. In particular, metaphors in ecological discourse are used to communicate the moral and ideological imperatives behind state policies, as well as to foster national unity in pursuit of environmental goals [18]. However, while previous studies have analyzed the language of ecological discourse in a general sense, few have conducted corpus-assisted studies using Critical Metaphor Analysis to explore how metaphors specifically related to the Beautiful China Initiative shape public understanding.

Despite the growing body of literature on metaphor use in ecological discourse, studies that focus on the intersection of metaphor, Chinese environmental policies, and media representation remain limited. The present study aims to fill this gap by conducting a Critical Metaphor Analysis of ecological discourse in China Daily using the keyword "Beautiful China." By exploring the metaphors embedded in media narratives, this research seeks to understand how the concept of "Beautiful China" is metaphorically constructed and how these constructions align with or challenge dominant environmental ideologies within the Chinese socio-political context.

Furthermore, the use of a corpus-based approach in this study adds a quantitative dimension to the analysis, allowing for the systematic identification of metaphorical patterns and their frequency in the discourse. This methodology offers deeper insights into the relationship between metaphorical language and ideology, particularly in the context of China's state-driven environmental initiatives.

In summary, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a critical examination of how metaphors in Chinese ecological discourse, specifically in China Daily, reflect broader socio-political ideologies related to the Beautiful China Initiative. By analyzing the metaphorical framing of this concept, this research sheds light on the role of language in shaping public perceptions of environmental sustainability and governance in China.

3. Methodology

The methodology is divided into five key components: the data, data collection, instruments, analytical framework, and data analysis. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how metaphors shape narratives around the Beautiful China Initiative. The following subsections will detail the specific data sources, the processes used to gather and organize the data, the tools employed for analysis, the theoretical framework guiding the research, and the methods used to interpret the findings.

3.1. The Data

Since China Daily is controlled by the government, it's an important channel for Chinese government spreading ideas to readers around the world or constructing images to demonstrate Chinese government's determination to solve environment problems. China Daily was founded in 1995, it is the earliest national English website in China, and has become a national comprehensive media website and the most influential English portal in China, with an average daily page visit of more than 47 million. Furthermore, China Daily gathers reports and the voice of reporters from different countries. Therefore, China Daily has the distinct report emphasis. Particularly in the opinion part, comments of many foreign scholars and commenters are included, as well as more abundant material selection angle. The 'Beautiful China Initiative' will be explained and interpreted through different perspectives. This study will analyze the types and functions of metaphors in Chinese ecological articles from China Daily newspaper as well as the ideologies revealed through the metaphor uses.

3.2. Data Collection

This study takes China Daily news articles in 2022. October 2022 witnessed the opening of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in which Xi Jinping delivered a speech to emphasize healthy China initiative. China is committed to enhance the ecological sustainability and aims to reach peak carbon emissions and carbon neutrality. Based on this ecological protection strategy, the news article serves as a vantage point for observing the utilization of ecological language to heighten the public's awareness. Through searching the news articles with key word "beautiful China" or "Beautiful China", 13 articles are selected from China Daily in 2022. The selected data are as follows:

No.	Title	Date	Words
1	Xi Focus: Plant more trees to make the country's land greener	March 31, 2022	883
2	Xi Focus-Closeup: A decade of green efforts	March 31, 2022	469
3	Xi Focus: China's 'green miracles' highlight Xi's vision of ecological civilization	April 24, 2022	812
4	Xi Focus: China's biodiversity push and its broader ecological ambition	May 23, 2022	1157
5	Xi highlights ecological civilization	June 2, 2022	837
6	Xi urges efforts to build beautiful China	June 5, 2022	370
7	President calls for action to protect nature	June 6, 2022	507
8	Xi calls for efforts to pursue harmony between humanity and nature on the World Environment Day	June 6, 2022	768
9	A decade of rising forest cover and better protecting the environment	July 26, 2022	656
10	Efforts pledged on ecological civilization	September 7, 2022	500

11	Nation forges ahead with climate actions	October 13, 2022	1613
12	Resolute promotion of an ecological civilization	October 25, 2022	367
13	China showcases for climate resilience	November 7, 2022	988

Table 1: Data from China Daily Newspaper

3.3. Instruments

The tool used for data analysis in this study is Wmatrix 5.0, an online corpus analysis software that automatically codes the semantic domains of uploaded texts. Wmatrix's semantic tagging is based on the Longman Multifunctional Classification Dictionary, categorizing text into 21 upper semantic domains and 232 sub-domains. Equipped with its own USAS semantic tagger framework, Wmatrix is well-suited for this study. After automatic and manual tagging, the software ranks word frequency and thematic categories. This study utilizes Wmatrix to generate collocation lists and analyze lexical bundles and collocations, allowing for an assessment of meaning in context. By comparing the contextual meaning with the basic meanings in other texts, the study explores how metaphors highlight or obscure certain aspects of the discourse, revealing the motivations behind specific collocation choices.

Though the software Wmatrix can code the data automatically and in a short time, it's still necessary to do the manual work for finding out metaphor words. The corpus-assisted analysis may ignore some potential or implicit metaphors that are hidden in the texts, which should be filtered rigorously by checking the concordances of specific words. To make complement to the software approach the manual metaphor identification methods are introduced. MIP (Metaphor Identification Procedure) is proposed by Pragglejaz Group (2007) [19], which aims to determine whether the words have the metaphorical meaning in the context [20]. MIP aims to identify the indirect metaphor that can be marked as metaphor as there is distinction between the contextual meaning and its basic meaning. To make Pragglejaz Group's theory further, Steen (2010) [21] explained MIPVU which is operational in the direct metaphors and implicit expressions (for example, simile, analogy, substitution, and ellipsis, etc.). Despite MIPVU's supplementation, MIP is sufficient in this research to figure out the indirect metaphors.

3.4. Analytical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis draw upon the theories of pragmatics, corpus linguistics and other theories constructs the research framework of critical metaphor analysis. Critical metaphor analysis takes three steps: (1) Metaphor identification (2) metaphor interpretation (3) Metaphor explanation (Charteris-Black, 2004). Charteris-Black proposes two steps to identify metaphor: First step is based on the definition of metaphor to select possible metaphors in the designed corpus. Step 2 is further qualitative analysis of possible metaphors. As for interpretation of metaphor, it refers to excavating the relationship between metaphor and the pragmatic factors. Metaphor explanation mainly involves analyzing the persuasive

role of metaphor according to social context. Charteris-Black argues that metaphor can evoke emotion and achieve persuasion through lexical choices [13].

3.5. Data Analysis

In this study, the preliminary stage is to identify the metaphor related words. Wmatrix (5.0) is employed to label and classify the semantic domains. And it will be used to run the frequency of every word in the corpus. To figure out the metaphor related words, it's necessary to do the concordance. Through the concordance lines, the researcher can read the context of single words, which lays a foundation for using MIP and Steen's five step procedure to ensure metaphor related words.

After running and analyzing these numbers, Charteris-Black's critical metaphor analysis approach: metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation is followed. In addition, Charteris-Black stated that the social and political background should be stated in the first stage [22]. Therefore, the setting of Beautiful China Initiative is explained and how does it give rise to the research questions are illustrated. Then, the interpretation of the conceptual metaphors in the ecological discourse are categorized and analyzed. The underlying ideology conveyed by the government will be explored. After digging out the ideology constructed by the government, the functions of metaphors in the ecological discourse are going to be explained and triangulated.

4. Results and Discussion

RQ1: What types of conceptual metaphors occur in the ecological news discourses with key words 'Beautiful China'? According to Charteris-Black (2004) [13], resonance of source domains is an important indicator of the output rate of source domain conceptual metaphors. The higher the resonance is, the higher the metaphorical productivity is, which demonstrates that this type of metaphor is used more frequently. Resonance is the measurement criteria for metaphors output rate. Type refers to different linguistic forms of words and token refers the number of times each linguistic form appear in the text. The formular $\text{resonance} = \text{sum of types} * \text{sums of tokens}$ [13].

Through semantic tagging of Wmatrix, the source domains of the selected data are worked out. After being manually scrutinized and verified by the informants, metaphors are classified and arranged. Among them, there are five source domains by and large, concluding Journey, Build, Money, Body and kin. The following table shows the type, token, resonance and rate of resonance.

Source domain	Types	Tokens	Resonance	% of total resonance
Journeys	10	32	320	42.8
Buildings	5	59	295	39.5
Money	5	16	80	10.7
Body parts	4	10	40	5.4
Kin	3	4	12	1.6
TOTAL	27	121	747	100

Table 2: Summary of source domains and resonance in China Daily corpus

Through comparing with British National Corpus (BNC) written language, the source domains can be organized as above. To clarify the types of words in the corpus, words with same root are considered as one type. For example, words like build, built, building are classified as one type 'build' and meanwhile their tokens are taken into account. From table 2, it can be seen that the second column shows the types of word in different source domains that are identified as metaphors. And the third column refers to the tokens of each metaphor type. Even though some source domains demonstrate same metaphor types, words may occur differently. What's more, resonance of journeys in the third column is the highest one, accounting for 42.8% of the total resonance, it means the metaphors exist in this source domain is the largest and most productive one.

4.1. Journey metaphors

In journey metaphors, the goal of building a beautiful China is conceptualized as the destination of travelers. Just as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) [2] stated, LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Life is an abstract term to understand, and journey is the concrete experience that can be easily related to. Here the source domain journey projected its pragmatic function into the target domain life, which achieves the integration of linguistics, pragmatics, and conceptual notions. The types and tokens of journey metaphors in the data, and domain mapping of journey metaphors are shown in the following tables.

Types	Tokens	Types	Tokens
Path	7	journey	3
step	6	enter	2
goal	5	drive	1
advancing	3	cross	1
following	3	swing	1

Table 3: Types and tokens of journey metaphors

Source domain	Projection	Target domain
Path/journey	→The process of moving forward	Process of achieving beautiful China
Step/advance/follow	→Specific actions or progress	Efforts to achieve beautiful China
Enter/cross/drive	→Navigating challenges or difficulties	Obstacles in achieving beautiful China
Goal	→The destination or desired outcome	Purpose of achieving Beautiful China

Table 4: Domain mappings of journey metaphors.

The whole process of achieving the construction of beautiful China is regarded as a journey not flat and smooth rather full of hardships and hinderance. The final destination is set, yet it takes a lot of time and energy to arrive at the destination. These ups and turns in the road make the process longer than predetermined. Nevertheless, all these experiences are necessary and will be addressed in the end. The detailed examples are as follows:

Text 1

Now that China has put the environment first, and is following a green development *path*... (July 26th, 2022)

Text 2

We must shift to a *path* of balanced and sustainable development. Moreover, coinciding with the United Nations climate change conference... (November 7th, 2022)

Text 3

...new development philosophy and following the *path* of prioritizing ecological conservation and boosting green development . (March 31st, 2022)

Text 4

On the new *journey* toward a modern socialist country in all respects, we must take Xi Jinping 's thinking on promoting ecological progress as our guide...(June 6th, 2022)

The path and journey metaphors refer to the long and complete period of ecological conservation. In the context, it implies there

are different paths to construct the country. Nevertheless, it should always be the priority to choose the path of protecting ecology. The path is described with adjectives green, balanced, and sustainable etc. which prove it is a worthwhile and right road. And the words shift to and new etc. show that the country was in a different way in the past and justify that it is reasonable to transform into a path or journey of ecological conservation.

Text 5

China has been taking unprecedented *steps* to tackle climate change, and has made remarkable progress...(April 24th, 2022)

Text 6

The country has made concrete *steps* toward building a beautiful China, he said...(June 6th, 2022)

Text 7

we have launched a host of creative, forward-looking, and fundamentally important initiatives and taken major *steps* toward building a beautiful China...(June 6th, 2022)

In these sentences, steps are considered as the efforts made by the country to tackle a variety of problems and build a beautiful China. Besides, it's obvious to find out collocations of the word 'steps' are adjectives like unprecedented, concrete, and major. These collocations highlight the unknown, solid and great efforts entailed to make to achieve beautiful China. Despite the long journey, the hardest part to embark on it is making each solid step.

Text 8

It's a new long march for China to promote the construction of ecological civilization and realize its climate targets. "The country needs to *cross* the river by feeling the stones," he added. (June 2nd, 2022)

Text 9

At present, the ecological civilization in China has *entered* a critical period for eco-environment improvement, Xi said...(March 31st, 2022)

Text 10

In the period, China has *entered* a critical moment when environmental protection is progressing from quantitative to qualitative changes...(June 2nd, 2022)

In text 8, the process of promoting the construction of ecological civilization, which belongs to the schemes of a beautiful China is regarded as a new long march. In Chinese history, the communist party has endured thousands of miles march which was known by all. During the march, the party has encountered the treacherous rivers and snowy mountains which are covered

by snows all year round. Here, the sentence "cross the river by feeling the stones" indicate that the major obstruction is in the way and no previous experience can be drawn upon, people from all the country should bear the determination grit and stamina to combat the difficulties. The metaphor word 'enter' basically means going into a enclosed room. Here it can be compared to proceeding to a particular time, which is the key moment of final success. In addition, this period is usually the most difficult part that many participants may give up or fail. It implies the country should withstand the ordeal and insist on the right ways towards the beautiful China.

4.2. Building metaphors

In the building metaphors, 'beautiful China' is shaped as an anticipated and shared future for all Chinese people to pursue. Some metaphor types are about the verbs to make a beautiful China and some types are nouns that emphasize the warmth and comfort of the beautiful China. The types and tokens of building metaphors, and the domain mappings are shown in the following tables.

Types	Tokens
build	42
construct	8
home	7
shelter	1
threshold	1

Table 5: Types and tokens of building metaphors

Source domain	Projection	Target domain
Build/construct	→ The act of assembling or creating	Creating beautiful China
Home/shelter	→ The ideal or protected space	Beautiful China
Threshold	→ The boundary or limit to be guarded	Protecting Beautiful China

Table 6: Domain mappings of building metaphors

From the domain mappings of the building metaphors, conceptual projection is formed by comparing the source domain to the target domain. The action of creating beautiful China which is virtual, and intangible is conveyed to readers by imagining it as the living residences. The real and deep feeling about home is transplanted to the future beautiful China. Detailed examples are as follows:

Text 10

Xi said that by joining other volunteers to plant trees, he wants to make his contribution to *building* a green and beautiful China, and encourage society... (July 26th, 2022)

Text 11

He said these goals are "a natural choice to achieve sustained development of the Chinese nation" and "a solemn commitment to *building* a shared future for mankind...(October 13th, 2022)

Text 12

...and it is the common responsibility of all humans to *build* a clean and beautiful world featuring harmony between humanity and nature...(June 6th, 2022)

Text 13

...no welfare is more universally beneficial than a sound natural environment, and the *construction* of global ecological civilization requires the joint efforts of all...(September 7th, 2022)

Metaphor words, 'build' and 'construct' collocate with beautiful China, shared future, clean and beautiful world, and global ecological civilization. It reveals that the activity of making meaningful entities is related with creating some abstract notions. The thing created does not belong to someone, instead it is a shared and intertwined ecological nature. Not only will everyone benefit from it, but each person is also involved in and shoulders the responsibility to strive for it.

Text 14

He visited the farm's forest rangers four years later, urging efforts to sustain the farm's role as an ecological *shelter*...(March 31st, 2022)

Text 15

...attaches great importance to the national event on the World Environment Day. Han said earth is the only *home* mankind has...(June 6th, 2022)

Metaphor words ‘shelter’ and ‘home’ are able to stimulate the secured and warm feeling immediately. Despite weathering disasters or exhausted from work, shelter and home will embrace us and provide the daily necessities for us. To make the vague or abstract term palpable, the earth is compared to the home human beings have and the farm is treated as animal’s shelter. The conceptual projection in this situation is ecological environment can be the rest and living place of human beings and animals.

Text 16

Related government bodies and regions should tighten *thresholds* and stop projects that go against the central government’s requirements. (June 2nd, 2022)

Metaphor word ‘threshold’ is part of the building structure: the floor at the doorway. When people step over the threshold, they

will enter the room. In the example, threshold refers to the entrance of beautiful China. Assume the threshold is raised, projects that may damage the ecology will be blocked outside. It is a series of policies that constrain projects harmful to the ecology and protect the efforts of creating beautiful China not to be sabotaged. Therefore, the conceptual projection of this example can be policies protecting beautiful China should be more strictly complied with.

4.3. Money metaphors

Money metaphors are related with the value things in general. They may attract people’s attention and remind people that they should be better kept and not destroyed. The goal of ecological discourse is usually to express persuasion for people to protect the ecology. Evidence of valuable notion can be found in the details.

Types	Tokens
assets	7
rich	4
wealth	3
prosperity	1
treasure	1

Table 7: Types and tokens of money metaphors.

Source domain	Projection	Target domain
Assets/ Wealth/treasure	→Something valuable or highly prized	Importance of beautiful China
Rich/Money	→Abundance or complexity	valuable and insightful insights

Table 8: Domain mappings of money metaphors

The source domain of valuable material things is projected onto the importance of beautiful China. The concept that high-valued good things should be protected and pursued is rooted in each person’s mind. In order to inspire people’s enthusiasm to build a beautiful China, the discourses compared the ecological entities to intangible yet valuable things.

Text 17

‘lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable *assets*’ has become a motto for China’s future development...(July 26th, 2022)

Text 18

...and research has shown that the ecosystem in the forests and wetlands there had become a source of *wealth*...(March 31st, 2022)

Text 19

It is a national *treasure*, Xi said. Xi inquired about the gibbon’s population. (May 23rd, 2022)

The sentence ‘lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable *assets*’ repeatedly occur in the corpus. Just like the advertisement, the repeated sentence may reinforce people’s impression about this expression and persuade people to agree with its connotation by appealing to people emotions and feelings. Then the concrete and not being valued forests and wetlands are described as the things people should attach

importance to and may reap benefits from these ecological forms.

Text 20

Xi’s thoughts offer rich resource for all people, symposium participants say. (September 7th, 2022)

In this case, the source domain of “rich,” which traditionally refers to wealth or economic abundance, is metaphorically projected that Xi’s thoughts are full of numerous ideas, insights, or perspectives that can be drawn upon. And it implies that there is abundant intellectual content in Xi’s thoughts that is available for people to explore. The Great Wall, an ancient fortification built to protect China from invasions, serves as a metaphor in this context. The "green Great Wall" symbolizes a healthy and robust ecosystem that shields China from environmental threats such as sandstorms and floods. The conceptual projection is that a balanced and thriving ecology acts as a protective barrier, safeguarding the vision of a “Beautiful China.”

4.4. Body metaphors

Body metaphors usually consist of physical features. On one hand, each organ is an indispensable part of our body; on the other hand, since the breed is an action closely related with female’s organ breast, it is considered as the body metaphors as well. The types and tokens of body metaphors and its domain mappings are listed as followings:

Types	Tokens
body	6
head	2
kidney	1
nourish	1

Table 9: Types and tokens of body metaphors

Source domain	Projection	Target domain
body	→ The main component or central part	Major part of things
head	→ Leadership or key individuals	Important people
kidney	→ Essential or vital elements	Importance of things
nourish	→ Fostering or maintaining relationships	Close relationship

Table 10: Domain mappings of body metaphors.

Different from the invisible wealth or assets, the body metaphors are more relatable and can prompt people to keep it safe and prevent it from being damaged. The body metaphors can trigger more thoughts about importance of the ecology or closeness between the ecology and human mankind. The evidence about body metaphors can be found in the following examples.

Text 21

The past nine years have seen the occurrence of heavy haze effectively curbed and the number of black, odorous water *bodies* significantly reduced, he said in the article...(June 2nd, 2022)

In this sentence, the main area of water is depicted as the water body, which may generate an image that this is the central part of the water field. Then conceptual projection can be that this part of water is the largest and most import one. It should be protected and not polluted due to its huge influence.

Text 22

Referred to as the '*kidneys* of the Earth', wetlands can be regarded as water-treatment facilities. (November 7th, 2022)

To strengthen readers' impression that wetlands are extremely important on the earth. The wetlands are described as the kidneys of the earth. Kidneys are the vital organs ensuring the body to function well, otherwise serious problem may occur to the body and even have deadly impact. Based on the knowledge

of kidneys, the wetlands are compared to the kidneys of the earth. They are key factors to sustain the balance of ecology.

Text 23

Mother Nature has *nourished* us, and we must treat nature as our root, respect it, protect it, and follow its laws. (May 23rd, 2022)

In this example, the source domain is the regular relationship between mother and children. A mother raised her child, gave her child valuable nutrients. Then, when the child grows up, he should respect his mother, and adhere to filial piety to obey his mother. And the target domain is the relationship between nature and human mankind. Nature is the great mother who nourished the child. In the meantime, human mankind is the child who receives food and resources from nature. Man should respect and protect the nature and follow the nature's laws. This is domain mapping of relationship from the relationship among human beings to the relationship between nature and man, resulting a vivid image that readers can strike a chord with.

4.5. Kin metaphors

There is no surprising that kin words can be the metaphor related words, because of the intertwined relationship between nature and man. Both depend and live on each other. What's more, make use of each other. The types and tokens of kin metaphors, and domain mappings are as follows.

Types	Tokens
foster	2
mother	1
offspring	1

Table 11: Types and tokens of kin metaphors.

Source domain	Projection	Target domain
Foster	→ Nurturing and developing	Cultivating ecological initiatives
Mother	→ Source of life and protection	The natural environment
Offspring	→ The outcome of care and growth	The goal of a Beautiful China

Table 12: Domain mappings of kin metaphors

The kin metaphors emphasize the character and position of each role. Mother, child, nature and human are formed into pairs, and it manifests China's value on the class of society. The young people should respect the elderly, and the elderly should protect the young vice versa.

Text 24

We need to act with a sense of responsibility and unity, and work together to *foster* a community of life for man and Nature. (May 23rd, 2022)

Text 25

The tropical rainforest in Hainan belongs to the province itself, the people of the whole country, and *mother* Earth. It is a national treasure. (May 23rd, 2022)

Text 26

People plant trees so their *offspring can enjoy the shade*, he once cited the Chinese proverb during a tree-planting activity. (March 31st, 2022)

From the examples above, the family structure of a society is shown. Nature is the mother. People are the children, and the community should be developed so that nature and people can live harmoniously. One point needed to be mentioned is that in the phrase ‘offspring can enjoy the shade’, shade doesn’t refer to the actual shadow. Instead, it means the future generations may receive sustainable benefits from the benign ecology. The living principle in daily life is projected to the coexistence between human and nature, which justifies that respecting and protecting the ecology is the reciprocal and long-lasting tenets for both.

RQ2: What ideologies do the conceptual metaphors from ecological news discourses show in the Chinese context?

In China, conceptual metaphors in ecological news discourses often reflect deep-rooted ideologies derived from traditional Chinese philosophy and modern ecological governance frameworks. A key principle is the ancient idea of “Man is an integral part of nature” [23], emphasizing harmony and interdependence between humanity and the natural world. This philosophy, rooted in the works of Zhuang Zi and later expanded by Dong Zhongshu, forms the ideological foundation for China’s ecological discourse.

Building upon this heritage, Xi Jinping’s ecological theory embodies and modernizes these traditional values. His ecological thought integrates concepts like “unity of nature and man,” “harmony and coexistence,” “conformity to nature,” and “respect for nature.” These ideas are vividly reflected through metaphors in official discourses, often quoting Xi’s words directly.

For example:

Text 12 states, “It is the common responsibility of all humans to build a clean and beautiful world featuring harmony between humanity and nature,” directly echoing the philosophical ideal of unity and harmonious coexistence.

Text 17, “Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets,” emphasizes the dual importance of ecological preservation and economic development, portraying them as complementary rather than conflicting.

In another instance, Xi’s statement, “If we humanity do not fail nature, nature will not fail us” (May 23), encapsulates the principle of “respect for nature,” underscoring the reciprocal relationship between human actions and natural outcomes.

These metaphors not only communicate abstract ideas in an accessible manner but also serve to align ecological priorities with cultural values. The use of such conceptual metaphors reinforces a collective responsibility towards environmental protection, framing it as both a cultural heritage and a modern necessity.

Additionally, these metaphors help promote China’s ecological ideologies on the global stage. Through discourses that connect traditional wisdom with modern ecological initiatives, such as the “Beautiful China” vision and the idea of building a “community with a shared future for mankind,” these metaphors serve to position China as a leader in sustainable development. They craft a narrative that blends cultural pride with a forward-looking ecological agenda, appealing to both domestic and international audiences.

In sum, the conceptual metaphors in Chinese ecological discourses encapsulate ideologies that bridge ancient philosophical traditions with contemporary governance. They not only reflect Xi Jinping’s ecological thoughts but also resonate with broader values, reinforcing a shared sense of environmental stewardship and global responsibility.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the types of metaphors that occur in ecological discourse related to the keywords ‘Beautiful China.’ It also explores the underlying ideologies and functions conveyed through these metaphors within the corpus. The data analysis reveals the following results:

The ecological discourse reveals the use of five major conceptual metaphors: journey, building, money, body, and kin metaphors. These metaphors serve multiple functions, particularly in shaping public perception and promoting ecological awareness. By framing environmental protection as a shared journey, a constructive process, or an investment in the future, the metaphors effectively persuade individuals to engage in ecological preservation. Additionally, they evoke personal connections—comparing nature to the human body or familial relationships—which fosters empathy and a sense of responsibility. This persuasive language employs strategies aimed at pervasive, heuristic, and empathetic purposes, guiding readers toward deeper ecological commitment and action.

This study analyzes news discourse from the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, where President Xi emphasized the importance of building a “Beautiful China.” Using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and Steen’s five-step method, the study identifies metaphors in the ecological rhetoric. However, the limited dataset, which focuses on a specific time and place, lacks a comparative analysis with newspapers from other regions. This may result in a partial understanding of the types, ideologies, and functions of the metaphors, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

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