An Exploration of Conceptual Metaphors for Framing Ecology-Evidence from President Xi's Speeches on Ecological Civilization

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Abstract

Adopting the MIP (Metaphor Identification Procedure) method, this paper unearths the cognitive mechanism of conceptual metaphors through qualitative and quantitative analysis of data extracted from The Dataset of President Xi Jinping's Major Speeches. The study delves into the structure and characteristics of five conceptual metaphors, namely JOURNEY metaphor, PLANT metaphor, WAR metaphor, LIFE metaphor, and DISEASE metaphor, aiming to elucidate the ecological concepts and cultural connotations underlying the employed metaphors on the one hand, extrapolate the pragmatic functions of the metaphors in the construction of ecological civilization on the other. Results reveal that such metaphors are highly interrelated rather than performing independently, jointly addressing the issues of why to construct ecological civilization, what kind of ecological civilization to construct, and how to construct ecological civilization. Those employed metaphors are based on bodily and traditional Chinese medicine and Confucian cultural experiences, thus justifying the physiological and cultural-social embodiment of conceptual metaphors.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, cognitive mechanism, ecological civilization, Chinese culture

1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed rapid development across various domains, which comes unfortunately at a significant cost to the ecological environment where both humans and other species survive and thrive. Consequently, environmental degradation and related issues have become major concerns for people from all walks of life. Against this backdrop, there emerged an ecological turn in linguistics, bringing into a developing discipline ecolinguistics during the 1970s (Li & Shen, 2017), with the aim to construct a sustainable ecology by examining the interaction between language and the ecological environment (Zhu, 2009). Around the same time, cognitive linguistics emerged as a separate discipline to uncover cognitive principles through an investigation of the ternary interaction between language, cognition, and reality (Wang, 2017). Despite their distinct research objectives, the inherent interaction between language and reality provides a basis for the integration of these two disciplines, particularly given the urgent ecological situation. Some scholars thus advocate for the integration of cognitive linguistics and ecolinguistics, leading to the emergence of cognitive ecolinguistics (Zhu, 2015; Wang, 2017; Wang, 2018). Through linguistic research, this interdisciplinary approach not only reveals individuals' underlying ecological views, but also discloses the potential influence of language on the ecological environment, ultimately contributing to the resolution of ecological crises and the establishment of a sustainable ecological environment.

Ecological civilization is a distinct ecological and political concept proposed by China that differs from Western industrial civilization, along with which is the emergence of a set of political discourses incorporating a series of new ideas and initiatives. These discourses utilize language semiotics and media to construct and interpret the concepts of ecological civilization, as well as to standardize practices of ecological civilization construction. More pertinent research on ecological civilization primarily focuses on philosophy and politics, elucidating and evaluating the concepts, achievements, and prospects of China's ecological civilization construction (Xun, 2015, 2021, 2022; Wang, 2019). Less attention, however, has been paid to the cognitive aspect. As a novel form of civilization and political practice, ecological civilization necessitates the effective construction and dissemination through language. To some extent, the construction and propagation of ecological civilization discourse play a prominent role in shaping the ecological values within society, enhancing the public identity of ecological civilization concepts, and transforming them into conscious actions. Therefore, both the theoretical and practical significance of research on ecological civilization discourse are witnessed.

Following the cognitive turn in the field of metaphor studies, metaphor is now perceived as a cognitive event rather than merely a linguistics tool. Grounded in experiential philosophy, the essence of metaphor lies in understanding and experiencing one in terms of another. It is through perceptual experiences that humans comprehend abstract,

unknown, and unfamiliar concepts by relating them to concrete, known, and familiar entities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

For instance, the comprehension of more abstract concepts (e.g., ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION) is achieved through the more concrete concepts (e.g., JOURNEY), giving rise to the conceptual metaphor ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION IS A JOURNEY.

In the masterpiece *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson introduced the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which subsequently gave rise to a cognitive turn in this field. They argued that metaphors are not merely rhetorical devices, but also ways of thinking that shape our conceptual systems. The mechanism of metaphor involves "understanding and experiencing one in terms of another", which includes the mapping process from a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They regarded people's thoughts, actions and experiences as essentially metaphorical, that is, metaphors are ubiquitous in our daily lives, not only in language but also in action and thought. Therefore, the possibility can be witnessed for this research on metaphors to reveal the underlying ideas and culture embedded within an individual's speech.

Lakoff (1992) asserts that conceptual metaphor is universal for its origination from common experiences in the physical environment, but culturally specific due to the influence of cultural experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A culture's core value can find its manifestation through the metaphorical structures of the most basic constructs of said culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), indicating a close relationship between metaphor and culture, wherein culture significantly shapes people's understanding and interpretation of conceptual metaphors. Overall, conceptual metaphor is rooted in both physical and cultural experiences, with culture weighing heavily in the interpretation of metaphor variations. Much research was done by cognitive linguists on the universality of metaphor, but scarce attention was paid to the reason why metaphor varies so extensively within and across cultures (Kövecses, 2005). Therefore, this study tends to investigate the underlying Chinese ecological values and unique cultural connotations by analyzing the metaphorical structures and distribution in President Xi Jinping's ecological-themed discourses.

When metaphor is employed as a cognitive tool to be mapped into the political realm, it becomes a kind of political discourse imbued with a highly veiled ideology, often regarded as a political metaphor. Thompson (1996) asserts that politics without metaphor is like fish without water. Two reasons can be presumed for the combination of conceptual metaphor and political discourse. Firstly, metaphor can facilitate the public's comprehension of abstract and complex politics by making it more concrete and accessible to ordinary people. Secondly, metaphor can empower politicians in effective propaganda by addressing the underlying symbolic themes within the public consciousness. Consequently, conceptual metaphor not only contributes to the construction of political discourse but also serves as an analytical tool applied to political discourse, enabling the identification and interpretation of the linguistic and psychological strategies employed in politics (Mio, 1997). For this reason, research on metaphors in Chinese political discourse has attracted scholarly focus from domestic linguists, with a particular emphasis on the analysis of President Xi Jinping's major speeches (Dou & Wen, 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2017; Chen & Jian, 2019; Hou, 2021; Yang & Wang, 2023). However, research on ecological discourse, especially from a cognitive perspective based on corpora, remains scant.

Lakoff (1996) was the pioneer in analyzing political metaphors from a cognitive perspective. In his work *What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don't*, he systematically researched conceptual metaphors in political discourse, leading to a wave of enthusiasm among subsequent scholars in the extensive exploration of the relationship between conceptual metaphors and political language. Chilton and Ilyin (1993) discussed the COMMON EUROPEAN HOUSE metaphor in European languages, through which they observed that skillful use of conceptual metaphors in political discourse helps effectively shape public ideologies, thus empowering policy formulation and implementation. The study highlighted the influential role of metaphors in political communication and its impact on collective consciousness. Musolff (2004; 2006) advocated for the view of analogical metaphors and conducted a data-driven study of conceptual metaphors and ideologies in European political discourse, revealing particular political dispositions and preferences of the respective national discourse communities. Charteris-Black (2005) examined the rhetorical usage of six political figures in British and American history. He conducted a detailed analysis of the metaphors used and elucidated the transmission of different ideologies behind them. Wang (2014) conducted a cognitive examination of the primary metaphors within the discourse of the American government, unveiling that the underlying frameworks and metaphors determine the public acceptance of policies put forth by the two major political parties in America. Wen (2017) analyzed the conceptual, interpersonal, and discursive functions of President Xi Jinping's metaphor of "a community of shared future for mankind" within the frameworks of cognitive linguistics and functional linguistics. Cao and Wang (2017) delved into the experiential features of President Xi Jinping's China-specific metaphors by examining dual-layered structures, degrees of metaphors, and conceptual fields of source domains. Tian and Li (2018) investigated President Xi Jinping's economic-themed speeches in 2014 and 2015 based on the MIP method, demonstrating how concepts such as agriculture, disease, and engines are utilized to construct and comprehend the abstract concept of economy. The influence of ancient Chinese agrarian civilization and traditional Chinese medicine culture on conceptual

metaphors is also interpreted. Li and Tian (2020) analyzed cognitive metaphors in ten political speeches by President Xi Jinping, emphasizing the significance of culture in the interpretation of conceptual metaphors, which contributes to the dissemination of Chinese culture and political policies. Seixas (2021), through critical metaphor analysis, even demonstrated how politicians utilize WAR metaphors for vastly different purposes in crisis communication and the management of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, challenging previous criticisms regarding the inherently negative and destructive nature of WAR metaphors.

Abundant thematic discussions and critical directives have been put forth by President Xi through a sequence of significant speeches on ecological civilization since the 18th National Congress. Ecological civilization has become a mainstream ideology that needs to be practiced, whose value, attitude, and interest orientation embody national power and will. President Xi adeptly employs conceptual metaphors to expound ecological thinking, such as "lv-shui qing-shanjiu-shijin-shan yin-shan (Clear waters and green mountains are as good as mountains of gold and silver)". The construction of metaphorical discourse is crucial for the acceptance of the Chinese government's ecological ideology. Therefore, this article seeks to select data from President Xi Jinping's speeches to delve into the cultural connotations and spiritual essence of China's ecological civilization construction.

Cognitive linguistics offers practical analytical tools for investigating the underlying cognitive mechanisms involved in constructing environmental discourse (Zheng & Wang, 2018). Lakoff (2010), in his paper titled *Why It Matters How We Frame the Environment*, explored how to use "framing", the crucial theoretical tool of cognitive linguistics, to establish a constructive environmental framework. Larson (2011) delves into the use of metaphors by scientists to convey intricate scientific ideas, emphasizing how inaccurate metaphors can lead to confusion and ineffective policies. Larson's study is a critical reminder of the impact that metaphors can have on shaping individuals' social outlooks. Some scholars integrated cognitive linguistics theories to survey the cognitive views presented in environmental discourses. Stibbe (2015), in his seminal work *Stories We Live By*, employed conceptual metaphor theory and frame theory to examine metaphors in different environmental discourses, thereby establishing a new paradigm for scholars to explore the interaction between language and the environment, as well as reveal the hidden cognitive mechanisms. Furthermore, Guo (2017) explored discourse strategies in environmental news by combining conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual metonymy theory, and conceptual blending theory.

Emerging as a new type of civilizational paradigm in the prevailing crisis-ridden global environment, the concept and political practice of ecological civilization has demonstrated both theoretical and practical research value owing to its profound impact on the ecological environment. Furthermore, the discourses of ecological civilization, particularly exemplified in Xi Jinping's speeches, abound with conceptual metaphors. Considering the feasibility of applying cognitive tools to analyze ecological discourses, as confirmed by extensive prior scholarly investigations, it becomes imperative to further explore the cognitive mechanisms underlying ecological discourses for the maximization of their positive impact on the environment and to achieve the goal of sustainable environmental development.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research questions

Through the explication of conceptual metaphors in President Xi Jinping's speeches on ecological civilization, this paper aims to explore the following questions: 1) What are the conceptual metaphors employed by President Xi Jinping in his speeches on ecological civilization?2) What are the connotations implied in these conceptual metaphors? 3) How do they help to convey President Xi Jinping's ideas about ecological civilization construction?

2.2 Data Source

Since the 18th National Congress, the development of ecological civilization has consistently been given top priority, constructing a distinctive feature and significant strategic layout in the governance of China. Still, the governance of ecology was given unprecedented attention during the 19th National Congress when it was raised to the status of a long-term national project for China's sustainable development.

Therefore, this paper takes President Xi's series of speeches on the construction of ecological civilization as the data and analyzes the metaphors in such ecological discourse within the framework of cognitive metaphor. The examples in this study are selected from *The Dataset of President Xi Jinping's Major Speeches* (http://jhsjk.people.cn/), which includes over 10,000 speeches, letters, reports, etc. given by President Xi on various occasions. Many wonderful statements have become popular at home and abroad, known as "Xi-style golden sentences", embodying the essence of Chinese governance and serving as a key for all to earnestly study. These speeches are disseminated through media such as newspapers, books, television, radio, and the Internet, thus forming a dominant "discourse field" primarily shaped by official discourse. This discourse field serves as a

significant stage for the manifestation of the new form of ecological civilization, announcing the will of the nation, values, and social practices.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

This paper compiles ecological discourses extracted from a large-scale official corpus and constructs a self-built small-scale corpus. The empirical corpus-based methodology can free us from the limitations of intuition as much as possible, providing us with authentic linguistic materials, and thus guaranteeing the objectivity, accuracy and credibility of the data. Adopting Charteris-Black's (2005) theory of Critical Metaphor Analysis, the study involves three steps in recognizing metaphors: identification, interpretation, and explanation. To facilitate the credibility of metaphor identification, the MIP (Metaphor Identification Procedure) method is employed, equipped with The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary to determine the basic meanings of a Chinese lexical unit. Based on the MIP method, metaphorical keywords are identified through manual text reading, whose proportion of occurrences will be calculated later. Subsequently, detailed interpretation and explanation of the leading metaphorical types are conducted based on their respective frequencies.

Here are the specific procedures for data collecting. First, the Chinese keyword "生态文明(ecological civilization)" was put into the search column in *The Dataset of President Xi Jinping's Major Speeches*, after which a total of 29 articles were retrieved with the "title" option limited, leaving a final selection of 21 articles to self-build a small corpus after removing duplicate items. The selected discourses were published within the period from May 24, 2013, to March 31, 2022, encompassing a range of important speeches, relevant discussions, instructions, letters, and addresses delivered by President Xi. These speeches and associated texts jointly constitute a political discourse featuring the new principles and policies of ecological civilization in China.

The MIP method is applied next. The objective of MIP, as proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), is to detect metaphorical language in discourse. The primary steps of MIP can be succinctly outlined as follows: Firstly, the entire text is read to gain an understanding of its general theme. Secondly, the text is divided into multiple lexical units. Thirdly, the contextual and lexical meanings of each lexical unit are identified. Fourthly, a comparison is made between the contextual and lexical meanings of each lexical unit. If the contextual meaning contradicts the lexical meaning, yet it can still be comprehended in that manner, then the lexical unit is deemed to be metaphorical. If not, it is literal.

A pilot study of metaphor identification is provided for better understanding. Take *bao-wei-zhan (a defense war)* in the Chinese sentence Jian-jue *da-ying lan-tian bao-wei-zhan (We will win the fight to keep the sky blue)* for instance. Since there is no metaphorical signal or any quotation mark, the MIP method is used here:

(1) *jian-jue da-yinglan-tian bao-wei-zhan*
Step 1: Read the entire sentence and figure out its meaning "People fight a defense *war* to consolidate our ecological environment, notably the blue sky".
Step 2: Identify the lexical components within the bolded terms, which are demarcated by slashes for clarity.
jian-jue/da-ying/lan-tian/bao-wei-zhan/
Step 3 involves the delineation of our choices for every lexical unit, followed by an assessment in step 4 to ascertain whether the lexical unit is being employed metaphorically within the context.
jian-jue
(a) contextual meaning: In this context, "jian-jue" means China will protect the ecological environment firmly, suggesting the determination and will of China.
(b) basic meaning: As an adverb, "jian-jue" refers to taking actions in a strong or definite way.
(c) contextual meaning versus basic meaning: The literal meaning is the same as the context-specific meaning.
(d) metaphorically used? No.
da-ying
(a) contextual meaning: In this case, "da-ying" implies that China successfully controls environmental pollution and keeps the sky blue.
(b) basic meaning: One of the basic meanings of "da-ying" is to win in a competition, race, battle, etc.
(c) contextual meaning versus basic meaning: The contextual meaning differs from the literal meaning, but can be comprehended through a comparison. The fact that China managed to combat environmental pollution and maintain clear skies can be discerned through the knowledge and experience of winning a war.
(d) metaphorically used? Yes.
lan-tian
(a) contextual meaning: Regarding this, "lan-tian" literally refers to the sky being blue.
(b) basic meaning: The basic meaning of "lan-tian" is the blue sky.
(c) contextual meaning versus basic meaning: The contextual meaning and the literal meaning are identical.
(d) metaphorically used? No.

bao-wei-zhan

(a) contextual meaning: In this instance, "bao-wei-zhan" suggests the conservation of the ecological environment, specifically, the blue sky.

(b) basic meaning: One of the basic meanings of "bao-wei-zhan" is a defense fight between armies, especially during a war.

(c) contextual meaning versus basic meaning: The contextual meaning diverges from the basic meaning yet can be comprehended through a comparative analysis. The knowledge and experience of war enable us to understand ecological conservation.

(d) metaphorically used? Yes.

To conclude, the terms "da-ying (win)" and "bao-wei-zhan (fight)" are acknowledged as metaphorical. They are originally the elements from the WAR frame, whose employment pertains to protecting the ecological environment, notably the blue sky. In short, this sentence embodies THE CONSERVATION OF BLUE SKY IS A WAR metaphor. A description of the application of the MIP method to lexical units tends to illustrate the operational mechanics of MIP, as well as to delineate the decision-making process employed by researchers in determining the presence of metaphorical usage within examples. To enhance the reliability of data, this study undertakes thorough triple-checks throughout the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Distribution of Conceptual Metaphors in President Xi Jinping's Speeches on Ecological Civilization

This article retrieves metaphorical keywords from the self-built corpus and calculates their respective frequencies of occurrence, ultimately compiling the proportion of occurrences for each category of conceptual metaphors based on the collective occurrences of metaphorical keywords. Through MIP, the conceptual metaphors identified in the speeches and their proportions are presented as follows.

Table 1. Metaphorical Types in President Xi Jinping's Speeches on Ecological Civilization

Metaphor categories	Metaphor Keywords	Tokens	Percentage
JOURNEY metaphor	轨道、逆水行舟、不进则退、步伐、难关、目标、方向、新台阶等	72	20.2%
PLANT metaphor	兴衰、耕耘、根植、永续、根本、落地生根、有机统一等	65	18.3%
WAR metaphor	攻坚战、保卫战、大仗、硬仗、苦仗、铁军、战斗、战场等	60	16.9%
LIFE metaphor	生命共同体、命脉、眼睛、再生产能力等	47	13.2%
DISEASE metaphor	痛、患、病、诊断病因、标本兼治、突出治本等	36	10.1%
BUILDING metaphor	工程、建设、构建、平台、建成、搭建等	28	7.8%
COLOR metaphor	绿水青山、植绿、护绿、爱绿、天蓝、红线等	22	6.2%
WEALTH metaphor	金山银山、生态产品、生态财富、资源库等	11	3.1%
Sub-total		15	4.2%
Total		356	100%

Table 1 reveals that the highest frequency of metaphor usage in President Xi Jinping's speeches corresponds to the JOURNEY metaphor, followed by the PLANT metaphor, WAR metaphor, LIFE metaphor, and DISEASE metaphor. Metaphors with a frequency below 10% encompass the BUILDING metaphor, COLOR metaphor, WEALTH metaphor, LINE metaphor, and several others.

3.2 Interpretation of Conceptual Metaphors in President Xi Jinping's Speeches on Ecological Civilization

3.2.1 JOURNEY Metaphor

The ecological discourse of this research predominantly features the utilization of the JOURNEY metaphor. A total of 72 tokens of this metaphor were identified, comprising the highest representation at 20.2% percent. By analyzing these speeches, we can retrieve the conceptual metaphor ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION IS A JOURNEY. The metaphorical expressions of this metaphor primarily encompass "走......之路(zou......zhi lu)", "轨道(gui dao)", "目标(mu biao)", "难关(nan guan)", "新台阶(xin tai jie)", etc.

*(1) a. 如期实现 2030 年前碳达峰、2060 年前碳中和的**目标**。Efforts are being made to achieve the **goals** of carbon peaking by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060 as scheduled. (Speech at the 9th Meeting of the Central Committee of Finance and Economics, March 15, 2021)*

*b. 大力建设生态文明，引领中华民族在伟大复兴的**征途**上奋勇**前行**。China is making great efforts to construct an ecological civilization, guiding the nation to **march forward** courageously on the **journey**of great rejuvenation. (Speech during an inspection visit to Yunnan Province, January 2015)*

*c. 把生态文明建设纳入制度化、法治化**轨道**。 Incorporate the construction of ecological civilization into the **track** of institutionalization and legalization. (Instructions on the Construction of Ecological Civilization, November 28, 2016)*

*d.同走绿色发展之**路**！**Promote** a green **path** of development! (Speech at the opening ceremony of the Beijing International Horticultural Exhibition, April 28, 2019)*

*e. 我国生态环境质量持续好转，但成效并不稳固，稍有松懈就有可能出现反复，犹如**逆水行舟，不进则退**。Although environmental quality in China is continuing to take a turn for the better, the results are still tenuous. The situation is much like that **a boat sailing against the current must forge ahead or it will be driven back**. (Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environment Protection, May 18, 2018)*

*f. 推进生态文明建设还有不少**难关要过**，......我们必须咬紧牙关，**爬过这个坡，迈过这道坎**。We still have a lot of **obstacles** to overcome if we want to advance China's ecological civilization. …… We have to grit our teeth, **ascend this slope, and climb the hurdle**. (Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environment Protection, May 18, 2018)*

*g.努力推动我国生态文明建设迈上**新台阶**。Weshould strive to take China's ecological civilization construction to **a new stage**. (Speech at the deliberation of the Inner Mongolia delegation, March 2019)*

JOURNEY metaphors often occur in the political discourse for constructing long-term and purposeful activities (Lakoff, 1993). Going beyond industrial civilization and constructing ecological civilization is an unprecedented and monumental project, full of difficulties and obstacles that need to be overcome in order to achieve the goals. In this study, important speeches by President Xi on ecological themes are selected as the data. According to table (1-2), such discourses predominantly highlight the process of the journey, such as the goals, paths, obstacles, and stages. So we can get the conceptual metaphors ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION IS A JOURNEY, GREEN DEVELOPMENT IS THE ORIENTATION OF THE JOURNEY, DIFFICULTIES IN THE CONSTRUCTION ARE OBSTACLES OF THE JOURNEY and PLAN FOR ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION IS THE ROUTE MAP FOR THE JOURNEY. These metaphors eloquently illustrate the goals, determination, and will to promote ecological civilization construction in China.

Table 2. Mappings of JOURNEY Metaphor

Source domain	Mappings	Target domain
JOURNEY	→	ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION
TRAVELERS	→	PARTICIPANTS
ORIENTATION	→	GREEN DEVELOPMENT
OBSTACLES	→	DIFFICULTIES IN ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION
THE ROUTE MAP	→	PLAN FOR ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION

Ecological civilization, whose goal is the transformation of social civilization, is not merely an ideological concept but also an unprecedented scale of social practice. The construction and process of ecological civilization are emphasized in the ecological discourse, hence the abundance of JOURNEY metaphors in such discourse. Specifically, the conceptual framework of the source domain "JOURNEY" is used to construct the subject, process, approach, and objective of ecological civilization construction and development. Words associated with the domain of "JOURNEY" are paired with terms related to "construction", such as "轨道(gui dao)", "难关(nan guan)", "方向(fang xiang)" and "驰骋(chi cheng). (1a-c) explicitly employ expressions about "road" to metaphorically depict the construction of ecological civilization, highlighting the purpose, procedure, and normativity of the path, as well as the determination and will to move forward along this path. (1d-g) demonstrate the difficulties and challenges faced during the ecological civilization construction.

In (1g), for instance, the term "迈上(mai shang)" originally refers to a specific physical action of "stepping up" performed by humans, but it is here mapped to "the implementation of ecological civilization construction",

establishing a similarity between "ecological civilization construction" and "humans." The term "台阶(tai jie)" originally means "a series of structures made of bricks, stones, concrete, etc. for people to ascend and descend," while in this context, it metaphorically indicates a new height to reach after a long-term ecological civilization construction. Based on the comprehensible JOURNEY metaphors, Xi informs the audience of the communicative purpose of the discourse (i.e., advancing ecological civilization construction to a new stage) and elucidates specific strategies, namely, the conscientious implementation of pertinent policies and regulations by different regions and departments. Thus, the recipients can interpret the ideology of the Chinese government hidden behind the aforementioned metaphors.

Metaphors vary along the diachronic dimension (Kövecses, 2005). President Xi's frequent use of the JOURNEY metaphor is rooted in historical experience, making it the most prominent type in this research. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, China has embarked on a development path with Chinese characteristics.

A comprehensive review of China's developmental history reveals a trajectory characterized by self-improvement and progress. Striving for Reform and Opening Up for 40 years, China become increasingly powerful and determined to further advance reforms. Alongside its pursuit of sustainable development, China prioritizes environmental protection. During a journey, it is customary to follow a roadmap to traverse the correct path and reach the destination. Similarly, the process of constructing an ecological civilization mirrors the convoluted journey of China's historical development, necessitating a clear and precise plan to guide the country in environmental conservation. In this journey, the leaders of the Party and the nation assume the role of guides, while the people constitute the travelers, and the ultimate destination of this journey is the attainment of a green development of ecological civilization.

3.2.2 PLANT Metaphor

According to Table 1, the metaphor with the second highest frequency in Xi's ecological thematic speeches is the PLANT metaphor, accounting for 65 tokens and 18.3% of the total. Specifically, as shown in Table 3, the essential metaphors were identified: ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION IS PLANT, GREEN DEVELOPMENT IS ROOT, ECOLOGICAL POLICY IS SEED, GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION ARE FRUITS.

Table 3. Mappings of PLANT Metaphor

Source domain	Mappings	Target domain
PLANT	→	ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION; CHINESE NATION
ROOT	→	GREEN DEVELOPMENT
SEED	→	ECOLOGICAL POLICY
FRUITS	→	GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION

The connotation and discursive potency of the ecological civilization ideology are directly influenced by the concept of civilization from that perspective (Wang & Zhao, 2023). In this regard, the plant metaphor is widely used to construct abstract forms of civilization such as nation, state, and society within the framework of ecological civilization. As a source domain, the elements of plants within their category (roots, branches, fruits), the growth process of plants (germination, growth, flowering, fruiting, withering), and human cultivation of plants (seeding, harvesting) are systematically mapped to the target domain, as shown in (2a-c).

(2) a. 林草兴则生态兴。*The prosperity of forests and grasslands leads to the **flourishing** of the ecosystem. (Speech at the Capital Tree Planting Event, March 30, 2022)*

b. 加快形成绿色生产方式和生活方式，**厚植**高质量发展的绿色底色。 *We should accelerate the formation of green production modes and lifestyles, and **foster** a green foundation for high-quality development. (Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environment Protection, July 17-18, 2023)*

c. 建设一个美丽富强的中国，实现中华民族**永续**发展，是习近平总书记心中的梦想和力量之源。这力量，**根植**于生生不息的中华文明。*Building a beautiful and prosperous China and achieving the **sustainable** development of the Chinese nation are the dreams and driving force in President Xi Jinping's heart. This driving force is **rooted** in the ever-lasting Chinese civilization. (Speech during an inspection visit to Yunnan Province, January 2015)*

In (2a), the rise and fall of civilizations are metaphorically represented by the growth and decline of plants in the natural world, including "germination", "growth", and "withering". In (2b), the concept of "green and high-quality development" is metaphorically portrayed as a "plant", urging the public to deeply root this plant and its seeds into

the soil. In (2c), the metaphor BEAUTIFUL AND PROSPEROUS CHINA IS A PLANT implies that the nation and its people, as "cultivators," should root it in the fertile "soil" of Chinese civilization. In this example, "Beautiful China Initiative" not only refers to picturesque landscapes but also metaphorically signifies the flourishing and prosperity of Chinese civilization. The realization of this ecological type of Chinese civilization requires cultivation and nurturing, as only then can it bear bountiful fruits and thrive perpetually.

The pursuit of economic and social development should emulate the nurturing of plant growth, adhering to the principles inherent in natural laws, and achieving a harmonious coexistence among humans, society, and nature. Only with such an approach can sustainable development be achieved. This notion of development, much like how plants take root in the ground, is deeply ingrained in the hearts of both ecologists and practitioners. Moreover, the PLANT metaphors employed in the data of this research are also applied to construct concepts such as "policy", "economy" and "social landscape", as exemplified in (2d-e).

*d. 保证党中央关于生态文明建设决策部署**落地生根**见效。 We must guarantee that the CPC Central Committee's decisions and arrangements on building an ecological civilization **are firmly implemented and produce real results**. (Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environment Protection, May 18, 2018)*

*e. 实现百姓富、生态美**有机统一**。 Realize the **organic unity** of people's wealth and ecological beauty. (Speech at the deliberation of the Guizhou delegation, March 7, 2014.)*

The fact that the frequency of PLANT metaphors ranks second in President Xi's speeches can be attributed to the close connection between plants and human production and livelihood. Embodied philosophy posits that human concepts, categories, reasoning and cognition are not mere reflections of the objective world, but are more bodily experiences-oriented, particularly the sensory-motor system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). It is through the interactive and cognitive processing of human experiences with plants in production and livelihood that the PLANT metaphor is formed (Hu & Xu, 2019), and thus they can be accessible and easily understood by the public. Considering this, people's observations and reflections on the growth of plants, as well as their understanding of the constituent relationships, are widely used to construct more complex concepts in fields like politics, economy, ecology, etc. Likewise, elements related to plants have also become vital parts of source domains, as illustrated in Table 3.

3.2.3 WAR Metaphor

The concepts related to war are often employed to describe confrontational behaviors, such as MARKETPLACE IS A BATTLEFIELD. Political intentions are often conveyed in political discourse with the concepts pertinent to war being highlighted or concealed. It can be asserted that the concept of war has consistently resided within human civilization, even demonstrating uniformity in related concepts such as "opposition," "cruelty," and "survival necessity" across different cultural frameworks. And it performs the cognitive foundation for the metaphorical understanding of war. The historical and practical nature of war necessitates that the mindset of struggle becomes the cognitive foundation for all confrontational concepts, extending to various aspects of human life. The construction of an ecological civilization demands not only clear directions, goals, and pathways, but also a confrontation with societal behaviors that contradict ecological civilization. WAR metaphors are thus prevalent in ecological discourse. According to Table 1, the frequency of WAR metaphors ranks among the top three in this research, with 60 tokens, accounting for 16.9%.

War metaphors in Xi's ecological speeches are primarily realized through keywords such as "战斗(zhandou)" "铁军(tie jun)" "攻坚战(gong-jianzhan)" "保卫战(bao-weizhan)" and "大仗(da zhang)". Hence, we can derive the main metaphors as shown in Table 4: ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION IS A WAR, ECOLOGISTS/ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS/CONSERVATIONISTS ARE ARMIES, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION IS ENEMY, THE CONSERVATION OF BLUE SKY IS A DEFENSE BATTLE, and ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION PREVENTION IS A TOUGH AND DECISIVE BATTLE.

Table 4. Mappings of WAR Metaphor

Source domain	Mappings	Target domain
WAR	→	ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION
ARMY	→	ECOLOGISTS, ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS, CONSERVATIONISTS
ENEMY	→	ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION
A DEFENSE BATTLE	→	THE CONSERVATION OF BLUE SKY
A TOUGH AND DECISIVE BATTLE	→	ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION PREVENTION

*(3) a. 持续**打好**蓝天、碧水、净土**保卫战**。 Continue to **fighta defense battle** to safeguard blue skies, clean waters, and pure land. (Speech at the 29th collective study session of the Central Political Bureau, May 2, 2021)*

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*b. **打好污染防治攻坚战**时间紧、任务重、难度大，是一场**大仗、硬仗、苦仗**，必须加强党的领导。**The tough battle** against pollution is **a time-pressed, arduous, and difficult battle**. It is **a major battle** that must be strengthened under the leadership of the Party. (Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environment Protection, May 18, 2018)*

*c. 要建设一支生态环境保护**铁军**, ... 特别能**战斗**、特别能奉献。 We must build a force of environmental protection **warriors**, who are especially capable of **engaging in battles**, and making contributions. (Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environment Protection, May 18, 2018)*

The metaphorical keywords of "fight", "a defensive battle," "a tough battle," and "an arduous battle" in (3a-b) evoke novel metaphors regarding the nationwide resistance to pollution, depicting not only the nature and difficulty of governing damages but also signaling the determination, willpower, and confidence of China in combating the war. Among them, "a defensive battle" and "a tough battle" can be traced back to various People's War in modern China, activating the senses of the audiences to map the scenes of intense confrontation between the opposing sides. Inspired by the image schema of war, the public can infer that the task of ecological governance, related to the well-being of the people, is extremely arduous and urgent, requiring individuals to emulate the heroic fighters and step forward (Yang & Wang, 2023).

The example of (3c) further highlights the main force in the war, "Iron Army", by mapping the characteristics of "Iron Army" on conservationists. It emphasizes the need for powerful activists to wage war against environmental pollution for China to completely reverse its extensive development model of ecology. President Xi's ecological civilization discourse, through WAR metaphor, signifies the normative power of national authority over social production practices, and that the environmental polluters are metaphorically regarded as "enemies" of society and must be fought. This in turn highlights the political determination and courage of China in promoting the construction of ecological civilization.

Metaphor variations occur due to differential experiences and differential cognitive preferences. In other words, metaphor variations stem from two main reasons. The variation arises from the diverse experiences encountered by individuals on the one hand, and from the distinct cognitive preferences and styles employed in generating abstract thoughts on the other (Kövecses, 2005). This study reveals that, due to the profound historical experiences of warfare among the Chinese people, the source domain of WAR is heavily employed in the mapping of ecological civilization construction. One of the most renowned war-related works in China is *The Art of War* (孙子兵法) by Sun Tzu, which states "War is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin, hence it is a subject of inquiry that can on no account be neglected (兵者，国之大事，死生之地，存亡之道，不可不察也)". It demonstrates the significance and meaning of war for Chinese people and the development of China.History has witnessed approximately 5000 wars, accounting for about one-third of the total recorded wars in the world (Hou, 2011). This extensive history of war has shaped a military ideology centered around the theory of People's War, expanding the Chinese people's cognitive perception of war. Abundant idioms and their stories commonly used in everyday Chinese life originate from the domain of WAR. For instance, the idiom "Surrounded by enemies on all sides (四面楚歌)" comes from the Battle of Gaixia between Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, and is now used to describe a situation of being trapped and isolated without support. Furthermore, war-related idioms derived from the military classic *Thirty-Six Stratagems* (三十六计) are frequently employed in the commercial and political field, such as "Make a feint to the East but attack in the west (声东击西)", "Act rashly and alert the enemy (打草惊蛇)", and "Work miracles in maneuvering troops (用兵如神)". Drawing on such specific historical experiences and cultural connotations, President Xi extensively employs the source domain of WAR to construct the notion of environmental issues, reminding us of the severity of environmental pollution and the need for active participation in the struggle against it. As a result, the effective functions of persuasion and encouragement of ecological metaphors are observed.

3.2.4 LIFE Metaphor

In addition to the aforementioned metaphors, Xi's ecological-themed speeches also widely employ LIFE metaphors to construct the meaning and value of ecology to humans. Based on Table 1, 47 tokens taking up 13.2% of the whole data are classified as LIFE metaphors, primarily including the following metaphors: MOUNTAIN/RIVER/FOREST/FARMLAND/EARTH IS A HUMAN BODY, ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT IS A LIFE, ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT IS EYE, OCEAN/FOREST IS A PRODUCER, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Mappings of LIFE Metaphor

Source domain	Mappings	Target domain
HUMAN BODY	→	MOUNTAIN; RIVER; FOREST; FARMLAND; EARTH
LIFE	→	ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT
EYES	→	ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT
PRODUCER	→	OCEAN; FOREST

(4) a. 山水林田湖是一个**生命共同体，**人的**命脉**在田，田的**命脉**在水，水的**命脉**在山，山的**命脉**在土，土的**命脉**在林和草。 *The mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands and lakes are part of the **community of life**. The **lifeline** of humans rests with farmlands, that of farmlands with water, that of water with mountains, that of mountains with earth, and that of earth with forests and grasslands. (Explanation on Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform, November 15, 2013)*

b. 我们要像保护**眼睛**一样保护生态环境，像对待**生命**一样对待生态环境。*We must protect this planet as we protect our own **eyes**, and cherish Mother Nature the way we treasure **life**. (Speech at the opening ceremony of the Beijing International Horticultural Exhibition, April 28, 2019)*

c. 森林是陆地生态的**主体**。*Forests are the **mainstay** of terrestrial ecosystems. (Speech at the Capital Tree Planting Event, April 2, 2013)*

d. 维护海洋自然**再生产能力**。 *We shouldsafeguard the natural **reproductive capacity** of the oceans. (Speech at the 8th collective study session of the 18th Central Political Bureau, July 30, 2013)*

In (4a), the concept of systematic governance is cited to elucidate the ecological view of "human and nature as a community with a common stake". Nature and its various elements are understood as life entities like humans, traditionally regarded as inert natural entities —— "mountains, rivers, forests, fields, and lakes" are redefined as creatures with "lives" and "eyes." Not only are natural elements imbued with life traits, but they are also built as an interconnected community that is intimately tied to human life (Wang & Zhao, 2023). And thus the mindset of opposition and fragmentation between humans and nature tends to be rejected. LIFE metaphors in (4b) embody the transition from individualism to communitarian values. Through the metaphor of the most crucial perceptual organ, "eyes," and the unique essence of "life," Xi emphasizes the unity of ecological and individual interests, encourages individuals to actively respond to ecological policies, rewards protective actions, and criticizes devastating behavior.

Conceptual metaphors are based on bodily experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and the fundamental core of the human body lies in life itself. Life is the premise and foundation of all human activities to understand and transform the world, and LIFE metaphors are thus ubiquitous, especially in ecological discourse. LIFE metaphor not only reconstructs the ecological elements of a living organism but also metaphorically constructs the subjectivity and agency of ecology. As exemplified in (4c-d), "forests" and "oceans" are no longer objects to be conquered and controlled by humans, nor are they merely static and passive life forms. Instead, they are portrayed as "human body" with the capacity for "reproduction." Since nature is considered a living entity with agency, humans should approach and treat nature with empathy, striving for harmonious coexistence.

The cross-cultural variation of conceptual metaphors is anticipated, mirroring the natural and evident variations observed in metaphorical linguistic expressions (Kövecses, 2005). This study reveals that the framework of LIFE metaphor is rooted in the traditional Chinese concept of "Unity between heaven and humanity (天人合一)". Whether it is the ecological thoughts found in Confucianism such as "All beings flourish when they live in harmony and receive nourishment from Nature (万物各得其和以生，各得其养以成)", or the ecological ethics embodied in Daoism with the principle of "of "Dao Operates Naturally (道法自然)", they all contribute to nurturing a harmonious and symbiotic relationship between humans and nature (Mok, 2020). The employment of LIFE metaphor demonstrates China's unwavering commitment to the people-centered tenet and the principle of unity and cooperation.

3.2.5 DISEASE Metaphor

Ecological civilization construction necessitates a battle against behaviors that damage the ecology and restoration and governance of disastrous ecological consequences. Therefore, in Xi's speeches, DISEASE metaphors, particularly medical-related concepts, are frequently conducted to illustrate ecological governance and restoration. As shown in Table 1, DISEASE metaphors appeared 36 times, accounting for 10.1% of the total. Specifically, major metaphors have been identified: ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS ARE DISEASES, GOVERNMENT/REGIONAL ORGANIZATION IS A DOCTOR, ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT IS A

PATIENT, GOVERNANCE MEASURES ARE MEDICINES, SOLVING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IS TREATING DISEASE, as shown in Table 6.

(5) a. 今天就是专门研究从全局角度寻求新的治理之道，不是**头疼医头**、**脚疼医脚**。*We are specifically engaged in exploring new paths of governance from a global perspective, rather than **taking stopgap therapy**. (Speech at the fifth meeting of the Central Financial and Economic Leading Group, March 14, 2014)*

b. 农村环境已成为民心之**痛**、民生之**患**。*The rural environment has become the **pain** of the people and a **concern** for their livelihoods. (Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environment Protection, May 18, 2018)*

c. 我讲过"长江**病了**"，而且**病得还不轻**。治好"**长江病**"，要科学运用**中医整体观**，追根溯源、诊断病因、**找准病根、分类施策、系统治疗**。 *I have previously stated that the Yangtze River is **sick**, and the **illness** is not mild. To cure the **"Yangtze River disease"**, we need to scientifically apply the holistic perspective of **traditional Chinese medicine**, trace its origins, **diagnose** the root causes, identify and implement targeted strategies, and enforce systematic **treatments**. (Speech at the Symposium on Promoting the Development of the Yangtze Economic Belt, April 26, 2018)*

d. 要针对查找到的各类生态隐患和环境风险，......通过**祛风驱寒**、**舒筋活血**和**调理脏腑**、**通络经脉**，力求**药到病除**。*To address identified ecological vulnerabilities and environmental risks, efforts focus on alleviating cold-related issues, promoting blood circulation and joint flexibilityand regulating visceral functions, with the aim of achieving holistic therapeutic outcomes. (Speech at the Symposium on Promoting the Development of the Yangtze Economic Belt, April 26, 2018)*

Table 6. Mappings of DISEASE Metaphor

Source domain	Mappings	Target domain
DISEASE	→	ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS
DOCTOR	→	GOVERNMENT, REGIONAL ORGANIZATION
PATIENT	→	ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT (YANGTZE RIVER, YELLOW RIVER, ETC.)
MEDICINE	→	GOVERNANCE MEASURES
TREATING DISEASE	→	SOLVING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Human cognition pertains to comprehending the objects and phenomena in the surrounding environment through an individual's personal bodily experience. Disease constitutes a fundamental aspect of human existence, serving as an enduring predicament concerning the survival of mankind. DISEASE metaphors in examples (5a-d) tend to employ concepts from traditional Chinese medicine to construct ecological governance in the political sphere, such as "中医整体观(zhong-yi zheng-ti guan)" "祛风驱寒(qu-feng qu-han)" "通络经脉(tong-luo jing-mai)" etc., which reflect the cultural attributes of conceptual metaphor. Traditional Chinese culture determines the fundamental genes of Chinese people's thinking mode, values and characteristics (Zheng & Wang, 2012). As an integral component of Chinese traditional culture, traditional Chinese medicine's unique concepts and experiences will inevitably be manifested in everyday language usage, shaping people's thinking and output. For instance, the proverb "Good medicine tastes bitter" not only encompasses medical principles of healing and health preservation but also encapsulates ethical guidelines for human behavior.

Metaphors vary according to cultural contexts, involving direct physical or causal experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Such cultural nature of cognition and language has also been witnessed in Xi's speeches. (5a) emphasizes that when facing ecological issues, China's proposed measures are comprehensive and focused on the underlying causes, rather than simply addressing symptoms individually. This metaphor abounds with traditional Chinese culture and philosophical thoughts, contributing to the harmonization, balance, and systematic nature of Chinese ecological civilization. In (5b-c), the terms "痛(tong)", "患(huan)" and "病(bing)" all originally referred to abnormal physiological or psychological conditions but are used in this context to represent ecological destruction, pollution, and related issues. Based on the similarity, DISEASE metaphors map the concepts of "the pathological condition of the human body and the therapeutic methods" onto "the present circumstances and methods of environmental governance". However, the types and severity of diseases and the treatment measures differ, thus the

approaches, means, and the identity of those responsible for ecological governance also vary, as indicated by the Chinese idiom "找准病根(zhao zhun bing gen)、分类施策(fen lei shi ce)" in (5c-d).

4. Conclusion

In brief, within the self-built corpus of ecological-themed speeches by President Xi Jinping, the source domains of conceptual metaphors in ecological discourse have been categorized into eight major types based on their distribution. This study conducts a cognitive ecological analysis of the top five with a frequency exceeding 10%, namely JOURNEY, PLANT, WAR, LIFE and DISEASE, involving exploring their cognitive mechanisms, knowledge of the cultural background, as well as the underlying reasons for employment, after which the ecological impact that metaphors generate are further investigated. Notably, BUILDING metaphor, COLOR metaphor and WEALTH metaphor, which account for less than 10% of the total, are considered atypical and thus fall outside the discussion.

Through analysis, it is evident that metaphors are not solely determined by individuals' physical experiences, but also profoundly influenced by the culture ingrained in our minds. Specifically, Chinese culture exerts a substantial driving force on the conceptual metaphors occurred in the research. Consequently, without acquaintance with the cultural background pertinent to these metaphors, some may fail to grasp the abstract political ideas and ecological views embedded, even the similar or identical experiences are observed. In particular, JOURNEY metaphor epitomizes the development pattern of Chinese modernization, which advocates for the pursuit of sustainable and environmentally friendly pathways known as "green growth". PLANT metaphor elucidates the vision of magnificent China, symbolizing the "organic unity" between humanity and the environment while evoking memories of diligent farming during the agricultural era. WAR metaphor embodies the distinctive war experiences of Chinese people and strategies derived from a century of warfare, deeply ingrained in its historical narratives. LIFE metaphor represents the traditional Confucian philosophy in China, emphasizing the harmonious integration of the benevolent individual with the celestial and terrestrial realms (*ren-zheyu tian-di wan-wuweiyi-ti*). Lastly, DISEASE metaphor unveils the profound traditional Chinese medicine, renowned for its vast and intricate body of knowledge.

Being the only country globally to designate "ecological civilization" as a millennium-defining national projectand incorporate it into national major strategies, Party Constitutions, and the Constitution, China within a linguistic framework elucidates the concept of green ecological civilization and itsdevelopmental trajectory. Furthermore, it regulated the country's governance and human practices, and propelled the growth of a new civilization featuring harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. From this standpoint, the ecological discourse serves as an inherently compelling tool for constructing and disseminating ecological civilization, as well as reshaping social cognition, with the extensive utilization of ecological metaphors performing as a pivotal catalyzer. This research delves into President Xi Jinping's metaphorical expressions in ecological discourses, contributing to the research on metaphor in Chinese characteristic discourses with empirical evidence and offering insights into the construction of a unique Chinese discourse system in the new era.

Acknowledgments

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