

Metaphorical Framing in Political Translation: Translating Xi Jinping’s Ecological Progress

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Metaphors are intricate linguistic devices and potent cognitive-discursive tools for persuasion in both source texts (ST) and target texts (TT). They primarily function in framing, namely the selection and clarification of cognitive domains, a function that is particularly vital in political communication. Yet, metaphorical framing, aka metaphor framing, as a pivotal cognitive strategy remains underexplored within political translation. In light of this, our study investigates how metaphorical framing operates in translating the Ecological Progress chapter of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*. We find that metaphorical framing in political translation involves cognitive manipulation, emphasizing certain cognitive domain aspects and incorporating models of moral reasoning. In the case of Ecological Progress, institutional translators make explicit urgency and cooperation frames by personifying ‘ecology’ and establish a resolution frame through the translation of ‘red line’ and ‘thunder pool.’ This mediation helps to present China’s positive image and manifest its official stance. While ST and TT may differ in metaphor configurations, the TT frames resonate with the ST’s ideological and moral principles and align with the moral cognitive model of the target community. As such, the TT seeks to reinforce the moral authority of China’s call for international ecological cooperation, legitimate its ecological policies, and shape an image of a responsible, forward-thinking nation committed to ecological protection.

Keywords: metaphor translation; framing; *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*; translatorial mediation; institutional translation

1. Introduction: Metaphorical Framing in Political Discourse (Translation)

Language intertwines with conceptual systems. The deployment of language within a moral or political conceptual system not only utilizes but also reinforces that system (Lakoff 2002). By introducing a moral political lens into metaphor studies, George Lakoff is aware that our thought processes are often molded by metaphor-laden conceptual systems. For instance, dishonesty might result in losing ‘moral credit,’ while repeated misbehavior could cause the ‘house of morality’ to collapse. This suggests our conceptual systems can be impacted by

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discursive strategies such as repetition and negation. In his analysis of liberals’ and conservatives’ reasoning patterns, Lakoff noted that concepts and language are not neutrally constructed or employed but are imbued with moral worldviews and metaphorical reasoning shaped by discursive salience. This salience is usually a result of framing, a process of selecting certain aspects of an event (Entman 2004). In this sense, political communication is by and large a purposeful activity, where metaphors can thus be chosen and framed to influence cognition (Brugman, Burgers, and Vis 2019), legitimate policies, and persuade audiences (Mio 1997; Charteris-Black 2011; Thibodeau 2016; Boeynaems et al. 2017). Such a process of framing to influence decision-making by mapping features of one concept in terms of another is called metaphorical framing. It is often contextual and ideological, hinting at potential cognitive-pragmatic effects beyond mere rhetorical embellishments.

Metaphors in Chinese political discourse bear similar features. Lingmei Cao and Hong Wang (2017) contend that Chinese political metaphors are not unconsciously used. Classified into illness metaphor, animal metaphor, body metaphor, etc., they are idiomatic substitutes for abstract political notions, often reflecting Chinese people’s daily experiences. By the same token, Ke Li (2020) argues that idiomatic metaphors are utilized in president Xi Jinping’s ecological discourse for their persuasive efficacy. A critical metaphor analysis shows that Xi’s rhetoric is motivated by the desired balance between economic development and environmental protection. Their studies reveal China’s effort in forging discourse power, aiming to globalize Chinese perspectives through story-telling maneuvers (Xi 2014). If the “story” can be regarded as what Arran Stibbe postulates as “cognitive structure or mental models” (Stibbe 2015, 47), it would be a mental representation that is normally subtle to the social world. In his words, frames and metaphors as cognitive tools are necessitated to make explicit stories. Moreover, to accommodate complicated political ideas in stories, the format of story-telling may require elaborations and analogies. Metaphor, one thing employed to interpret another via domain mapping (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), naturally serves as an instrument in depicting Chinese political concepts.

As China voices its narratives, translation becomes a bridge to global dialogue that requires meticulous cognitive discursive operations in accommodating the target readership (Li and Li 2015). The double-whammy of pragmatic interpretation and discursive configuration adds to translating metaphors in political discourse, which may also be the reason why they are one of the most problematic concerns for translators (Newmark 1988). Metaphors in such cases

can receive more cognitive considerations so as to fulfill successful communicative intentions through carefully designed speech acts and present favorable interpretations of what is being said. Although research into political discourse (translation) has seen the cognitively mediative power of metaphor configuration (Thibodeau 2017; Semino, Demjén, and Demmen 2018; Song and Zhang 2024) and translators’ ideological mediation via various linguistic maneuvers (Li and Pan 2021; Gu 2022a; Gu 2023), a framing perspective into political metaphor translation seems underexplored. Consequently, a lack of framing analysis may exhibit a less complete picture of the cognitive-pragmatic patterns underlying those renditions, which may harbor institutional translators’ ideological mediation.

To bridge this gap, we seek to explore the framing mechanism behind the treatments of TT metaphors in the Ecological Progress chapter of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*. We focus on explaining and interpreting the framing patterns in those treatments after identifying the metaphorical items in the ST and their treatments in the TT. The following research questions will be addressed: (i) What metaphorical items are present in the Ecological Progress chapter and how have they been translated? (ii) What mechanisms of metaphorical framing underlie these translations?

By uncovering the framing intricacies of metaphor translation, we aim to enrich our understanding of metaphorical framing mechanism and political framing effects in political discourse translation. Moreover, if a metaphorical-framing lens is validated in elaborating metaphor translation, our study may further offer new cognitive-pragmatic insights into interpreting how and why metaphors at times get shifted in political translation (Song and Zhang 2024). To this end, through a critical framing analysis involving identification, explanation, and interpretation, we delve into the framing patterns of metaphor translation in the Ecological Progress chapter.

2. Data and Method: Critical Framing Analysis Approach into Metaphor Translation

Considering the framing prominence of metaphor in Chinese political translation, we adopt critical framing analysis (CFA) (Wang and Zhang 2018) for our case study on the Ecological Progress chapter in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*. This analytical approach aligns with a “descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic” perspective (Snell-Hornby 2006, 49) in translation studies. CFA incorporates a three-step pattern into discourse analysis:

description, elaboration, and interpretation. Description involves the linguistic features (including metaphors) of a discourse and the surface frames (conceptual and mental structures invoked by linguistic representations) it may invoke. The subsequent phase, elaboration, delves into the deep frames (emotional and moral patterns activated by surface frames) and values entailed in the discourse (Lakoff 2006). The two steps lay a descriptive foundation for interpreting ideology and power relations that motivate the discourse, thus bridging the detailed linguistic scrutiny with broader sociocognitive implications (van Dijk 2018).

CFA is powerful in elucidating metaphorical expressions from a cognitive lens. It derives from critical metaphor analysis, which proves to be useful in analyzing political discourse and ecological discourse, though much less attention has been paid to that in translation studies (Song 2024). Within this framework, metaphorical framing becomes an integral part of the (translated) discourse that denotes “what happens when language ‘gets done’” and that captures “both the meaning and effects of language usage” (Simpson and Mayr 2009, 5). By extending CFA from monolingual discourse analysis to bilingual analysis, we also attempt to examine its applicability in translation research.

Moreover, the underpinnings of CFA concur with a critical cognitive perspective. Here, the term ‘critical’ is not synonymous with negativity (Foss 2017). It emphasizes explanations of complex phenomena (Wodak 1999; Hart, Daughton, and LaVally 2018), provoking a more profound interpretation in discourse analysis where nothing is taken at face value. Critical cognitive linguistics (Zhang and Zhang 2020) focuses on ideology and social dynamics in the meaning-making process of cognitive linguistic resources (e.g., metaphor, metonymy, and construction). With CFA, the relations between concept, cognition, and social context can be touched upon in political discourse translation.

Indeed, akin to critical discourse analysis, CFA can be critiqued that information would be potentially cherry-picked. A researcher might be biased and influenced by his/her own ideology when selecting some data to analyze. In case of researcher bias, an additional analyst aside from the authors was invited to identify metaphors, ensuring data triangulation. The three analysts possessed sufficient expertise in cognitive metaphor theories, following the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007). In the first round of data collection, two analysts were separately engaged in metaphor identification based on the guidelines provided. To mitigate subjectivity, the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary was resorted to as an external source for identifying the tension between an expression’s ontological meaning and a

metaphorical one. Other references were Corpus of Contemporary American English, British National Corpus, and BCC Contemporary Chinese Corpus. Upon collection, the two analysts discussed the results to generate a full list of metaphors. A number of lexical items that had been identified were incorporated into the list, including those they had both identified and those an analyst had identified and another agreed after discussion to keep in the list. When no consensus was reached in terms of specific items, the third analyst was consulted in the second round to guarantee reliability.

3. Data Analysis: Metaphorical Framing in Translating Ecological Progress

Our metaphor classification and analysis delineate that metaphorical framing in the translation of Ecological Progress leans towards the positive reconceptualization of values, morality, and the nation’s image. It centers around constructing frames of urgency and cooperation by personifying ‘ecology’ and establishing a resolution frame through the rendering of ‘red line’ and ‘thunder pool.’

3.1 Ecology Personified: Urgency and Cooperation Frames

Similar to Shuguang Li’s (2022) findings, the identified keywords are 保护 (*baohu*, protect; 19 times), 尊重 (*zunzhong*, respect; 2 times), and 顺应 (*shunying*, accommodate; 2 times), etc. These are detailed in table 1 with further statistical data. The predominant data slice (88.3%) demonstrates that human as a source domain is employed to understand ecology. More specifically, the weak (76.5%) is used as an underlying source domain (source domain II as in table 1). As such, the ecology is personified by the ST author with the conceptual metaphor ECOLOGY IS HUMAN or ECOLOGY IS THE WEAK.¹

Table 1. Types, frequencies, and proportions of metaphorical keywords

Source Domain I	Source Domain II	Keywords	Total Frequency	Proportion
HUMAN	THE WEAK	保护(<i>baohu</i> , protect; 19)、保障(<i>baozhang</i> , safeguard; 3)、恢复(<i>huifu</i> ,	26	76.5%

¹ We follow the norm of cognitive linguistics to present conceptual metaphors and their domains with small capital letters.

		recover; 2)、牺牲(<i>xisheng</i> , sacrifice; 1)、服务(<i>fuwu</i> , serve; 1)		
	UNSPECIFIC	尊重(<i>zunzhong</i> , respect; 2)、顺应 (<i>shunying</i> , accommodate; 2)	4	11.8%
FACILITY	MACHINE	维护(<i>weihu</i> , maintain; 2)、修复(<i>xiufu</i> , renovate; 2)	4	11.8%

As discussed, whereas the ecology is generally seen as mankind, interestingly, it is in particular depicted as the weak. It should be protected (保护, *baohu*), safeguarded (保障, *baozhang*), and served (服务, *fuwu*). It should never be sacrificed (牺牲, *xisheng*). The use of personification, a type of ontological metaphor in cognitive linguistics, resonates with an environment-caring context where ecology is a major concern.

This context has been formulated over three phases during which numerous national conferences regarding environmental protection were held. The three phases are the beginning stage (1973-1987), the developing stage (1989-2006), and the maturing stage (since 2007) (Zhang 2014). The first environmental protection conference in 1973 recognized the serious environmental problems caused during the past era. Before that time, it had been widely accepted in China that eco-crisis was unique to a capitalist society. Premier Zhou Enlai, however, pointed out that it was unfair to hold that view, because China also had serious pollution and western countries were not that inferior in terms of environmental issues (Liu 1996).

A decade later, the second conference canonized environmental protection as a fundamental national policy. Both conferences have directed the public’s attention to the environment and sought consensus to take more action in the future. In the developing stage, administrative means were taken to prevent and solve environmental problems. Notably, the sixth environmental protection conference emphasized that three old-fashioned mentalities should be avoided: more emphasis on economic increase than environmental protection, administration after contamination and destroying while administrating, and mere administrative means in environmental protection. This shows that higher considerations with foresight were given to produce effective measures. More importantly, in the maturing stage, ecological construction was put even higher in the 17th and 18th CPC National Congresses. The ‘Five in One’ or five-sphere (五位一体, *wuwei yiti*) developmental plan was proposed: the

economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological development. That is, ecological development should not be separated from any other forms of development but be promoted in every aspect.

The above trace manifests a burgeoning trend of environmental protection and ecological development in China. This increasing focus rests with an awareness of the escalating severity of environmental problems and a demand for improved living standards. Such a context may justify the employment of ECOLOGY IS HUMAN in the ST. By personifying ecology, it may narrow the relationship between the ecology and mankind, transforming it into something tangible and relational rather than an abstract issue reserved for expert deliberation. Moreover, framing the ecology into the weak or patient in the use of, for example, 保护 (*baohu*, protect) and 恢复 (*huifu*, recover) underscores its severe condition, hence activating the surface frame of urgency for more action to be taken. This framing also suggests a reasoning pattern attached with a moral value that being empathetic with and caring for the weak is a virtue. As the ecology is a weak patient, it is moral to protect and save it rather than let it be sacrificed (牺牲, *xisheng*) without taking any measures.

The metaphor ECOLOGY IS HUMAN is also present in the third section of Ecological Progress—为子孙后代留下天蓝、地绿、水清的生产生活环境 (*wei zisun houdai liuxia tianlan dilv shuiqing de shengchan shenghuo huanjing*, Leave to Our Future Generations Blue Skies, Green Fields and Clean Water). This section is Xi’s congratulatory letter to the Eco Forum Annual Global Conference Guiyang 2013. Set in a global context, the conference invited presidents, heads of governments, scholars, and entrepreneurs from various countries to share their insights on eco-civilization. The global context helps integrate the human metaphor into a cooperation frame as in the discourse 相信通过与会嘉宾共同努力, 会议的成果必将为保护全球生态环境作出积极贡献 (*xiangxin tongguo yuhui jiabin gongtong nuli, huiyi de chengguo bijiang wei baohu quanqiu shengtai huanjing zuochu jiji gongxian*, I am convinced that the achievements made by the participants’ collective efforts at this conference will make a useful contribution to protecting the global environment). By juxtaposing 保护 (*baohu*, protect) and 共同努力 (*gongtong nuli*, collective efforts), the addresser injects a cooperation frame into the discourse, showing that cooperation will be a positive and moral behavior to protect and save the global environment.

A large proportion (93.3%) of the keywords regarding ECOLOGY IS HUMAN have been faithfully rendered in the TT. This may result from the fact that environmental issues are common to the globe and the human metaphor and the frames it activates in the ST are not strange to the TT audience.

Global environmental issues can be seen in several documents. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) delivered in May 1992 marked an international collaboration in response to climate change. To promote the framework, the Kyoto Protocol was implemented in 1997 and took effect in February 2005. Ten years later in 2015, the Paris Agreement was proposed at the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference. 195 nations promised to cut greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the consequences of climate change. Those efforts as a trend manifest a multitude of countries’ willingness to protect the ecology. With relevant concerns aside from climate change, ECOLOGY IS HUMAN or more particularly ECOLOGY IS THE WEAK has been ubiquitous in examples such as ‘environmental protection,’ ‘protect our planet,’ ‘save the earth,’ etc. Those frequent linguistic and social practices add to the frames that environmental protection is an urgency and every country, be it a developed or developing one, should cooperate to protect the ecology. Environmental protection becomes a responsibility. Protecting the ecology is hence positioned in the moral reasoning that indifference or being environmentally unfriendly is immoral and should be criticized.

This is obvious in former U.S. President Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. In 2017, the U.S. Federal Department began censoring the use of ‘climate change’ and suggesting ‘extreme weather’ (Milman 2017). Those practices were enacted under a business-friendly and deregulatory agenda. To this end, 74 actions were taken to weaken environmental protection. The Trump administration’s standing alone was criticized by many other countries. The leaders of Italy, France, and Germany responded to the decision to quit the Paris agreement with regret. Japan’s environment minister commented that he was disappointed and angry and that the U.S. is turning its back on humanity. In response to the U.S., China’s premier Li Keqiang conveyed that fighting climate change was an international responsibility and a global consensus (Wang 2022). Since then, the EU and China have been forging a new alliance on climate change. Those events show that protecting the ecology has been a moral issue that involves international concerns.

Metaphorical items regarding ECOLOGY IS HUMAN in the TT seem to suggest congruent framing compared with those in the ST. Expressions containing ‘protect,’ ‘protection,’ and so

forth activate an urgency frame; discourse suggesting ‘collaboration’ and ‘collective’ activate a cooperation frame. By evoking the urgency and cooperation frames, China suggests that it has seen the seriousness of environmental issues and will take an active role in protecting the environment via cooperation with other countries. In so doing, the TT may further consolidate China’s moral stance and construct a responsible image of China. Such a moral stance is constructed based on the common ground of the ST and TT audiences’ moral cognitions: environmental or ecological protection is good behavior.

In addition, the cooperation frame is not embedded separately within the third section of the Ecological Progress chapter, as with the other two sections, all the three have actualized an urgency frame activated by the human metaphor. With this premise, the cooperation frame may be more convincing. This is because, first of all, through the urgency frame, the reader is informed of the severity of the environment. As environmental issues are a big threat to many countries, solving these issues is in the national interest of each of them. Environmental protection, therefore, seems to be one of the priorities requiring global cooperation. Second, the audience is informed that China can be a reliable and bona fide cooperator, as it has been concerned about the ecology and some measures have been taken to protect it. This sets the stage for China’s call for global cooperation.

3.2 ‘Red Line’ and ‘Thunder Pool’: Resolution Frame

In addition to the ontological metaphor found in the ST and TT, the metaphorical expressions 生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red line) and 越雷池 (*yue leichi*, cross thunder pool) are framed to show the resolution for protecting the ecology in the translation. With the acceleration of China’s urbanization and industrialization, the rapid expansion of construction land has been a big threat to the ecology. Against this backdrop, 生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red line), also 生态保护红线 (*shengtai baohu hongxian*, ecological conservation red line) as a Chinese-specific concept is employed to maintain environmental protection. 红线 (*hongxian*, red line) in Chinese can refer to matchmaking and, moreover, imply correct ideas in political agendas. The latter may entail a sense of limit, i.e., political actors should uphold correct ideas and should not hold incorrect ones. This is more obvious in 政治红线 (*zhengzhi hongxian*, political red line). It means that an official or Party member must prevent misbehaviors or s/he would probably cross the political red line.

Interestingly, no records containing ‘ecological red line’ or ‘ecological redline’ have been found in COCA and BNC, but in English, ‘red line’ or ‘redline’ can share similar connotations with those expressions. COCA is a large-scale American English corpus; BNC is a widely-used corpus featuring British English. This suggests that on the one hand, they are creative metaphorical terms in Chinese. On the other, they may bear semantic and metaphorical ties with ‘red line’ or ‘redline’ in English, which may be one of the factors to keep the terms in the TT.

A red line or redline can mark a point on a gauge, suggesting a recommended safety limit. The earliest use of ‘red line’ as a metaphor seems to date back to the 1970s, when the president of the United States warned that crossing a red line has more drastic consequences than crossing a line in the sand, as red is the color of blood and danger. In 1975, the ‘red line’ was notably used as a political metaphor by Israel Foreign Minister Yigal Allon in “Washington has managed to draw a red line which all the Arab countries know they must not cross” (Zimmer 2013). In all, a red line represents a warning rule that anyone who breaks it would face unfavorable results.

生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red line) in Chinese can be metaphorized as a boundary or a threshold. As a boundary, it delineates several regions that should be meticulously treated. It also refers to the strict control boundary in key ecological function areas, ecologically sensitive and fragile areas, which is the bottom line of national and regional ecological security. As a threshold, it is often seen as a legally binding value, similar to the red line of the amount of arable land. One who breaks the value will be punished. This creates a warning frame for those who risk challenging the law. This frame is further empowered in Chinese official media. For instance, 生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red line) is compared to 高压线 (*gaoyaxian*, high voltage wire) and 生命线 (*shengmingxian*, lifeline). By 高压线 (*gaoyaxian*, high voltage line), it is warned that violations will lead to severe punishments. The knowledge of getting a deadly electric shock is employed to understand those consequences. By 生命线 (*shengmingxian*, lifeline), it is emphasized that 生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red line) concerns many creatures’ lives. Ignoring this fact is inhumane.

However, the frame ‘ecological red line’ may create in the TT can be very different, as the target audience would not be Chinese locals. The TT audience may not feel a sense of warning facing the ‘ecological red line.’ Rather, the stories with this concept act as a channel

for them to look at China’s active role in environmental protection. The following extract presents the sentences where 生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red line) appears twice in the document. The concept has been faithfully rendered in the TT.

ST:

要坚定不移加快实施主体功能区战略，严格按照优化开发、重点开发、限制开发、禁止开发的主体功能定位，划定并严守生态红线，构建科学合理的城镇化推进格局、农业发展格局、生态安全格局，保障国家和区域生态安全，提高生态服务功能。要牢固树立生态红线的观念。(yao jiandingbuyi jiakuai shishi zhuti gongneng qu zhanlue, yange anzhaoyouhua kaifa, zhongdian kaifa, jinzhi kaifa de zhuti gongneng dingwei, huading bing yanshou shengtai hongxian, goujian kexue heli de chengzhenghua tuijin geju, nongye fazhan geju, shengtai anquan geju, baozhang guojia he quyushengtai anquan, tigao shengtai fuwugongneng. yao laogu shuli shengtai hongxian de guannian.) (Xi 2014, 209; emphasis added)

Gloss:

It is a must to unswervingly accelerate the implementation of the main function zone strategy, strictly follow the main function orientation of optimizing, focusing on, restricting, and prohibiting development to delimit and strictly observe the ecological red line, build a scientific and reasonable pattern of urbanization, agricultural development, and ecological security, ensure national and regional ecological security, and improve the ecological service function. It is a must to firmly establish the concept of ecological red line.

TT:

We will accelerate the work of functional zoning, follow the functional definitions of different areas where development must be optimized, prioritized, restricted, or forbidden, and delimit and strictly enforce ecological red lines. We will work out appropriate plans for urbanization, agricultural development and ecological security to safeguard national and regional ecological security, and improve services for ecological conservation. We must fully understand the importance of enforcing ecological red lines. (Xi 2014, 239; emphasis added)

Those sentences set a context of restriction and prescription, indicating what should be done and what should be forbidden in regional development. ‘Ecological red lines’ therefore entail China’s policies in ecological conservation. This can be found in the goal of creating 生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red lines): to build the strictest policy system of ecological conservation. Discursively, the goal of setting ‘ecological red lines’ to protect the ecology manifests the Communist Party of China’s pragmatic strategy of ‘performance legitimacy,’ which means that the government retains its legitimacy by accomplishing specific

goals regarding the nation’s development (Zhao 2009; Zhu 2011). This pragmatic mentality has been retained via the discussion of upholding ‘ecological red lines’ in the TT.

More specifically, keeping the term in the TT may consolidate the frame of resolution that China has been taking firm action to protect the environment instead of being all talk. As such, the TT audience comes into contact with part of the ST audience, for instance, the ordinary Chinese citizens. They may perceive the identical frame of resolution rather than the warning frame which may indicate punishments. Hence, by framing the ‘ecological red line’ metaphor, the translators may build a more positive image of China that concerns the ecology in policy-making. In this way, the conformity between metaphorical framing and image building can motivate the faithful translation of 生态红线 (*shengtai hongxian*, ecological red lines). Such conformity arguably rests with the overall national interest to gain global trust in ecological policies.

Another example can be seen in the translation of 越雷池 (*yue leichi*, cross thunder pool). Compared with the 红线 (*hongxian*, red line), 雷池 (*leichi*, word-for-word translation: thunder pool) is more of a culture-laden term. In the east of Wangjiang, Anhui, along the river in southwest Anhui lies a vast area of the dense water network, which was known as the Great Thunder Water (大雷水, *daleishui*) in ancient times. Its downstream rivers converge into a pool called 古雷池 (*gu leichi*, word-for-word translation: ancient thunder pool). Despite its geographical image, 雷池 (*leichi*, thunder pool) is believed to have originated from an allusion.

Yu Liang, brother of Emperor Ming of Jin, received a secret report that Su Jun, governor of Liyang, was attempting to commit rebellion. Instead of taking immediate action, Yu tried to trick Su Jun into being Grand Secretary of the capital Jiankang. He underestimated the strength of Su Jun’s army and thought that Wen Qiao, Governor of Jiangzhou, must stay where he was to protect Jiangzhou without marching into Jiankang. Therefore, he wrote to Wen not to ‘cross the thunder pool’ (足下无过雷池一步也, *zuxia wuguo leichi yibu ye*), i.e., to be stationed in Jiangzhou. Consequently, Jiankang was taken by Su, as his attack was not successfully blocked.

The above allusion shows that 雷池 (*leichi*, thunder pool) seems to point to the place where someone is. Another evidence of the use of 雷池 (*leichi*, thunder pool) comes from its

frequent collocates; it is often collocated with the verb 越 (*yue*, cross) in the BCC corpus.² 242 out of 470 (51.5%) concordance lines are found containing 越 (*yue*, cross) collocated with *leichi*. Other verbs are *ru* (入, enter), *guo* (过, cross), *yu* (逾, go beyond), and *jin* (进, get in). Now, *bukan yue leichi yibu* (不敢越雷池一步, dare not cross the thunder pool) can be used to describe adherence to a stereotype routine without adapting to changes. This entails the negative prosody that may imply a speaker’s blame on an actor who dares not cross 雷池 (*leichi*, thunder pool).

In contrast, another formally similar but semantically different expression, 不能越雷池一步 (*buneng yue leichi yibu*, must not cross the thunder pool), suggests a sense of prohibition. In Chinese, 雷 (*lei*, thunder) can be a metaphor for 电 (*dian*, lightning) as in 雷击 (*leiji*, lightning strike) and 天打雷劈 (*tianda leipi*, be struck by lightning and split into two halves). 雷池 (*leichi*, thunder pool) in this way presents a figurative area filled with potential risks and even the danger that one may be struck by lightning. In other words, 越雷池 (*yue leichi*, cross thunder pool) can be a very risky and prohibited behavior because crossing 雷池 (*leichi*, thunder pool) will lead to severe consequences.

Following the line 要牢固树立生态红线的观念 (*yao laogu shuli shengtai hongxian de guannian*, it is a must to firmly build the concept of ecological red line), 越雷池 (*yue leichi*, cross thunder pool) is presented as an idiom in 不能越雷池一步 (*buneng yue leichi yibu*, must not cross the thunder pool). Co-occurring with the discussion about ‘ecological red line’ in the section 努力走向社会主义生态文明新时代 (*nuli zouxiang shehui zhuyi shengtai wenming xin shidai*, word-for-word translation, striving to move towards a new era of socialist ecological civilization; TT: Usher in a New Era of Ecological Progress), the extract below shows how the framing of ecological protection aligns with a new era of ecological progress.

ST:

在生态环境保护问题上，就是要不能越雷池一步，否则就应该受到惩罚。
(*zai shengtai huanjing baohu wenti shang, jiushi yao buneng yue leichi yibu, fouze jiu yinggai shoudao chengfa.*) (Xi 2014, 209; emphasis added)

² BCC corpus, accessed September 10, 2023, <https://bcc.blcu.edu.cn/>.

Gloss:

When it comes to ecological protection, it is important not to cross the thunder pool, otherwise one should be punished.

TT:

Any violations regarding environmental protection will be punished. (Xi 2014, 239; emphasis added)

It seems that some have been neglected in the TT compared with the information in the ST. Understandably, the discussion of the ‘ecological red line’ has set a context of ecological protection for the whole section. The danger of crossing the thunder pool is to be evoked with the expression 否则就应该受到惩罚 (*fouze jiu yinggai shoudao chengfa*, otherwise one should be punished). This shows a frame of resolution in implementing strict policies with punishment to conserve the ecology. Framed into ‘violations,’ crossing thunder pool has lost its metaphorical image or source domain that may be entrenched in Chinese as an idiom. Partially motivated by the fact that it is unique to the Chinese culture, the translators may have canceled its metaphorical sense but retained its corresponding frame. Furthermore, the choice of ‘violation’ suggests an echo with ‘punished.’ Similar to that evoked by the ST, they may together activate the resolution frame that the Chinese government is determined to protect the environment via policies.

Moreover, such a frame seems to be made explicit by the semantic foregrounding of ‘violation’ instead of ‘cross the thunder pool’ or other correspondents of 越雷池 (*yue leichi*, cross thunder pool) and strengthened by the term being put at the beginning. This mediation is not unexpected, as the translators as a team organized by the authority share on the whole the same ideology with the government. As such, they are vested with the discursive power to seek maximal national interests. Their discursive power can usually be manifested through the cognitive mediation of accommodating to the TT audience in rendering non-distorted conceptual frames, whilst the wording seems different from the ST. As a result, a similar frame can be activated or even strengthened for a (more) positive image of the nation.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we find that institutional translators can be driven by the consistency between national image and metaphorical framing. Metaphorical framing in translation is not limited to translating metaphorical items directly from the ST to the TT; rather, it involves how

institutional translators handle the ST metaphors to frame the TT. Confronting ST metaphors, these translators might maintain, modify, or demetaphorize them to trigger a specific frame in the TT. In institutional translation, metaphors or metaphorical framing are likely to be conditioned by desired national images and interests (Song and Zhang 2024) and further by the moral values and ideologies embedded in the political ST. By elucidating these constraints underlying cognitive ideological mediation in political/institutional translation, we add to Chunshen Zhu and Junfeng Zhang’s (2015, 387) finding that government-affiliated translators may “dance with ideology” via linguistic configurations for a favorable rendition. Specifically in our case, the ontological metaphor ECOLOGY IS HUMAN prompts the urgency and cooperation frames to reinforce China’s moral stance on global collaboration. Additionally, such moral positioning is amplified through the framing of 生态红线 into ‘ecological red line’ and 越雷池 into ‘violation.’ It also shapes an image of responsible and active China in ecological conservation. As such, nuanced wording can be acceptable if the building of national image and metaphorical framing are congruent in the TT.

The translation team, comprising government-affiliated institutional translators, is ideologically invested rather than mechanically translating content. Some of them are CPC members attuned to politically sensitive issues (Li and Li 2015). Adhering to guidelines and rigorous revision protocols, they form a team steeped in ideology, utilizing cognitive strategies in their translation decisions. Through self-interpretation, a translator may translate based on his/her own understanding of the ST. Ideological incongruity may happen at this stage, as not all translators share homogeneous cognitive environments. Nevertheless, through collaborative efforts, a consensus is often reached on a revised, more unified version, particularly when disparities come to light. In our case study, elements that bolster a positive national image are typically emphasized and foregrounded. These cognitive discursive strategies—employing metaphorization, demetaphorization, and moral reasoning—become the tools of story-telling that configure cognitive structures and mental models. Consequently, institutional translators are crucial agents in (re)telling China’s stories through metaphorical framing. They are the vital (re)tellers who shape positive and congruent national images in the global narrative arena (Gu 2022b).

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