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RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: XI JINPING AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract. This paper explores the rhetorical functions of metaphorical language in political leadership, using Xi Jinping's speeches as a case study. Political leaders frequently use metaphor as a strategic tool to shape public opinion, reinforce ideology, and legitimize authority. Through qualitative analysis of selected speeches, the study reveals how Xi Jinping utilizes metaphorical language to construct political narratives, evoke cultural values, and guide national identity. The findings highlight the central role of metaphor in chinese political discourse and its effectiveness in leadership communication.

Keywords: Metaphorical language, political discourse, Xi Jinping, rhetorical strategies, conceptual metaphor, political leadership, chinese dream, political communication, discourse analysis, ideology.

Metaphorical language plays a crucial role in political discourse across cultures. Political leaders rely on metaphors not only to simplify complex ideas, but also to evoke emotional responses, guide perception, and embed ideological values into public consciousness. In chinese political communication, metaphors often draw from traditional culture, nature, war, journey, and family domains to project strength, unity, progress, and harmony.

Xi Jinping, as china's paramount leader, employs metaphorical language with rhetorical precision. His metaphors serve to articulate the vision of the "Chinese Dream," mobilize national sentiment, and position China as a global leader. This study examines the rhetorical functions of metaphors in his political speeches and explains how they contribute to his leadership style and communicative effectiveness.

This analysis draws on conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which posits that metaphors are not merely decorative but fundamental to thought and reasoning. CMT emphasizes that metaphor shapes how people conceptualize abstract political ideas—such as power, progress, or reform—through more concrete domains like war, nature, or travel.

Additionally, the rhetorical perspective views metaphor as a tool of persuasion, identity construction, and ideological framing. Metaphors help to encode and legitimize specific worldviews while marginalizing others (Charteris-black, 2011).

A qualitative discourse analysis was conducted on a selected corpus of Xi Jinping's public speeches between 2013 and 2024. Sources include official government websites, the



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Qiushi journal, and the Xinhua News Agency. Metaphors were identified, classified by source domain (e.g., journey, nature, war), and analyzed for rhetorical function.

One of Xi Jinping's most frequently used metaphors is that of a journey or path. Examples include:

- *"The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a long journey."*
- *"We are moving forward step by step along the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics."*

Rhetorical function: This metaphor frames national development as a collective voyage. It emphasizes perseverance, direction, and inevitability. It also implicitly sets expectations that success requires discipline and unity over time.

In speeches addressing internal reform or external threats, war metaphors are common:

- *"We must fight a tough battle against poverty."*
- *"Corruption is a cancer we must eradicate."*

Rhetorical function: War metaphors create urgency and a call to action. They polarize issues into winners and losers, good and evil, positioning the government as a strong and righteous force. This appeals to national pride and moral clarity.

Xi frequently refers to nature and balance:

- *"Green mountains are gold mountains."*
- *"Man must live in harmony with nature."*

Rhetorical function: These metaphors promote ecological awareness and sustainability as core national values. They also connect with traditional Chinese philosophy (e.g., Daoism, Confucianism), invoking a harmonious worldview that blends modern policy with cultural heritage.

The family metaphor appears in discussions of governance and state-society relations:

- *"The Party is the mother of the people."*
- *"We are one family sharing one dream."*

Rhetorical function: These metaphors establish emotional intimacy between the state and the people. They portray leadership as caring and paternal, reinforcing loyalty and social cohesion.

The bridge and dream metaphors: vision and connectivity

- *"The Belt and Road is a bridge of cooperation."*
- *"The Chinese Dream is the dream of each citizen."*

Rhetorical function: These metaphors serve to inspire and connect abstract political goals with personal aspirations. They project optimism and strategic vision, enhancing the image of China as both forward-looking and inclusive.

Discussion:

Xi Jinping's metaphorical language serves multiple rhetorical goals:

1. **Ideological legitimization** – Metaphors frame socialist principles in culturally resonant terms.
2. **Nation-building** – They reinforce collective identity and shared destiny.



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3. **Emotional mobilization** – War and journey metaphors stir feelings of urgency and pride.
4. **Policy justification** – Metaphors simplify complex reforms and policies, making them more palatable and understandable.
5. **Global strategy** – Metaphors like “bridge” or “community with a shared future” present China as a benign global power.

Importantly, Xi’s metaphors are carefully calibrated to blend modern governance with Chinese tradition, thus reinforcing cultural legitimacy while advancing new political directions.

Conclusion. Metaphorical language in Xi Jinping’s political leadership is not merely ornamental—it is a powerful rhetorical device for persuasion, legitimization, and nation-building. By drawing from conceptual domains that resonate with Chinese cultural and philosophical values, Xi’s metaphors foster a sense of continuity, purpose, and unity.

This case study underscores the importance of metaphor in political communication and demonstrates how linguistic strategies shape both national and international perceptions of leadership.

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