

# A Diachronic Study of Political Metaphors and Their Social Implications in Government Work Reports (1983-2013) in China

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Received: March 3, 2014 Accepted: April 13, 2014 Online Published: August 29, 2014

doi:10.5539/ells.v4n3p71 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ells.v4n3p71>

## Abstract

Conceptual metaphors since the reform and opening up in China in political discourses in Zhejiang provincial government work reports are taken as the research corpus for studying their usages diachronically in order to find out the development trends of various kinds of political metaphors in different historical periods and to explore the way of the local government changing the constructions and forms of the conceptual metaphors according to the social development in Zhejiang. Based on these analyses, the governance strategies and the social implications conceived in the metaphor phenomenon including social psychologies, values, morals, laws, economies, beliefs and citizens' living styles are discussed.

**Keywords:** political metaphors, social implications, diachronic research, Zhejiang provincial government work reports

## 1. Introduction

In the past first session of the 12th National People's Congress of Zhejiang Province, the acting governor Li Qiang delivered a government work report of Zhejiang province which established the goals to construct a modernized province in the following 5 years with prosperity both materially and spiritually. Over the years Zhejiang provincial government work reports are made for reviewing achievements, summarizing experiences, defining the future development directions of Zhejiang by governors. Therefore, it has features of regionalism, historicity and timeliness and reflects the political spirit and social culture in Zhejiang effectively. Since the reform and opening up in China, the politics and economy in Zhejiang have gone through great reforms, so the analysis of discourse features of Zhejiang provincial government work reports for the past 30 years helps study the governance concepts of Zhejiang provincial government. Moreover, Zhejiang has long been a focus for concern for its "Zhejiang economic mode" which is represented by its "Private Economy". It boasts fast growth of per capita GDP and was crowned as "the richest province in China". These economic and social achievements in Zhejiang owned to the governance validity of the provincial government. So taking Zhejiang provincial government work reports as the research corpus helps interpret the political innovations in the report discourses.

Metaphor, as a rhetorical device and cognitive tool, is widely adapted in all walks of people's life including politics. For it expresses abundant political implications with the simplest language forms, thus has been commonly used in political discourses like work reports. Since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) put forward the conceptual metaphor theory, scholars made analyses of metaphors in political discourses from different perspectives. However, most existed research studied the metaphors from a synchronic viewpoint, which can only reflect the language phenomenon and its implications in a certain era (Lakoff, 1996,2004; Musolff, 2006). Furthermore, according to Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, all of these language phenomena are the carriers of culture (Shaozeng, 2006). The fine social culture necessarily conceives the polished language. In turn, the fine social culture propels the development of language constantly. Regretfully, the existing researches lingered over the analysis of the metaphor phenomena without exploring the social and cultural roots including social psychology, values, morals, laws, economy, and belief conceived in the language phenomenon.

Therefore, this study would take Zhejiang provincial government work reports as the research corpus for studying their usages diachronically in order to find out the development trends of various kinds of political metaphors in different historical periods and to explore the way of the local government changing the

constructions and forms of the conceptual metaphors according to the social development in Zhejiang. Furthermore, the governance strategies and the social implications conceived in the metaphor phenomenon including social psychologies, values, laws, economics and citizens' living styles will be discussed.

## 2. Research Corpus

Based on the government reports from the second session of the Sixth National People's Congress of Zhejiang Province (1983) to the first session of the Twelfth National People's Congress of Zhejiang Province (2013), 6 corpuses are established according to different sessions. The serial numbers are tagged as I[12(1)-11(2)], II[11(1)-10(2)], III[10(1)-9(2)], IV[9(1)-8(2)], V[8(1)-7(2)], VI[7(1)-6(2)].

According to the conceptual metaphor theory, metaphors are cross domain mapping in conceptual system. They are summarization at the conceptual level, so they are named as conceptual metaphors. Metaphorical expressions refer to the surface body in cross domain projection, in another word, the individual expression at language level. Therefore, we have to find out as many metaphor expressions as possible and tag them as key words, like “战略”(strategy) and “哺育”(nurture). Next employ the Chinese lexical analysis system Ictclas 1.0 for classifying the original corpuses and adapt AntConc 3.2.1w to process the participle corpuses through retrieval by window and frequency count. Analyze the contexts where the key words are and exclude the non metaphorical expressions. Then summarize and classify the processed expressions through the analysis of the source domains of the key words. Figure out the proportion of all types of metaphors in each corpus and study the development trend of political metaphors in Zhejiang provincial government work reports. Based on these analyses, the governance strategies and the social implications conceived in the metaphor phenomenon including social psychologies, values, morals, laws, economics, beliefs and citizens' living styles are discussed.

## 3. Categories of Political Metaphors

Through identifying and extracting the metaphors in corpus, the conceptual metaphors can be classified in to 6 types in the government reports, including war metaphors, fighting metaphors, medical metaphors, travel metaphors, construction metaphors, and agriculture metaphors (examples below).

(1) “一年来，省人民政府认真贯彻党的十八大和十八届二中、三中全会精神，深入实施‘八八战略(strategy)’，全面落实省委十三届三次、四次全会精神。” (*Government Reports of Zhejiang Province*, 16/1/2014)

(2) “保持‘严打(Strike-hard)’态势，严厉打击(attack)暴力犯罪、毒品犯罪、带有黑社会性质的有组织犯罪和流氓恶势力犯罪，以及抢劫、盗窃、拐卖妇女儿童等刑事犯罪，依法取缔(crack down)和打击(attack)‘法轮功’之类的邪教组织，打击(attack)走私、骗汇以及金融、财税、商贸等领域的严重经济犯罪活动，坚决扫除(clean up)各种社会丑恶现象。” (*Government Reports of Zhejiang Province*, 18/2/2000)

(3) “坚决纠正一些地方和部门存在的办事不公、以权谋私、损害群众利益等问题；建立统一的招投标平台，进一步完善建设工程招投标、经营性土地出让、产权交易和政府采购制度，努力从源头上预防(prevent)和治理(cure)腐败。” (*Government Reports of Zhejiang Province*, 17/11/2004)

(4) “进一步探索具有浙江特点的农业现代化道路(road)，加快(speed up)发展高效生态农业。” (*Government Reports of Zhejiang Province*, 16/1/2008)

(5) “深化文化体制改革，全面推进文化建设(construct)‘八项工程(project)’和新农村文化建设(construct)‘十项工程(project)’” (*Government Reports of Zhejiang Province*, 17/11/2011)

(6) “通过重点实施“五大百亿”工程和培育(breed)“五个一批”企业，进一步提升企业和产业整体水平。” (*Government Reports of Zhejiang Province*, 17/11/2000)

The quantity distributions and proportions of the conceptual metaphors in the 6 corpuses are summed up in graph1 and graph2.

Table 1. Quantity distributions of the 6 types of conceptual metaphors in the government reports of Zhejiang in the 6 corpuses

	I[12(1)-11(2)]	II[11(1)-10(2)]	III[10(1)-9(2)]	IV[9(1)-8(2)]	V[8(1)-7(2)]	VI[7(1)-6(2)]
<b>War metaphors</b>	156	121	98	103	74	69
<b>Fighting metaphors</b>	136	96	75	124	24	32
<b>Medical metaphors</b>	56	53	79	84	99	76
<b>Travel metaphors</b>	83	85	90	92	88	90
<b>Construction metaphors</b>	25	46	29	36	49	42
<b>Agriculture metaphors</b>	0	9	6	14	13	21
<b>Total</b>	456	410	377	392	343	330

Table 2. Proportions of the 6 types of conceptual metaphors in the government reports of Zhejiang in the 6 corpuses

	I[12(1)-11(2)]	II[11(1)-10(2)]	III[10(1)-9(2)]	IV[9(1)-8(2)]	V[8(1)-7(2)]	VI[7(1)-6(2)]
<b>War metaphors</b>	34%	30%	24%	23%	21%	21%
<b>Fighting metaphors</b>	30%	23%	18%	27%	7%	10%
<b>Medical metaphors</b>	12%	13%	19%	19%	29%	23%
<b>Travel metaphors</b>	18%	21%	22%	20%	25%	27%
<b>Construction metaphors</b>	5%	11%	7%	8%	14%	13%
<b>Agriculture metaphors</b>	0%	2%	1%	3%	4%	6%

#### 4. Diachronic Changes of Political Metaphors

From graph1 and graph2 it can be concluded that during 30 years war metaphors and travel metaphors constitute highest proportions constantly, among which war metaphors had a slow fall but always stayed above 20% while travel metaphors were going up gradually and stayed above 20% except during the first 5 years. In comparison, construction metaphors and agriculture metaphors accounted for small proportions but still remained stable upward trends. Medical metaphors have been increasing year after year and reached its peak of 29% during the fifth 5 years. The one with greatest changes of twists and turns is fighting metaphors which decreased during the first 15 years but soared during the fourth 5 years and went down. Although at present fighting metaphors are still been commonly used but cannot be compared at the primary level in reform and opening up.

##### 4.1 Political Metaphors with Stable Use

###### 4.1.1 War Metaphors

War metaphors can be interpreted as “Province development is a war”. In the war, the provincial government is the conductor; the masses are the warriors; the construction of province is the fighting. War Metaphors took the largest proportions in the 6 types of conceptual metaphors during the first 15 years. It fell below the proportion of fighting metaphors in the fourth five years. Though later it lingered around 21% until 2013 but could not be compared with those in the first 5 years.

In the initial reforming stage which was during the several years after 1983, the cognitive modes and the thinking modes of the government had not been transmitted and were still colored by the influences of class struggles in Cultural Revolution in the previous history, so there was still a habitual preference for the government of employing revolutionary language to express political views. With the stabilization of the peaceful social and political environment, the focus had been diverged into economic constructions, thus the usage of the war metaphors had been greatly reduced. However, during 1998 to 2002, the turbulent international and domestic factors constantly affected China’s domestic stability, so it was purposeful for the government to use war metaphors to improve their alertness of the unexpected eventualities and take a strong stand. Even in recent years the war metaphors are still keeping a usage with high frequency above 20% in the government reports because war metaphors can fuel will to fight and inspire people to engage in the constructions. Whereas, the proportion of the war metaphors are 13% lower than that in the initial reforming stage which proved that the government has turned its function from revolutionary into governance in economy.

###### 4.1.2 Travel Metaphors

Travelling has always been seen as a purposeful movement from the departure to the destination in the metaphorical study. Lakoff (1993) summarized travel metaphors as “the purposeful movement forward towards

the destination.” The final aim of Zhejiang Provincial Government is “to build a rich and modernized province in various aspects” as expounded in the each government report of all the years. Thus travel metaphors in this context can be summarized as a travelling along the road towards the aim for realizing a rich and modernized province.

In the relation of bodies and vehicles in the travel metaphors, the citizens in Zhejiang are the travelers; the CPC Zhejiang Provincial Committee is the guider; the principles of the Party Central Committee are the guide. There are evidently positive association senses in travel metaphors. On the one hand, travel metaphors make description of the direction of development of Zhejiang in detail, which give people a vivid vision and a strong aspiration of the future. On the other hand, travel metaphors emphasize the importance of the principles set up by the government and propel the citizens to follow the government in the future road. Therefore, the heavy use of the travel metaphors not only can uplift people’s enthusiasm to strive hard, but also can stabilize the leadership of the government.

During the past 30 years, the fact that the usage of travel metaphors was creeping higher and kept above a comparatively high percentage shows that with the contradictions among the people weakened and the social environment stabilized, people require the improvement in material and spiritual life, so development has been listed as more and more significant part in Zhejiang Government’s project. The change of the travel metaphors’ usage reflects the variation of the requirements of people and the development of the society.

#### 4.1.3 Construction Metaphors

Construction metaphors can be interpreted as that “developing Zhejiang province is constructing a building”, among which the province is the body of the building; the Zhejiang provincial government is the chief engineer and designer; the citizens are the constructors who work hard to make their own contributions to the whole building.

Construction metaphors have meanings with positive evaluation to the tasks. Firstly, it sets up a blueprint by comparing the final result of the development of Zhejiang with a tall building, which arouses people’s longing for the future and initiates their enthusiasm for work. Furthermore, construction metaphors contain another special meaning in which the crux of the building construction is to lay a good foundation. Similarly, it is important to do the grass-roots work well for building a rich and modernized Zhejiang. Therefore, construction metaphors help people realize the importance of the basic tasks and work in a down-to-earth manner.

Zhejiang is well known for its “Zhejiang development mode” nationwide which is represented by “private economy”. Since the reform and opening up Zhejiang had always been the province with the biggest GDP growth. Construction metaphors accounted for small proportions but still remained stable upward trends, which shows that the construction needs especially in terms of economy in Zhejiang province are highly emphasized.

#### 4.1.4 Agriculture Metaphors

Agriculture metaphors can be interpreted as “province development is planting the plants”. The different aspects of the province constructions including economy, politics, culture, infrastructure, transportation and so on are compared to plants; the government and the masses in Zhejiang are compared to the planters; the construction achievements are compared to harvest.

This type of conceptual metaphors is far less than other 5 types and accounts for 3% of the total, but it rises year by year. Especially during the recent 5 years, with the urgent requirements for fostering provincial enterprises and projects, the Zhejiang government established a series of policies and poured a large financial support to help the development. Therefore, this governance ideology reflected in the rhetorics of the government reports by employing the agricultural metaphors.

Agriculture metaphors associate people with the relation between planting, cultivation and harvest. For another, it admonishes people to abide by the objective law and follow the principle of gradual improvement.

In conclusion, these four types of political metaphors though increase or decrease in using frequencies with the changes of times, they were always in a stable trend and varied with the social and political environment. All these conceptual metaphors give people positive associations and enhance their confidence to the future governance of Zhejiang. At the same time, these metaphors help people understand better the guiding policies of the government and the process of the construction tasks.

### 4.2 Political Metaphors with Unstable Use

#### 4.2.1 Fighting Metaphors

Fighting metaphors can be interpreted as that “constructing the province is a fighting”. The two parties involved

in the fighting are the constructors including the government as the leader and the masses as the members, and the difficulties negative factors they are confronted with.

The same as the war metaphors, the employment of fighting metaphors reached the pinnacle during the first five years for the influence of class struggle ideology left over by history. Later it declined continuously because the focus was transmitted into constructions during the peaceful periods. However, though the class conflicts were loosening, new conflicts were coming out in the reforming and developing period like drug crimes, the underworld of organized crimes, robbery, theft, trafficking and other crimes. Especially during 1998 to 2002, those crimes like smuggling, economic crimes, corruptions and evil cults become serious social problems, so the words with fighting metaphors were reflected in the government reports. In recent years, these criminal crimes have been controlled, so the words are more moderate with less fighting metaphors.

#### 4.2.2 Medical Metaphors

Medical metaphors can be interpreted as that “solving the problems in constructions is medical care” in which the government and masses are the doctors; problems and negative factors like crimes, corruptions, pollutions and so on confronted in the constructions are the diseases; the policies and measures adopted are the medicines.

Medical metaphors have been ascending year after year because with the deepening of the reforms, more and more problems revealed and attracted government’s concerns. Its quantity reached its peak of 392 during the fifth 5 years for problems of the government like power abuse, corruption and bribery become the triggers between the governors and the public, so anti-corruption work was the focus at that time. The wording with medical metaphors in the government reports expressed the determination of the government to solve the current problems and give the public confidence, easing the tensions of the two parties.

The employment of these two types of metaphors is closely related to the governance policies of the Zhejiang government in different times. They not only demonstrate the changes of strategies of the government in different situations, but also show its development course from the revolutionary to the constructive governance cognition.

### 5. Conclusion

The politics without metaphors is like the fish without water. (Thompson, 1996) It is important to learn the governance ideology of the Zhejiang provincial government through studying the usages of the political metaphors for 30 years.

From the above study and analysis, we can get the following three conclusions:

First, war metaphors, travel metaphors, construction metaphors, agricultural metaphors were used in a stable upward or downward trend.

Second, use frequencies of the political metaphors are closely related with the changes of the social psychologies, values, laws, economies and citizens’ living styles and other social factors.

Third, the Zhejiang government makes use of the political metaphors to stabilize citizens’ political stand and encourage them to engage themselves in the constructions of the province.

### Acknowledgments

This essay is supported by Project of Zhejiang Provincial Association of Social Sciences, Project Number: 2013N203.

The corpus in this essay is from the web page of people’s government of Zhejiang province<<http://www.zj.gov.cn/col/col5582/index.html>>.

Every key word with political conceptual metaphor extracted from the 6 corpuses has been identified. The record of the process is not taken on in the essay for the limitations of space.

The percentages in graph 2 are rounded to the whole number, so there are errors in above method.

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