

Micro-Level Negotiation and Cultural Reconstruction in the English Translation of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*: A Skopos-Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

The English translations of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* constitute a significant achievement in the international dissemination of Chinese political texts and represent an important practice in communicating Chinese political discourse to the global community. Existing studies have primarily focused on macro-level translation issues, such as political terminology and core political metaphors, while relatively limited attention has been paid to the translation of different types of micro-level metaphors, including mythological allusions, work-method metaphors, and fable allusions. Taking Skopos Theory as its theoretical framework, this study employs textual analysis and comparative analysis to investigate the translation strategies adopted for different categories of micro-level metaphors in the English translations of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, with particular emphasis on how translation purposes influence translators' strategic choices. The findings reveal that the translation strategies adopted for different types of micro-level metaphors do not simply conform to either domestication or foreignization. Rather, under the guidance of the intended translation purpose, translators dynamically negotiate among the transmission of political messages, the preservation of cultural connotations, and the acceptability of the target text in accordance with the discursive functions and cultural attributes of each metaphor. The study further demonstrates that translation purposes exert a direct influence on translators' strategic decisions. Translators are therefore required to strike a dynamic balance among political message transmission, cultural preservation, and target-text acceptability in light of the cultural attributes and discursive functions of different metaphors. Skopos Theory provides an effective explanatory framework for understanding this mechanism of strategic decision-making and offers valuable insights for the translation of

micro-level cultural expressions in Chinese political texts.

Keywords

Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Skopos Theory, Political Texts, Micro-Level Metaphors

1. Introduction

Selected Works of Mao Zedong is one of the most representative translated collections of Chinese political texts. Its English translations not only reflect the historical development of the international dissemination of Chinese political discourse but also embody the evolution of translation concepts and objectives across different historical periods. To clarify the research background and significance of the present study, this section introduces the study from three aspects: the research motivation, the research objects, and the research questions, thereby laying the foundation for the subsequent analysis.

1.1. Research Motivation: Why Focus on Micro-Level Metaphors in Selected Works of Mao Zedong?

The English translation project of Selected Works of Mao Zedong (hereinafter referred to as Selected Works) has long been regarded as one of the largest, most authoritative, and longest-running state-sponsored translation projects in the history of modern China. For students and researchers of translation studies, its English versions serve not only as exemplary translations of Chinese political texts but also as valuable resources for investigating translation strategies and cross-cultural communication.

According to the detailed investigation conducted by Wu Hexiong (2012) in *Changes in Translation Strategies in the English Translation of Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, the project was not completed by individual translators but was organized under the specific historical context by the English Translation Committee of Selected Works of Mao Zedong (later known as the English Translation Office) under the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. The committee brought together leading Chinese scholars in English language and Chinese studies, including Xu Yongying, Jin Yuelin, Qian Zhongshu, and Xu Guozhang, as well as foreign experts such as Solomon Adler and Douglas Frank Springhall, both of whom were sympathetic to the Chinese Revolution. This collaborative translation model, integrating leadership, academic expertise, and collective participation, ensured both the political accuracy and the linguistic authenticity of the translated texts.

A review of the existing literature reveals a noticeable tendency for previous studies to prioritize macro-level translation issues while paying comparatively less attention to micro-level linguistic phenomena. Most existing research has concen-

trated on the translation of political expressions, such as “imperialism is a paper tiger” or the rendering of “the mass line”. Although these studies have generated valuable insights, *Selected Works* also contains a considerable number of vivid expressions, including mythological allusions (e.g., Dragon King and contest of treasures), everyday metaphors (e.g., playing the piano), and fable allusions (e.g., The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains). These seemingly minor expressions, however, often present greater challenges for translators, who must determine whether to enhance comprehensibility for target readers through domestication or to preserve the distinctive features of Chinese culture through foreignization.

In this study, “micro-level metaphors” refer to localized metaphorical expressions embedded in specific textual contexts, in which concrete images, cultural references, or familiar experiences are used to convey more abstract political meanings. Unlike macro-level or conceptual metaphors that may operate across an entire discourse, micro-level metaphors are relatively localized expressions whose interpretation depends substantially on their immediate context and, in some cases, the cultural knowledge associated with them. In identifying micro-level metaphors, this study distinguishes metaphor, allusion, and culture-loaded expression according to their primary analytical functions. A metaphor concerns the figurative mapping between a concrete source image or experience and an abstract meaning in a specific context; an allusion refers to a recognizable reference to a culturally or historically established person, event, story, or text; and a culture-loaded expression is a linguistic expression that carries culture-specific historical, social, or cultural associations. These categories are not mutually exclusive: an expression may constitute an allusion or a culture-loaded expression while simultaneously functioning as a metaphor in its specific context. Accordingly, the primary criterion for identifying a micro-level metaphor in this study is whether the expression performs a clear metaphorical function in context, while its cultural reference and degree of cultural embeddedness are treated as additional dimensions for analyzing its translation.

The three expressions examined in this study represent different manifestations of this type of metaphor. “Contest of treasures” draws on a traditional Chinese mythological image to convey a political and military argument; “playing the piano” uses a familiar everyday activity to represent the coordination of different aspects of Party work; and “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains” refers to a traditional Chinese fable while conveying the idea of perseverance in overcoming difficulties. Although these expressions differ in their cultural sources and degrees of cultural embeddedness, they all function as localized figurative expressions in their respective contexts and therefore fall within the scope of micro-level metaphors examined in this study.

These seemingly minor expressions, however, often present challenges for translators, who must determine how to balance the preservation of culturally distinctive meanings with the comprehensibility and acceptability of the target text.

As Ouyang Jing (2018) points out, translation is essentially a process of negotiation in which translators continuously balance readers' comprehension with the preservation of source-language cultural characteristics. Building upon this perspective, the present study examines three representative cases of micro-level metaphors and compares the translation strategies adopted in different English versions of Selected Works of Mao Zedong, with a view to exploring how translators negotiate between different translation purposes in rendering culturally embedded metaphors.

1.2. Research Objects: A Comparison of Two English Versions

The two English versions examined in this study were produced in different publishing contexts, which may have influenced their translation practices. The earlier English translation of Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung was produced through a collectively organized translation project and published in London by Lawrence & Wishart and in New York by International Publishers in 1954. Scholarly research indicates that the International Publishers edition was essentially identical in content to the Lawrence & Wishart edition, with differences mainly occurring in publisher-related paratexts. The later English version was produced under the official translation program of the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing in the 1960s and was based on the earlier English version while undergoing further translation, editing, and revision.

These different publishing contexts suggest that the two versions should not be understood as representing completely distinct or fixed translation purposes. Rather, both versions participated in the broader political and communicative dissemination of Mao Zedong's works to English-speaking audiences, while their respective institutional and publishing contexts could result in different emphases in particular translation decisions. Previous research on the paratexts of the LW and FLP editions has shown that both versions employed introductory notes, publisher's statements, and other paratextual elements that contributed to the ideological framing and international dissemination of Mao's works.

Accordingly, this study does not assume that the LW version consistently prioritizes target-reader accessibility or that the FLP version uniformly prioritizes the preservation of source-cultural meanings. Instead, these are treated as possible tendencies that may become more or less prominent depending on the cultural embeddedness, metaphorical function, and communicative demands of individual expressions. This perspective also allows for case-specific variation: a translation may preserve a culturally specific image in one context while providing greater explanation or adaptation in another. The comparative analysis in Section 3 therefore focuses on how such strategic choices are negotiated at the micro level rather than attributing a single fixed translation purpose to either version.

1.3. Research Questions

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study seeks to address the following re-

search questions:

What translation strategies are adopted in the LW and FLP versions for different categories of micro-level metaphors, including mythological allusions, work-method metaphors, and fable allusions, in Selected Works of Mao Zedong?

How can Skopos Theory account for the formation of translation strategies adopted for different types of micro-level metaphors?

What strategic tendencies do the LW and FLP versions demonstrate in balancing cultural preservation and cross-cultural communication, and how do these tendencies vary across different types of micro-level metaphors?

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

To systematically investigate the English translation strategies employed for different types of micro-level metaphors in Selected Works, this chapter first reviews the theoretical framework relevant to the present study, followed by a survey of previous research on the English translation of Selected Works, the translation of political texts, and metaphor translation. On this basis, it identifies the research perspective and gap of the present study, thereby providing the theoretical foundation for the subsequent case analysis.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Skopos Theory, proposed by the German functionalist translation theorist Hans J. Vermeer, departs from the traditional paradigm of translation studies centred on equivalence by viewing translation as a purposeful act of intercultural communication. According to this theory, translators are expected to select translation strategies in accordance with the intended purpose of the translation. Rather than pursuing formal correspondence between the source text and the target text, translation is regarded as a communicative activity designed to fulfil a specific function in a particular communicative context. Consequently, the intended purpose of translation constitutes the primary criterion guiding translators' decision-making.

Skopos Theory comprises three fundamental principles: the Skopos Rule, the Coherence Rule, and the Fidelity Rule. Among these, the Skopos Rule occupies the central position, requiring that the target text serve its intended communicative purpose. The Coherence Rule requires the translation to conform to the linguistic conventions and cognitive expectations of the target readership so as to ensure readability and acceptability. The Fidelity Rule requires the target text to maintain a necessary semantic relationship with the source text and to remain as faithful as possible to the original while fulfilling its intended purpose. Rather than operating independently, these three principles complement one another in translation practice, with the Skopos Rule taking precedence whenever strategic choices need to be made.

As a representative collection of Chinese political texts, Selected Works contains not only political discourse but also a considerable number of culture-loaded

expressions, including mythological allusions, work-method metaphors, and fable allusions. The translation of such expressions involves not merely linguistic transfer but also the negotiation of political communication, cultural representation, and cross-cultural accessibility. Accordingly, translators must make strategic decisions in light of the intended translation purpose while balancing the accurate transmission of political messages, the preservation of cultural connotations, and the acceptability of the target text. From this perspective, Skopos Theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for investigating the translation of micro-level metaphors in *Selected Works*.

Building upon this theoretical framework, the present study compares the translation strategies adopted in the LW and FLP versions for three representative categories of micro-level metaphors in *Selected Works*—namely mythological allusions, work-method metaphors, and fable allusions—with the aim of exploring how different translation purposes shape translators' strategic choices.

2.2. Literature Review

In recent years, with the growing body of research on the international dissemination of Chinese political texts, the English translation of *Selected Works* has gradually become an important subject in Translation Studies. Existing research has mainly focused on the comparison of different English versions, the translation of political discourse, the translation of culture-loaded expressions, and metaphor translation, providing a solid theoretical foundation for studies on the translation of Chinese political texts. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to the mechanism underlying translators' strategic choices for different types of micro-level metaphors from the perspective of Skopos Theory.

Cheng Zhenqiu (1980) emphasizes that political texts require particular attention to political considerations in translation, highlighting the importance of maintaining political accuracy while conveying the intended meaning of the source text. Comparative studies of the English versions of *Selected Works* have primarily centred on the LW and FLP versions. Wu Hexiong (2012) systematically examined the translation characteristics of these two versions and pointed out that they differ significantly in their treatment of culture-loaded information owing to differences in the historical context of their production, intended readership, and translation purposes. Taking political expressions such as paper tiger as examples, Wu argues that the LW version places greater emphasis on the target readers' comprehension and acceptance, whereas the FLP version gives higher priority to preserving the cultural characteristics and political meanings embedded in the source text. These findings provide an important point of reference for the present study in comparing the translation strategies adopted for micro-level metaphors in the two English versions.

Beyond comparative studies of different versions, increasing attention has also been devoted to the translation of metaphorical expressions in *Selected Works*. From the perspective of metaphor translation, Pan Weimin (2016) investigates

the English translation of scientific metaphors in the text, using expressions such as disinfection, toxin, and antibody as examples to analyse how translators balance political meaning, rhetorical function, and target-language conventions. Pan argues that metaphors in political texts perform not only an informative function but also play an important role in shaping political cognition and reinforcing political discourse. Consequently, translators need to take into account cultural connotations, rhetorical effects, and communicative purposes in an integrated manner. Although such studies have broadened the scope of research on metaphor translation in *Selected Works*, they focus primarily on political and conceptual metaphors, while comparatively little attention has been paid to culturally distinctive micro-level metaphors, such as mythological allusions, fable allusions, and work-method metaphors.

With the continued advancement of research on the international dissemination of Chinese culture, some scholars have re-examined the translation of political texts from the perspective of cultural communication. Pan Weimin and his colleagues (2018) argue that culture-loaded expressions in political texts convey not only linguistic meaning but also specific historical and cultural information. They therefore contend that translators should fully consider the effectiveness of cultural communication during the translation process and avoid excessive domestication that may weaken the cultural characteristics of the source text. This perspective moves beyond earlier studies that focused primarily on the accurate transmission of political information by incorporating cultural communication into the evaluation of political-text translation. It also provides a theoretical basis for the present study to discuss the cultural communicative value of different types of micro-level metaphors.

In recent years, emerging translation theories have also provided new perspectives for research on the translation of political texts. Drawing on Translation Game Theory, Ouyang Jing argues that the translation of political texts is essentially a dynamic decision-making process jointly shaped by the translator, the source-text author, the target readership, and the communicative context. Translators are therefore required to continuously negotiate among political accuracy, cultural transmission, and reader acceptance throughout the translation process. Meanwhile, Meanwhile, Feng Weilan and Pan Weimin (2024) emphasize that translation is not merely a process of linguistic transfer but also one of knowledge reconstruction and dissemination. Accordingly, culture-specific expressions in political texts should be translated in such a way that both their epistemic significance and cultural value can be effectively conveyed in the target language. These theoretical developments have further enriched research on political-text translation and provided additional explanatory frameworks for understanding the formation of different translation strategies.

In summary, existing research has generated substantial findings on the English translation of *Selected Works*, the translation of political texts, and metaphor translation. Nevertheless, several limitations remain. First, previous studies have fo-

cused predominantly on political terminology, core political metaphors, and macro-level translation strategies, whereas systematic research on different categories of micro-level metaphors—including mythological allusions, fable allusions, and work-method metaphors—remains relatively limited. Second, most studies concentrate on individual linguistic phenomena or specific translation strategies, while comparatively little attention has been paid to differences in translators' strategic choices for different types of micro-level metaphors under different translation purposes. Finally, although Skopos Theory has been widely applied to literary translation, business translation, and publicity translation, relatively few studies have systematically integrated this theoretical framework with the translation of different categories of micro-level metaphors in Selected Works to investigate the mechanism underlying translators' strategic choices. Against this background, the present study adopts Skopos Theory as its theoretical framework and conducts a comparative analysis of the translation strategies employed for different types of micro-level metaphors in the LW and FLP versions. It aims to explore how translation purposes influence translators' strategic choices, thereby enriching research on the micro-level translation of political texts and providing insights into the translation of culturally distinctive Chinese expressions for international communication.

3. Comparative Analysis of Micro-Level Metaphor Translation

To ensure the representativeness and comparability of the cases, this study conducts a targeted search of the English translations of Selected Works of Mao Zedong available in the Marxists Internet Archive (MIA). The search covers passages in Selected Works that contain concrete figurative expressions used to convey abstract political meanings. Candidate expressions were identified by examining their metaphorical functions in context and were then classified according to their source domains and cultural associations. Cases were retained for analysis only when corresponding English renderings could be identified in both the Lawrence & Wishart (LW) and Foreign Languages Press (FLP) versions.

The identification of the three metaphor categories follows the analytical distinctions established in Section 1.1. A mythological allusion metaphor is identified when an expression draws on a recognizable mythological figure, story, or narrative and uses that cultural reference metaphorically to convey an abstract political meaning. A work-method metaphor is identified when an expression draws on a concrete activity or everyday experience and metaphorically represents a particular approach, principle, or method of political or organizational work. A fable-allusion metaphor is identified when an expression refers to a recognizable traditional fable or its associated characters and narrative and uses the allusion metaphorically to convey an abstract political idea or principle.

Based on these criteria, three cases were selected from the MIA corpus: “contest of treasures,” “playing the piano,” and “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the

Mountains.” “Contest of treasures” is classified as a mythological allusion metaphor because it draws on a traditional mythological narrative and uses the image metaphorically to illustrate the disparity in material conditions between opposing sides in warfare. “Playing the piano” is classified as a work-method metaphor because it draws on the concrete activity of playing the piano to represent the need to coordinate different aspects of Party work. “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains” is classified as a fable-allusion metaphor because it invokes the traditional fable of the Foolish Old Man and uses the associated narrative to convey the idea of perseverance in overcoming difficulties. These cases therefore provide three distinct forms of micro-level metaphor for comparison, while their availability in both the LW and FLP versions ensures the comparability of the translation data.

3.1. Translation of Mythological Allusion Metaphors

Source text: “.....不是龙王向龙王比宝，而是乞丐向龙王比宝。”(出处：《中国革命战争的战略问题 MIA:

<https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-193612.htm> Accessed September 2, 2026.)

LW version (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1954 (Vol. I, p. 252)):

The advocacy of a “contest of attrition” is unsuited to the Chinese Red Army today. It is rather ridiculous that a “contest of treasures” should be held not between one dragon god and another but between a dragon god and a beggar.

FLP version (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1965 MIA: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_12.htm Accessed September 2, 2026.):

It is inappropriate to advocate a “contest of attrition” for the Chinese Red Army today. A “contest of treasures” not between Dragon Kings but between a Dragon King and a beggar would be rather ludicrous.

Source: Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War (Selected Works, Volume I)

In this passage, Mao Zedong employs the image of the Dragon King from traditional Chinese mythology to represent the Kuomintang army, which possessed abundant material resources, while comparing the Red Army to a beggar with limited resources. Through the vivid metaphor of a “contest of treasures,” Mao emphasizes the enormous disparity in material conditions between the two sides and argues that the Chinese Red Army should not adopt a strategy of attrition warfare but should instead adhere to strategies of quick decision and annihilation. This expression performs both political argumentative and cultural rhetorical functions: it conveys a traditional Chinese cultural image while simultaneously serving the purpose of military strategic argumentation. Therefore, it can be regarded as a typical culture-loaded micro-level metaphor.

From the perspective of translation strategies, both the LW and FLP versions retain the core images of “contest of treasures,” “Dragon King (dragon god),” and

“beggar.” Neither version adopts cultural substitution or omission. Instead, both translators preserve the rhetorical structure of the source text through a relatively literal translation strategy, demonstrating a high degree of cultural fidelity. Nevertheless, differences can still be observed in their specific linguistic choices.

First, differences exist in the translation of “龙王”. The LW version renders it as “dragon god” and uses lowercase forms (one dragon god and another), emphasizing its status as a religious deity and providing target readers with additional cultural clarification. This approach helps reduce potential difficulties in cultural comprehension. By contrast, the FLP version directly translates it as “Dragon King” and adopts capitalization as a proper noun, preserving the distinctive cultural designation associated with Chinese mythology. This choice places greater emphasis on the complete representation of the source-culture image. The difference between the two versions reflects their different orientations in cultural communication: the LW version prioritizes target readers’ understanding of the cultural concept, whereas the FLP version places greater emphasis on retaining the cultural image specific to Chinese tradition.

Second, differences can be identified in the rendering of evaluative expressions. The LW version translates “未免滑稽” as “rather ridiculous,” while the FLP version uses “rather ludicrous.” Although both words convey meanings such as “absurd” or “ridiculous,” ludicrous carries a stronger formal and literary connotation and produces greater rhetorical force in formal political discourse, whereas ridiculous is relatively closer to everyday English usage. Therefore, the FLP version demonstrates a more formal linguistic style that corresponds better with the solemn and rigorous characteristics of political texts, while the LW version reflects a stronger orientation toward target-language acceptability.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, both translations achieve the basic communicative purpose of the original text, enabling target readers to understand the strategic idea that “the enemy is stronger while our side is weaker” and that the Red Army should not engage in a war of attrition. However, their specific translation strategies differ. The LW version places greater emphasis on the Coherence Rule by adopting the explanatory expression “dragon god” to facilitate cultural understanding among Western readers. In contrast, the FLP version reflects the Fidelity Rule to a greater extent by preserving the culturally distinctive image of “Dragon King.” While accurately conveying the strategic meaning of the original text, it also contributes to the dissemination of Chinese cultural imagery. Under the guidance of the Skopos Rule, the two versions serve different communicative needs in their respective historical contexts, demonstrating how translators adjust their strategies according to intended readership and translation purposes.

3.2. Translation of Work-Method Metaphors

Source text: “学会‘弹钢琴’。弹钢琴要十个指头都动作，不能有的动，有的不动。”

(MIA: <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-19490313.htm> Accessed September 2, 2026.)

LW version (Mao Zedong. *Selected Works*, Vol. V, p. 379. New York: International Publishers, 1956 (The International Publishers edition reproduces the English translation associated with the earlier Lawrence & Wishart translation.)):

Learn to “play the piano”. In playing the piano all ten fingers are in motion; it won’t do to move some fingers only and not others.

FLP version (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1965 MIA: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_59.htm Accessed September 2, 2026.):

Learn to “play the piano”. In playing the piano all ten fingers are in motion; it won’t do to move some fingers only and not others.

Source: *Methods of Work of Party Committees* (Selected Works, Volume IV)

In this passage, Mao Zedong introduces the metaphor of “playing the piano” to describe the working method of Party committees. By comparing the coordination and overall planning required in organizational work to the process in which all ten fingers cooperate and function together during piano playing, Mao vividly illustrates the importance of comprehensive planning and coordinated implementation. Unlike mythological and fable allusions, the metaphor of “playing the piano” is a work-method metaphor constructed upon everyday life experience. Its rhetorical meaning is based on the commonly shared understanding of piano performance and therefore demonstrates relatively strong cross-cultural comprehensibility.

Different from the previous case of the “Dragon King” metaphor, the LW and FLP versions adopt exactly the same translation in this case, with no adjustments in lexical choice, syntactic structure, or rhetorical expression. Such a high degree of consistency is not accidental; rather, it indicates that the translators shared the view that literal translation was sufficient to achieve the communicative purpose of the original text and that additional explanatory translation or cultural adaptation was unnecessary.

At the lexical level, both versions translate “弹钢琴” literally as “play the piano,” fully preserving the original metaphorical image. As an internationally recognized musical instrument, the piano has a high level of familiarity among English-speaking readers. Target readers can naturally associate piano performance with the coordinated movement of ten fingers, allowing the metaphorical meaning to be conveyed without additional cultural explanation. The subsequent rendering of “十个指头都动作” as “all ten fingers are in motion” and “不能有的动，有的不动” as “it won’t do to move some fingers only and not others” not only faithfully reproduces the linguistic form of the source text but also preserves its progressive logical structure, enabling readers to move from the concrete action of playing the piano to the abstract concept of comprehensive coordination and overall management.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, the adoption of an identical translation

strategy in both versions is fully justified. First, under the guidance of the Skopos Rule, both translations prioritize the accurate transmission of Mao Zedong's ideas concerning the working methods of Party committees. Since the metaphor of "playing the piano" is also grounded in a widely shared cultural experience in English-speaking contexts, literal translation enables target readers to quickly establish a cognitive connection between the coordinated movement of ten fingers and the idea of overall planning and coordination, thereby effectively fulfilling the communicative purpose of political thought dissemination.

Second, in terms of the Coherence Rule, the translations conform to English linguistic conventions and maintain natural and fluent expressions, causing no significant difficulty for target readers' comprehension. As a result, the translated texts achieve both readability and acceptability. Finally, from the perspective of the Fidelity Rule, both versions preserve the metaphorical structure, rhetorical image, and argumentative logic of the original text. Without weakening the expressive effect of the source text due to cultural differences, they successfully achieve a balance between the meaning of the source text and its expression in the target language.

It is worth noting that, compared with mythological allusions such as the "Dragon King" metaphor discussed above, the metaphor of "playing the piano" does not rely heavily on a specific national cultural background. Instead, its metaphorical foundation derives from everyday experiences shared across cultures, which contributes to its relatively high translatability. Therefore, both versions retain the original metaphorical image without adopting domestication or explanatory translation. This choice enables the rhetorical function of the source text to be reproduced more completely in the target language. This case demonstrates that when a source-language metaphor has a natural equivalent cognitive basis in the target culture, literal translation can effectively convey the original meaning while simultaneously achieving cultural preservation and communicative effectiveness, thereby realizing the coordination among the Skopos Rule, the Coherence Rule, and the Fidelity Rule.

3.3. Translation of Fable-Allusion Metaphors

Source text: "中国古代有个寓言，叫做‘愚公移山’。"(MIA: <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-19450611.htm> Accessed September 2, 2026.)

LW version (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1954, Vol. IV, p. 317.):

In ancient China there was the fable: "How Yu Kung Removed the Mountains."

FLP version (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1965 MIA: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_26.htm Accessed September 2, 2026.):

There is an ancient Chinese fable called "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains".

Source: The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains (Selected Works,

Volume III).

The allusion of *The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains* originates from *The Questions of Tang* in *Liezi*, which tells the story of an old man named Yu Gong who led his family members in persistently removing mountains and eventually moved the Heaven Emperor through his determination. Mao Zedong employs this classical fable to encourage the Chinese people to maintain firm ideals and beliefs, persist in long-term struggle, and overcome various difficulties on the path of progress through unwavering determination. Therefore, “*The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains*” is not only a classic fable in traditional Chinese culture but also carries the spiritual connotations of perseverance and persistent effort. In *Selected Works*, it functions as a political metaphor with distinctive cultural significance and value for cultural communication.

In this case, both the LW and FLP versions translate “寓言” as “fable,” accurately conveying the textual category of the original expression. However, they adopt different translation strategies in rendering the title of the allusion “愚公移山”.

The LW version translates it as “*How Yu Kung Removed the Mountains*,” adopting a combination of transliteration and semantic translation. Specifically, “Yu Kung” retains the personal name through the Wade-Giles romanization system, preserving the proper name of the figure in traditional Chinese culture, while the title structure “How...” conforms to common narrative patterns found in English fables and folk stories. This translation effectively maintains the cultural form of the source text and preserves the image of Yu Gong as a traditional Chinese cultural figure. However, for target readers without sufficient knowledge of Chinese culture, the name “Yu Kung” merely presents the character’s name and cannot directly convey the cultural symbolism and deeper meanings associated with the figure of “愚公”. The underlying cultural implications therefore require further interpretation through the context.

By contrast, the FLP version translates the title as “*The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains*.” Rather than retaining the personal name through transliteration, it adopts a descriptive translation strategy that directly presents the identity of the character and the content of the story. It should be noted that “*The Foolish Old Man*” is not merely a literal equivalent of “愚公”; instead, it presents the surface meaning of the character’s name to target readers, enabling them to obtain an initial understanding of the protagonist’s identity and the basic narrative without prior knowledge of Chinese culture. Although this approach weakens the cultural characteristics conveyed by the original personal name, it effectively reduces difficulties in cross-cultural comprehension and improves the acceptability of the target text. Meanwhile, the FLP version transforms the original expression “有个寓言，叫做.....” into “There is an ancient Chinese fable called...”, which corresponds more closely to conventional English expressions used when introducing cultural stories and therefore makes the sentence more natural in the target language.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, both versions achieve the basic communicative function of introducing the fable allusion, but they demonstrate different translation orientations. The LW version places greater emphasis on the Fidelity Rule by retaining the personal name and preserving the cultural form of the source text as much as possible, thereby maintaining strong Chinese cultural characteristics in the translation. In contrast, the FLP version demonstrates a stronger orientation toward the Skopos Rule and the Coherence Rule by adopting descriptive translation to directly reveal the identity of the character, helping target readers quickly establish a basic understanding of the protagonist and the symbolic meaning of the fable, thus better fulfilling the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

This case demonstrates that translation strategies are not determined solely by the translation version or historical period. Instead, translators may make different strategic choices according to the cultural embeddedness, metaphorical function, and communicative demands of individual expressions.

A comprehensive examination of the three cases shows that translation strategies for micro-level metaphors are not fixed but are jointly influenced by multiple factors, including metaphor type, degree of cultural embeddedness, and translation purpose. For highly culture-loaded metaphors such as mythological and fable allusions, translators often need to seek a balance between preserving source-language cultural characteristics and enhancing target readers' comprehension. By contrast, work-method metaphors based on shared cross-cultural experiences are more likely to achieve stable and consistent translations. These findings suggest that, from the perspective of Skopos Theory, the selection of translation strategies should be understood in relation to specific communicative purposes and contextual demands rather than as fixed characteristics of a particular translation version.

4. Findings and Discussion

Based on the case analyses above, this section further summarizes the common characteristics of translation strategies adopted for different types of micro-level metaphors and explores the reasons underlying their formation from the perspective of Skopos Theory. By synthesizing the findings of the case studies, this section discusses the features of different translation strategies and their theoretical implications, thereby further addressing the research questions proposed in this study.

4.1. Translation Features of Different Types of Micro-Level Metaphors

The comparative analysis of three cases involving mythological allusion metaphors, work-method metaphors, and fable-allusion metaphors in Selected Works reveals that different types of micro-level metaphors demonstrate different translation strategies due to variations in their degree of cultural embeddedness and

cross-cultural comprehensibility.

For mythological allusion metaphors, the case of the “contest of treasures” demonstrates that both the LW and FLP versions adopt a literal translation strategy, but they make different adjustments in the rendering of cultural-specific names. The LW version uses “dragon god,” emphasizing the religious attributes of the mythological figure, whereas the FLP version translates it as “Dragon King,” preserving the culturally specific image while improving the acceptability of the translation for target readers. This indicates that for highly culture-loaded mythological allusions, translators need to negotiate between cultural preservation and readers’ comprehension.

By contrast, work-method metaphors demonstrate stronger cross-cultural commonality. The metaphor of “playing the piano” originates from everyday life experience and can therefore be naturally understood by English-speaking readers. As a result, both the LW and FLP versions adopt a literal translation strategy and fully preserve the metaphorical image of the source text. This suggests that when a source-language metaphor can establish a similar cognitive mapping in the target culture, literal translation can achieve effective communication without requiring additional explanation or cultural adaptation.

Fable-allusion metaphors demonstrate another type of translation pattern. Taking “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains” as an example, the LW version retains the personal name “Yu Kung,” highlighting the cultural characteristics of the source text, whereas the FLP version adopts the descriptive expression “The Foolish Old Man,” lowering the cultural barrier and enabling target readers to quickly understand the image of the fable character. This demonstrates that for culturally embedded fable allusions, translators may adjust their strategies according to communicative purposes and target readers’ comprehension needs in order to achieve a balance between cultural transmission and reader acceptance.

4.2. Implications of Micro-Level Metaphor Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

The three cases demonstrate that Skopos Theory provides an effective explanation for the formation mechanisms of translation strategies adopted for micro-level metaphors in Selected Works. First, the Skopos Rule determines that translators should select appropriate translation methods according to the communicative objectives of the target text. When metaphors contain a high degree of cultural embeddedness, explanatory translation or adjustments in expression may be adopted to enhance comprehensibility. When metaphors possess stronger cross-cultural commonality, literal translation can be employed to preserve the original images.

Second, the Coherence Rule requires translated texts to conform to the reading habits and linguistic expectations of target readers. In some cases, translators make appropriate adjustments to proper names and sentence structures, resulting in more natural and fluent expressions and improving the readability of the target

text.

Finally, the Fidelity Rule requires translators to maintain consistency with the meaning of the source text while fulfilling communicative purposes. Whether retaining culturally specific names in the LW version or adopting descriptive translation in the FLP version, both strategies remain faithful to the core meanings of the original text while achieving a balance between source-text significance and target-language expression under different communicative purposes.

Overall, the English translation of micro-level metaphors in *Selected Works* does not follow a fixed pattern. Instead, translation strategies are jointly influenced by multiple factors, including metaphor type, degree of cultural embeddedness, and target readership. By emphasizing that translation strategies should serve communicative purposes, Skopos Theory provides a strong theoretical explanation for the translation of culturally distinctive metaphors in Chinese political texts and offers valuable insights for the international communication of Chinese political discourse in the contemporary context.

5. Conclusion

This study adopts Skopos Theory as its theoretical framework and examines the LW and FLP English versions of *Selected Works* by conducting a comparative analysis of three representative types of micro-level metaphors, namely mythological allusion metaphors, work-method metaphors, and fable-allusion metaphors. The findings reveal that different types of micro-level metaphors demonstrate distinct characteristics in translation strategy selection due to variations in their degree of cultural embeddedness and cross-cultural comprehensibility.

For mythological and fable allusion metaphors with strong cultural specificity, translators tend to seek a balance between preserving cultural characteristics and enhancing the comprehensibility of the target text. By contrast, for work-method metaphors with stronger cross-cultural commonality, the two English versions tend to adopt consistent translation strategies. These findings indicate that Skopos Theory can effectively explain the formation mechanisms of different translation strategies and provides strong theoretical explanatory power for the translation of micro-level metaphors in Chinese political texts. Meanwhile, the study offers certain insights into the international communication of Chinese political discourse in the contemporary context.

Due to limitations in research scope and length, this study only selects three representative cases for analysis. Future research may expand the corpus, incorporate a wider range of metaphor types and translated versions, and further explore the translation strategies of micro-level metaphors in political texts, thereby contributing to the enrichment of related research.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, L.J.Y. and P.C.Q.; methodology, L.J.Y.; software, P.C.Q.; validation, P.C.Q.; formal analysis, P.C.Q.; investigation, P.C.Q.; resources, L.J.Y.;

data curation, P.C.Q.; writing—original draft preparation, P.C.Q.; writing—review and editing, L.J.Y.; visualization, P.C.Q.; supervision, L.J.Y.; project administration, L.J.Y.; funding acquisition, L.J.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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