

**PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF INTERTEXTUAL RHETORICAL DEVICES IN  
POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

**Lei Li and Jie Yi Guo**

Gunagdong Polytechnic College, Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province, China

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**ABSTRACT**

The study, drawing on the political discourse, examines the role of rhetorical intertextuality in the construction of political identity, investigates such rhetorical intertextuality as allusion, metaphor and analogy from the level of intertextual resource identification, discourse trend analysis and pragmatic function and further proposes a socio-pragmatic framework for the analysis of the intertextuality thereof. The findings illustrates that allusion and metaphor highlights the discursive power while analogy performs the discursive democratization. Furthermore, allusion is endowed with vernacular and innovative style, simultaneously constructing the government's powerful identity; metaphor is equipped with reasoning and justifying purpose, as well as constructing the government's authoritative status; and analogy is armed with reader identification, meanwhile constructing the government's affability image. The study also reveals the cultural features of Chinese rhetorical devices and demonstrates their employment in political discourse for persuading the Chinese public.

**KEYWORDS:** political discourse, rhetorical intertextuality, political identity construction

**INTRODUCTION**

The style of Chinese political discourse, especially Xi Jinping's discourse is prominently reflective of Chinese elements as it employs new concepts of integration, development, and science to create a discourse system with Chinese style and grandeur, expanding China's international influence and enhancing China's international discourse power. The book *Xi Jinping: The governance of China* opens a "window on China" to the world in a unique language style.

Intertextuality, as the basic feature of a discourse, provides a new perspective for investigating discourse. In a discourse system, political discourse is a public discourse, the intertextual form of which reveals specific discursive trends. One of the important linguistic functions of intertextuality in terms of discourse strategy is the construction of identity. Rhetoric is the art of effective communication in language (Lai & Xin 2012). Political rhetoric is a way of expressing the subject's political persuasion via linguistic skills, which is a powerful executive force and an essential element in highlighting the comprehensive national strength of the country (He, 2018). The rhetorical intertextuality that is the focus of this paper refers to the intertextuality that is adopted to construct social and political identities with the help of rhetorical strategies. Unlike common intertextual means such as presuppositions and quotations, rhetorical intertextuality is an intertextual resource deployed to increase the rhetorical effect of a discourse, providing a unique rhetorical perspective on interpreting the meaning of a

discourse, understanding meaning-making, persuading the audience, and thus achieving the purpose of political identity construction. Herrick (2001) argues that rhetorical discourse is often aimed at influencing an audience to accept an idea and then act in a way that is consistent with that idea. The rhetorical discourse, according to Kane & Patapan (2010), is absolutely central to a leader's obligation to rule the people through constant persuasion. Intertextuality and the construction of identity have been frequently studied in the west, except with regard to political discourse, especially *Xi Jinping: The governance of China* (Li 2009; Ho 2011; Corona 2011). The current study, drawing on the book of *Xi Jinping: The governance of China*, attempts to identify and systematically classify common rhetorical intertextual resources in political discourse at the discourse form level, examine discourse trends in different intertextual projections at the level of discourse systems, and then demonstrate the influence of rhetorical intertextuality on the construction of the government's identity from the pragmatic perspective. It is found that in order to enable the general audience to have a better understanding of the new ideas, views, and assertions, General Secerty Xi Jinping used some vivid rhetoric, many of which belonged to metaphor, allusion. analogy, to concretize some abstract or generalized political concepts in the text into common expressions, making these concepts more objective, accurate, easy to understand, and more infectious. It has a strong cognitive and rhetorical effect (Chen & Jian 2019).

## **2. Socio-pragmatic framework for rhetorical intertextuality**

Intertextuality is a general term for the link between one text and the preceding text (Ngai, C, S, B & Singh, R, G & Kwan, B, S, C. 2020) , which was initiated by Kristeva (1969) who proposes that each of the text is from the beginning subject to other discourses. It is the point worthy of attention that a text is closely related to other texts, and is often demonstrated in political documents by references to specific texts, including poems and quotations. Devitt (1991, p.336) holds that all texts are interrelated since no text is monolithic and texts mirror each other, learn from each other, and create each other's purpose.

Intertextual research focuses on: 1) the way in which an utterance relates to other utterances; 2) features of intertextual relationships projected on language; 3) social function and implication of intertextuality. The social function of intertextuality involves interpreting that of intertextual resources at the pragmatic dimension. The discursive trends that characterize the language of the intertext constrain the choice of the intertextual form of an utterance, and provide guidance for discovering patterns in the intricacies of the intertextual form at the level of abstract discourse systems (Fairclough, 1992). The intertextuality is a body of discourse trends at the level of the discourse system. As discourse writers often change discursive trends by creatively using discourse within a particular institution or by absorbing discourse from other institutions, it is difficult for them to change their discourse. The different constructions of governmental identity by intertextual resources are the pragmatic representations of the meaning of intertextuality and the discursive trends that they embody. Intertextuality refers to "the mixing and blending of different genres, discourses, or styles associated with certain institutions and social meanings in a given language (Wu, 2012). The political discourse

is a typical humanistic semantic field, based on the impact and consequences of political decisions and actions on society, and plays a political role through linguistic representations (Chen & Jian 2019). Discourses are not frozen meaning (Kitis & Milapides, 1997). The core of the intertextuality lies in the explicit or implicit “appropriation”. The act of appropriation is based on the original genre, which is selected by the text builder from a range of available resources for a specific communicative purpose, and has genre relevance, optionality, and strategy (Deng L, M & Zhou Y. 2020). Pragmatic functions of political discourse are of communicative, contextually constrained, and user-empowered properties (Chen, 2018).

### 3. Intertextual rhetorical devices in *Xi Jinping: The governance of China*

#### 3.1 Allusion

It is the style of Xi Jinping’s discourse system to be good at using allusions (Ling, 2016). The task of the rhetorician is to change the audience’s existing attitudes, opinions, and behaviors through symbolic means, such as words, in order to create a new situation (Li, 2018). The use of proverbs is a special case of “meta-presentation” because the content of a statement is not the entire message it is intended to convey, but rather it is applied to a particular situation and used to indicate the speaker’s attitude toward some aspect of that situation (Musolff, 2020). It is found that phrases and sentences from ancient books are quoted directly from classical ancient texts in *Xi Jinping: The governance of China*, like “A single flower does not make spring while one hundred flowers in full blossom bring spring to the garden” (Fan & Guo, 2020).

#### Example 1

C: “众人拾柴火焰高”

(Back translation: Many hands make light work)

E: “When everybody adds wood to the fire, the flames rise high” (Xi, 2014).

According to the *Chinese Proverbs*, “众人拾柴火焰高” stems from the Liu Shaotang’s novel, that is, “Lanzhu doesn’t apply strict measures when he comes into power, instead, he is affectionate and loyal to others, and thus enjoys great popularity. Then people are willing to give their talents to their best. When everybody adds wood to the fire, the flames rise high.” The meaning of this proverb is that when many people add wood to a burning fire, the flame must be high, which is a metaphor for the power of many hands. As for the situation where the allusion appears, it is the key point made by General Secretary Xi Jinping during his meeting with the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), Liang Zhenying, and the Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR), Fernando Chui Sian. When meeting with Hong Kong Chief Executive Liang Zhenying, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed that it is the responsibility of the Chief Executive and the SAR government to properly implement “seeking change while maintaining stability”, and also relies on the concerted efforts of all sectors of the Hong Kong community. It is in such context that the General Secretary employs the proverb in the hope that the Chief Executive of

Hong Kong and all sectors of the community will unite and work together to build a better future for Hong Kong!

Then the word “wood” in the translation can be understood as “everyone’s common efforts”, while “the fire” and “the flame” specifically mean “a better future for Hong Kong”. By resorting to foreignization, the translator has not only exported the culture of Chinese proverbs, but also appropriately conveyed the purpose of Xi’s high hopes. In Chinese, the counterparts of “fire” and “flame” are “火” and “火焰” in Chinese. Fire and flame is red, which has a layer of prosperity and flourishing in Chinese culture. As such, the translation can vividly convey Xi’s sincere hopes that Hong Kong will flourish like “the fire” and “the flame”. The allusion is integral to the whole text serving as contextuality which is deployed to construct the government’s identity as a positive organizer to pull up every effort towards a bright future.

Example 2

C: “不患寡而患不均”

(Back translation: Inequality rather than want is the cause of trouble.)

E: “Care less about quantity and more about quality” (Xi, 2014).

The allusion dates from *The Analects of Confucius* with the connotation that neither the lords nor literati and officialdom (in feudal China) were concerned about the lack of property, but only about the uneven distribution of wealth. The allusion appeared in a speech given by General Secretary Xi at a forum for teachers and students at Peking University. The General Secretary mentioned that excellent Chinese culture has become the genes of the Chinese nation and is rooted in the hearts of Chinese people, so we should promote the core values of socialism and draw rich nutrition from them, such as “The benevolent man loves others,” “Honor the old age and care for the young.” “Care less about quantity and more about quality”. As is evidenced from example 2, foreignization is preferred to reflect the excellent translation Chinese values. If it is rendered into “inequality rather than want is the cause of trouble” the translation is admittedly negative and coherence at the intra-and inter-lingual level will be lost to a certain degree. Therefore, the allusion adopted is aimed to call on students and teachers to implement the core values of socialism, whereby the government’s discourse of persuasion is constructed. Allusions or statements that are familiar to people are deployed to archive political aims (Chilton and Lakoff 1999, Cheng 2015, Fu and Yuan 2017, Hidalgo-Downing and Kraljevic-Mujic 2016)

### 3.2 Metaphor

It is well acknowledged that metaphor is universal in our discourse (Steen et al., 2010). Metaphor is counted as a kind of analogy (Perelman et al., 1969; Reboul, 1989; Garssen 2009). If metaphors are adopted as a method to alter someone’s opinion of a current issue, then metaphors are relevant actions in terms of the purpose of resolving a disagreement (Lotte, 2020) in which the concepts are full of strong humanistic concerns, and the resulting linguistic tension gives the political discourse a strong

infectivity. Up to date, there exists scarce literature on Chinese political metaphors and their role in establishing national discourse and identity (Liu & Wang 2020). The study of metaphor has undergone a shift from a rhetorical to a cognitive function, but this does not mean that the latter negates or replaces the former. The traditional rhetorical function still exists and continues to play its aesthetic persuasive role in political discourse, while the shift to the cognitive function of metaphor only represents a shift in research perspective, not at the cost of denying the rhetorical function of metaphor. On the one hand, the persuasiveness of rhetoric mainly refers to the conceptual transfer and persuasion mechanism of political metaphors, which reflects the real demands of political discourse; on the other hand, the affinity of rhetoric emphasizes that political language conveys abstract concepts and logic in a people-friendly way, which is an effective way for political discourse to participate in social practice. Metaphor recognition involves the technical analysis of metaphors by language use analysts (Steen, 2004). Within the theoretical framework of critical metaphor analysis, the metaphor recognition methods and procedures proposed by Charteris-Black J (2004) and Pragglejaz Group (2007) are integrated to identify metaphors in the book *Xi Jinping: The governance of China*.

### Example 3

C: 只有这样，“一国两制”这艘航船才能劈波斩浪、行稳致远。

(Back translation: Only in this way can the ship “one country, two systems” cleave the waves and move steadily forward.

E : Only in this way can we ensure that the “one country, two systems” ship will maintain a steady course and reach its destination despite any rough seas (Xi, 2017).

### Example 4

C: 不管两岸同胞经历过多少风雨、有过多长时间的隔绝，没有任何力量能把我们分开。

(Back translation: No matter how many storms and long periods of isolation our compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have experienced, no force can separate us.)

E: No matter what ordeals we have experienced, or how long we have been isolated from each other, no force can pull us apart.

The political metaphors of political discourse have the function of ideological presentation, revealing the beliefs, views, attitudes, and feelings of the discourse community, and are the product of social, cultural, historical, and contextual choices (Liang, 2020). Ideology is a complex cognitive framework that controls the formation, transformation, and application of other social cognitive representations, including knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and even prejudices (Van Dijk T, 2008). Political rhetoric is a means of political communication and is applied to the whole process of political communication (Su & Gao, 2016). On the one hand, General Secretary Xi Jinping likened “one country, two systems” to a ship, which means that compatriots on both sides of the Strait are in the same boat, thus deriving

the image of people on both sides of the Strait as one family. Philosophical experience is projected in “Rough seas, steady course” to replicate and activate people’s experiential senses, bringing the experience to life. The voyage experience maps onto the political realm by activating people in non-political territories. It will infiltrate political concepts and convey political ideas, so that people on both sides of the Strait can reach a consensus on the issues of “one country, two systems” and the maintenance of peaceful reunification of the motherland, reflecting the real demands of the political metaphor, i.e. persuasion or persuasion function. On the other hand, “rain and wind” refers to the problems and common sufferings (ordeal) encountered in cross-strait relations, and evokes the audience’s sympathy and realizes the affinity function of political metaphors through the image of “how long we have been isolated from each other, no force can pull us apart”. The two intercontextual devices of metaphors are employed to win the audience’s empathy and construct the identity of family members. It is also natural and refreshing, reflecting Xi Jinping’s consistent advocacy for a new style of writing, and has eliminated the linguistic aesthetic fatigue brought about by clichés and bureaucratic language, thus resolving the problem of paralysis in people’s minds and forming a distinctive discourse system. Language may perform a part in the understanding of metaphors (Han, 2011).

## Example 5

C: 打通脱贫攻坚政策落实“最后一公里”。

(Back translation: The “last kilometer” of the implementation of policies to combat poverty.)

E: Remove the last major hurdle to implementing poverty elimination policies

## Example 6

C: 处理好改革“最先一公里”和“最后一公里”的关系，突破“中梗阻”。

(Back translation: Address the relationship between the “first kilometer” and the “last kilometer” of reform, and break the “middle obstacle”.)

E: We must handle well the relationship between “the first kilometer” and “the last kilometer” [the initiation and the implementation] of reform, eliminate obstacles in between (Xi, 2017).

Musolff (2004:2) points out that since humans organize their social experiences and conceptualizations metaphorically, politics, as part of the social domain, must also be metaphorically precepted and constructed. Metaphor is no longer a linguistic rhetorical phenomenon used only to modify words, but a human cognitive phenomenon, a way of thinking (Shu, 2000). In order to bring politics closer to the people, politicians often like to use metaphors to concretize complex, abstract concepts in order to convey political ideas vividly and powerfully. The “first kilometer” refers to the beginning phase of a job, which is pioneering and leading, while the “last kilometer” refers to the finishing and sprinting phase of a job, which contains connotations of urgency and nodality. In example 5, “打通脱贫攻坚政策落实‘最后一公里’” is rendered into “the last major hurdle”, which is based on the commonalities

between Chinese and Western cultures that helping the poor out of poverty is an uphill battle, and the “the last major hurdle” to achieve poverty alleviation nationwide not only means that the time has entered the final stage, but also, more importantly, that the period of poverty alleviation is an uphill battle, revealing the enormity of the task, the intensity of resources and the difficulty of the task. The term “the last major hurdle” is frequently used in the purpose of hurdle racing in sports events, in which participants need to coordinate time, physical strength, skill, strategy, etc. to cross the last “hurdle” of the obstacle course in order to complete the race, which coincides with the meaning of “the last mile”. Whereas in example 6, the connotation of metaphor is complemented by the use of “initiation” and “implementation”, which refers to the comprehensive deepening of reform to deal with the beginning, but also to do a good job of finishing and sprinting. As an important component of political metaphors, travel metaphors contain a large number of common features that are universal in characterizing cultural concepts, connotations, and interests, as well as many unique cultural characteristics of history, people, and culture. Metaphors are often created because some speakers want to express their specific feelings, which cannot be expressed by conventional words (Hu, 2004). Travel metaphors need to present the surface cultural phenomena, but also interpret the deeper cultural values in a way that is acceptable to the audience. One gets the impression that a respectable and approachable leader is responding to the new expectations of the people and expressing a common vision (Chen, 2016).

### 3.3 Analogy

Analogy is an extended metaphor that uses the characteristics of a class of things to explain and describe the characteristics of another class of things. The ontology is the concepts and things that need to be expressed clearly in a specific context, and is the problem that the author needs to solve; the analogy is the author's method and way of solving specific problems, and is the means for the reader to understand the meaning of the author's words. As a rhetorical and discursive strategy, analogies, when used properly, can achieve twice of the communicative effect with half of the effort.

#### Example 7

C: 不论树的影子有多长，根永远扎在土里；不论留学人员身在何处，都要始终把祖国和人民放在心上。

(Back translation: No matter how long the shadow of a tree is, the roots are always rooted in the soil; no matter where the students are, they should always keep the motherland and the people in their hearts.)

E: No matter how long the shadow it may cast, the tree strikes deep roots in soil forever. No matter where they are. Chinese students should always keep the home country and its people in their hearts (Xi, 2014).

In example 7, the relationship between “shadows” and “roots” is used as an analogy to the location of the international student and his or her necessary affiliation, i.e. no matter how long the shadows are,

the roots will always be stable in the ground. Likewise, no matter where a student is, he or she should always be connected to the motherland and the people and should not forget the fundamentals. This analogy is a relational analogy, that is, an analogy is made between the similarities between two relationships. The audience can infer the relationship between “where the students are” and “where their hearts belong” based on the relationship between “the shadow of the tree” and “the roots of the tree,” thus understanding the style and meaning of the sentence and achieving a specific communicative effect. Besides, there exists another rhetoric in the whole sentence if it is probed into deeply, that is, repetition, like such sentence structure “no matter...no matter...and no matter...” Repetition is the intentional repetition of certain words or sentences in order to emphasize a meaning or a feeling (Li & Sheng, 2000). The functions of repetitive rhetoric in political discourse include linguistic, rhetorical, aesthetic, and social functions (Deng & Zeng 2020). Politicians often use rhetorical repetition in order to convince their audience that they are confident in their future policy objectives (Zhang & Zhang, 2018). It guides the discourse audience to understand and accept the country’s core political philosophy and political behavior (An, & Wang, 2019).

## Example 8

C: 中国改革经过 30 多年, 已进入深水区, 可以说, 容易的、皆大欢喜的改革已经完成了, 好吃的肉都吃掉了, 剩下的都是难啃的硬骨头.

(Back translation: After more than 30 years of reform, China has entered the deep water zone. It can be said that the easy reforms, which are pleasing to all, have been completed.)

E : Having been pushed ahead for more than 30 years, China’s reform has entered a deep-water zone. It can be said that the easy part of the job has been done to the satisfaction of all. What is left are tough bones that are hard to chew (Xi, 2014).

The analogy of a particular stage of China’s reform to the “Deep Water Zone” in this example makes the abstruse, abstract and dry theories easy to understand, vivid, and makes the seemingly unrelated analogies and ontologies natural through the similarities of their internal relationships.

The “深水区” is the direct equivalent of the English “deep-water zone”. With this image, it is possible to communicate directly to Western readers that the reform has entered a relatively difficult phase. The English word “tough bones” is the same as the source word “难啃的”, which is used to analogize the different types of problems encountered in the reform process. It aptly and faithfully conveys the political wisdom and charisma of General Secretary Xi Jinping. The intercontextuality conforms to the thinking habits and reading psychology of Western readers and achieves the outreach effect of political literature. However, it is important to note that in political discourse, an expression or allusion to a particular stance may be merely a rhetorical device to support a certain political strategy and may not convey the speaker's personal point of view, because the speaker's identity pursues not only his or her



personal interests but also political interests, i.e., the speaker acts in a dual capacity not only as a private individual but also as a representative of a particular institution or decision-making body (Haselow, 2020).

#### **4. Rhetorical intertextuality and pragmatic function in political discourse**

Based on the analysis of rhetorical intertextuality at the formal level of political discourse, different discursive trends can be drawn that influence the way rhetorical intertext is produced and presented.

1) Although political discourse is fundamentally different from other discourses in terms of linguistic structure and linguistic meaning, due to (colonization of orders of discourse) (Fairclough, 1992: 99), political discourse is not the same as other discourses. The use of allusions and metaphors to promote the national image and core values enhances so as to strengthen persuasiveness and authority, make the arguments more solid and solid, enlighten people's thinking, and thus highlights the trend of publicizing discourse.

2) The use of analogy, from the perspective of discourse generation, reflects the discourse informalization and colloquialization tend to occur; from the perspective of discourse comprehension, it increases the readability and interest of the discourse and brings the distance between the author and readers closer; from the perspective of the power relations embodied in the discourse, it aims to reduce the intrusion of power into the discourse and the power inequality between the author and readers of the discourse, increase the inclusiveness, dialogue, and power reciprocity of the discourse, and enhance the trend of democratization of the discourse (Fairclough, 1992: 201).

Different forms of rhetorical intertextuality reflect different discourse trends and have different linguistic functions. As intertextual forms and trends in intertextual discourse are elucidated, their pragmatic functions are also realized. Therefore, it is of high necessity to summarize the important socio-pragmatic functions of rhetorical intertextual strategies for government identity construction in the linguistic dimension, and analyze how different rhetorical intertextual resources are woven together to serve the construction of government identity. Firstly, allusion serves as the persuasion function to re-contextualize proverbs from ancient books actively promoting the core values of Chinese society and excellent traditional culture in new contexts. As is what has been illustrated from the examples, this type of intertextual approach strategically combines objective delivery of information and subjective persuasion to popularize Chinese culture in the service of national identity construction. Secondly, metaphor is equipped with reasoning and justifying purpose, as well as constructing the government as the government's authoritative status. Finally, analogy exercise the publicizing function. The use of analogy in the language, through paraphrasing words, sentences, and formulas and other paraphrasing means to integrate the intertextual resources of propaganda into the political discourse, increase the dialogue and color of the language, infecting the reader to get closer to the government, serving the government's pro-people identity construction.

The government attaches more importance to establishing and maintaining government authority and credibility when constructing its identity, and tends to use metaphorical intercontext to highlight the scientific rationality of the government's governance; The use of allusion intertextuality marks the recontextualization of illusional stories in political discourse as a marketing and persuasion strategy to increase government influence; the employment of analogy intercontext also demonstrates the government's desire to guide public opinion to infect readers and help them build a national identity. Accordingly, metaphorical intercontextuality prominently exercise the function of scientific education, so as to better construct the government's authoritative identity; allusion intertextuality exercise the function of persuasion, so as to better construct the government's publicizing identity; and analogy intercontextuality flexibly exercise the function of public opinion, so as to better construct the government's pro-citizen identity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study takes the *Xi Jinping: The governance of China* and its identity-constructing functions as an example to explore the socio-pragmatic functions of rhetorical intertextuality in political discourse. Study of allusion, metaphor, analogy at the level of discourse form is conducted to identify intertextual resources. It is carried out vertically to explore the discursive trends such as the politicization of discourse and the democratization of discourse represented by these forms of intertextuality from the perspective the discourse system, and then horizontally to expand to the persuasive function of intertextual resources at the level of pragmatic use. This paper attempts to establish a framework for socio-pragmatic analysis of intertextual rhetorical devices in political discourse that integrates the identification of intertextual resources at the discourse form level, the analysis of discourse trends at the level of system, and the interpretation of intertextual functions from the perspective of pragmatic function. As is evidenced from the investigation, the pragmatic functions of intercontextuality in political texts are reflected in 1) persuading function of intercontexts. Allusion is deployed to persuade and entice readers to promote culture and construct the government's cultural identity; 2) reasoning and justifying purpose of intertextual rhetorical devices, metaphor is employed to construct the government as its authoritative status scientific and authoritative nature of the language and construct the authoritative identity of the government. 3) wining the public sentiment of intertextual rhetorical devices. Analogy is used to increase the interest and dialogue of the language, bring readers closer and construct the government's identity as a people-friendly organization.

This study lays the theoretical and practical foundations for the subsequent analysis of the intertextual strategies of government identity discourse construction and for the comparative study of Chinese and that of foreign. More political discourse data will be introduced to further investigate the influence of socio-cultural factors on intertextual strategies and the construction of politically differentiated identities.

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