

# Discourse Strategy Analysis on English Translation of Modern Chinese Essays Based on Framing Theory

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## Abstract

The English translation of modern Chinese essays provides a platform for the world to showcase the Chinese spirit. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research on the underlying discourse strategies of the English translation of modern Chinese essays. Based on the framing theory proposed by Lakoff, this study adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze surface frames and deep frames of the English translation of modern Chinese essays. Analyses show that among a total of 1074 metaphorical words, there exist four main metaphorical surface frames: people frame, nature frame, journey frame and object frame. These surface frames activate four deep frames: the pursuit of personal qualities, nostalgia for hometown and family, criticism of social reality and the struggle for the country. This study provides a new application perspective and promotes future research on the English translation of modern Chinese essays, and could help readers to interpret the main values embodied in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays 1*, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of these literary works.

**Keywords:** the English translation of modern Chinese essays, surface frames, deep frames, Metaphor Identification Procedure

## 1. Introduction

Modern Chinese essays hold great importance in the history of Chinese literature. In China, essay enjoys a long history, which can be traced back to the Xia Dynasty (Ming Qingying 2). However, modern Chinese essays didn't emerge until the May 4th Movement. Although modern Chinese essays has achieved significant success in literary creation, its translation research has long lagged behind, mainly due to the linguistic and cultural differences between Chinese and English languages, as well as the distinctive nature of modern Chinese essays. The publication of the book *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*, compiled by Zhang Peiji in 1999, marked the initial progress in the study of the English translation of modern Chinese essays, which aroused great response from readers. Nowadays, many scholars have chosen Zhang's works as a corpus for study. Through the translation and analysis of these works, research in the English translation of modern Chinese essays has been gradually improved. This advancement not only contributes to the deeper understanding of Chinese literature for readers at home and abroad but also promotes cultural exchange between countries.

The study of frames has a history of nearly 70 years since Bateson first proposed the concept. At the beginning of the 21st century, Lakoff introduced framing analysis from framing semantics, sociology, and communication studies into the field of political discourse. He combined the latest research findings from cognitive linguistics and neuro-cognitive science to establish framing theory. From Lakoff's perspective, frames are the psychological structures that people use to understand reality and sometimes construct what is considered reality (Lakoff 25). He proposed that frames are the use of language that aligns with one's own worldview (Lakoff 4) and conceptualize a situation (Lakoff 225). Frames play a crucial role in both discourse deconstruction and construction. When deconstructing discourse, people can delve deeper into the roles, relationships, event scenarios in which they participate, and cultural factors. In discourse construction, elements such as structure, metaphor, emotion, and morality are more important than language expression.

According to existing literature, the majority of current research studies the English translation of modern Chinese essays from the perspective of translation theories, with few studies from the cognitive perspective and a lack of attention to the values embodied in the essays. Therefore, based on Lakoff's framing theory, the author takes *Selected Modern Chinese Essays 1* as the corpus to analyze and induce surface frames, as well as the deep

frames activated by these surface frames identified.

## 2. Literature Review

Modern Chinese essays play an important role in Chinese literature, showcasing the changes in Chinese society and the daily lives of its people with their unique writing style and observation perspective. In recent years, research on the English translation of modern Chinese essays has gradually gained attention. Mainly taking *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* as the corpus, domestic scholars have delved deeply into the translation strategies, methods and techniques employed by renowned translators from the perspective of various translation theories. This aims to better present the diversity and unique artistic charm of modern Chinese essays to the world.

Wu Yingli (2019) selects the figures of speech that appear frequently in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* based on skopos theory (1978), and analyzes the translation strategies adopted by Zhang in translating them, so as to verify whether his translation strategies are consistent with the purpose of his translation. Ren and Lee (2019) takes *Selected Modern Chinese Essays 1* as the corpus to discuss what kind of translation strategy we should choose for the four-character idioms in essay. Chen Ming (2020) focuses on analyzing the cross-cultural contents and corresponding translation strategies in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* from the cross-cultural perspective for the purpose of promoting the study of modern Chinese essay translation. Based on the socio-semiotic approach proposed by Nida in 1982, He Henghuan (2020) selects the English translations of two essays from *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*, “Nothing Is Impossible to a Willing Mind” and “Summer in Western Europe”, and then studies Zhang’s translations in terms of designative, intralingual, and pragmatic meanings, respectively. Chen Huiling (2021) takes *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* as the corpus and selects typical idioms for analysis and translation guided by Nida’s functional equivalence theory (1974), which aims to help readers better understand the text and the meaning of idioms, and apply relevant strategies to translate Chinese idioms more accurately. Ting Yiqing (2021) takes *Selected Modern Chinese Essays 2* to study the choice and handling of figures of speech in different contexts. Zhou and Zhang (2021) use Eco-Translatology by Hu Gengshen in 2004 to analyze the translator’s subjectivity in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*, which fully reflects the translator’s consideration of the internal balance of the ecological translation system. Based on the theory of translation aesthetics, Chen and Wu (2021) takes the famous modern Chinese essay, “Life”, as an example to explain the embodiment of beauty in the translation of essay in five aspects, namely, phonological beauty, lexical beauty, syntactic beauty, imagery beauty and emotional beauty. Yang Lu (2021) combines “sound beauty” and “optimization”, two words proposed by Xu Yuanchong to appreciate the “phonetic advantages” of *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* from the aspects of rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, consonance, and onomatopoeia. Zhang Wanyu (2021) analyzes the similarities and differences between the translations of Zhang Peiji’s and Wang Jiaosheng’s translations of Autumn in Peiping from the perspective of the correlative approach to translation (1991). Taking some sentences in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* as the corpus, Yao Dongyue (2022) analyzes how Zhang Peiji applies “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance” to literary translation. Zhang and Li (2023) uses Reception Aesthetics to study how Zhang dealt with culture-loaded words in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*. From the perspective of Newmark’s metaphor translation theory (1981), Ming Qingying (2023) discusses five types of metaphors in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays 1* and further summarizes Zhang’s tendency to use different metaphorical translation strategies and searches for the reasons behind them. Yang Yanfei (2023) explores translator subjectivity in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* guided by cognitive translology (2010).

Since Lakoff proposed framing theory, many scholars have been doing research from the perspective of the theory. Fransson Kajsa (2020) uses a combination of corpus linguistics, discourse analysis and Lakoff’s framing theory to study climate emergency discourse. The climate change discourse is then analyzed using the UK Parliamentary Declaration on Climate Emergency as a corpus and the two discourses are compared. Results found that the two discourses had three recurring frames which were political frame, problem frame, and threat frame, and three distinctive frames of climate change, namely, war frame, cause frame, and predicament frame. Lorenzetti Maria Ivana (2020) compares and analyzes Donald Trump’s and Matteo Salvini’s anti-immigrant rhetorical strategies based on discourse analysis, Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model, and Lakoff’s framing theory. The study found that the two leaders’ speeches from Twitter posts were very similar and centered around the idea that immigrants were a threat to the country and its people. Camphuijsen Marjolein K. and Antonina Levatino (2022) identify discourse frames most commonly used by regional and local Norwegian media when reporting on national standardized tests to their readers guided by framing theory, and explore whether the prevalence of frames varies across time and geography. Kramar Natalie (2023) explores the role of language agency in framing media discourse on climate change from the perspective of framing theory and using 75 articles from major news

media in the UK and the US as a corpus. It was found that climate change was usually one of the indirect causes of negative situations, which may make readers lose sight of the urgency of climate change. Yi Chen (2023) analyzes how Dong Yuhui, a hit live-streamer on Youtube, gained popularity among audience using media priming and Lakoff's framing and conceptual metaphor theory. The results suggested that the live-streamer's success may be largely attributed to his careful selection of stimuli to achieve a perfect integration of explicit and implicit frames intertwined with each other. This study is useful in encouraging communication specialists and professionals to consider language practices and strategies based on positive, resonant, and coherent frames when planning for the purpose of transforming consumer perceptions and decision-making. Pandey Shyam (2024) analyzes speeches given by President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden on climate change using framing theory. It was found that President Trump utilized negative frames to make his points, while President Biden adopted positive frames to support his arguments and his speeches closely centered on the environmental justice frame.

Domestically, Zhang and Wang (2019) selected 60 official media reports on the Belt and Road and analyzed them from the perspective of framing theory. They found that the success of the reports was due to the selection of appropriate surface frames and the coherence between surface and deep frames. Wang and Yan (2020) select the corpus related to clean governance in the book, *A Compilation of Xi Jinping's Selected Remarks on Clean Governance and the Fight Against Corruption* and analyze clean governance discourse applying framing theory. The results showed that clean governance discourse embodied the values of justice and the rule of law and strongly defended the interests of the people. Zheng Shuyuan (2020) explains the surface and deep frames often used by Chinese state media during the COVID-19 period from the perspectives of conceptual metaphor theory (1980) and framing theory. It was found that metaphorical frames such as war, competition, and obstacles and non-metaphorical frames such as determination, confidence, and victory were mainly used in the reports. News reports of this kind helped to strengthen the audience's determination and courage to fight the epidemic. Wang Shaohua (2022) believes that there are differences between China and the West in terms of cognitive styles, concepts of international relations, and cultures, so the author innovates the "Strict Father Morality" and "Nurturant Parent Morality" proposed by Lakoff in 2002 that applies to American discourse from the perspective of cognitive linguistics and discourse studies. Zhou Dandan (2022) adopts Lakoff's framing theory to analyze conceptual metaphors using the Science and Technology news of People's Daily Online. Yan Lingyan (2022) takes G20 summit speeches delivered by President Xi Jinping as the corpus and analyzes deep frames by applying conceptual metaphor theory and framing theory. It was found that, in the course of the speeches, President Xi was good at using specific frames to emphasize his governing philosophy, and could shift his diplomatic discourse strategy in response to changes in the international situation, so as to enhance the acceptability and influence of his speeches. Besides, framing theory also applies to diplomatic discourse, poverty alleviation discourse, doctor discourse, "community with a shared future of mankind" discourse, South China Sea issue discourse and other fields according to literature materials on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) from 2009 to 2023.

To sum up, the discourse strategies studied using framing theory at home and abroad overlap to a certain extent. For example, scholars from both contexts analyze discourse strategies related to news and politics. Yet there are also some differences. Foreign scholars mostly study the discourses surrounding topics like climate change and anti-immigration through the lens of framing theory, while domestic scholars tend to focus on topics such as the Belt and Road initiative, clean governance, COVID-19 and so on. Therefore, the topics of discourse studied by scholars exhibit distinctive regional characteristics and are often centered around national trending issues.

In recent years, the study on the English translation of modern Chinese essays has become increasingly rich. Most studies have been conducted based on translation theories, but no single study exists from a cognitive perspective. What's more, previous studies on the English translation of modern Chinese essays have mainly focused on translators' strategies, methods and techniques, with little attention given to exploring the values and worldviews embodied in the essays.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap by exploring the values in the English translation of modern Chinese essays from the perspective of discourse analysis. It seeks to analyze the essays' surface frames, which are the ideas associated with individual words and expressions, as well as deep frames, activated by these surface frames in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays I*, in order to uncover the values and worldviews reflected therein. To carry out the study, the author firstly establishes a corpus that contains about 30000 words by selecting 35 essays in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays I*. Secondly, the study identifies the frequently occurring words and phrases in the corpus and analyze the surface frames they activate and the activated deep frames.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Lakoff introduced the framing analysis of framing semantics, sociology, and communication studies into the field of political discourse, and combined the latest research results of cognitive linguistics and neuro-cognitive science to establish framing theory at the beginning of the 21st century. Frames are the psychological structure that people use to understand reality and sometimes construct what we consider to be reality (Lakoff 25). One basic finding of cognitive science is that people think in terms of frames and metaphor, and that frames exist in the brain in the form of neural circuit diagrams (Lakoff 73). Therefore, when we are thinking or communicating, we usually evoke frames (Hu Tingting 30).

Frames can be divided into surface frames and deep frames (Lakoff 28–29). When a particular word or phrase activates a particular frame in the brain, it is called surface frames, which can be further divided into non-metaphorical surface frames and metaphorical surface frames (Lu Huitao 24). But most of the surface frames are metaphorical. For example, words like tactics, clash, wound, battleground, defense and retreat will activate a war frame. And a business frame can be summarized by words like deal, bargain, price, interest, means, etc.. Besides, the surface frame activated by the same word or phrase varies in different context. Taking the word “fight” as an example, in the context of a war between two armies, it means that these two armies oppose each other with weapons, which is non-metaphorical. While, if this word appears in the context of commercial or national conflicts, it is a metaphorical surface frame and refers to the fight between companies or countries.

Deep frames have a wider scope than surface frames (Liang Jingyu 36). They are moral systems, worldviews, and emotions activated by surface frames (Wang & Zhang 47) and they can be widely accepted if the values are in line with individuals’ own frames (Wang Shaohua 5).

#### 3.1 Principles of Framing Theory

Lakoff points out that the language of the opponent should not be used during debates or arguments, which is one of the fundamental principals of framing. For example, when the White House coined the term “tax relief” and it was then widely used in public discourse, President Bush’s tax relief plan became deeply ingrained in people’s minds. Subsequently, the Democratic Party also adopted the term “tax relief”, inadvertently reminding people of President Bush’s language. This reinforced the impression in the minds of the American people that the Democratic Party imposes heavy taxes and obstructs tax cuts proposed by Bush and the Republican Party, while portraying Bush and the Republicans as reducing the tax burden on the people. Consequently, the Democratic Party found itself in a passive position regarding taxation. This illustrates how the language of the opponent is connected with their underlying frame and values, and employing their language only serves to strengthen the audience’s perception of their moral values. Another fundamental principle of framing is that denying a frame often has the opposite effect of stimulating it. For example, Lakoff demonstrated this principle in class by instructing his students to think about anything they desired except entertaining thoughts of an elephant. Despite their efforts, none of them succeeded in complying. Paradoxically, the act of denying thoughts of an elephant only served to intensify the focus on it. Once the notion of an elephant was triggered, individuals found themselves unable to resist dwelling upon it. Similarly, when President Nixon was forced to resign due to the Watergate scandal, he famously declared in a televised speech to the American people that he was not a crook. However, this assertion of “I am not a crook” inadvertently activated the public’s imagination, associating Nixon even more strongly with the Republican Party’s involvement in the Watergate scandal and reinforcing the perception that he was indeed deceitful.

3.2 The Framing Framework for Translating Modern Chinese Essays

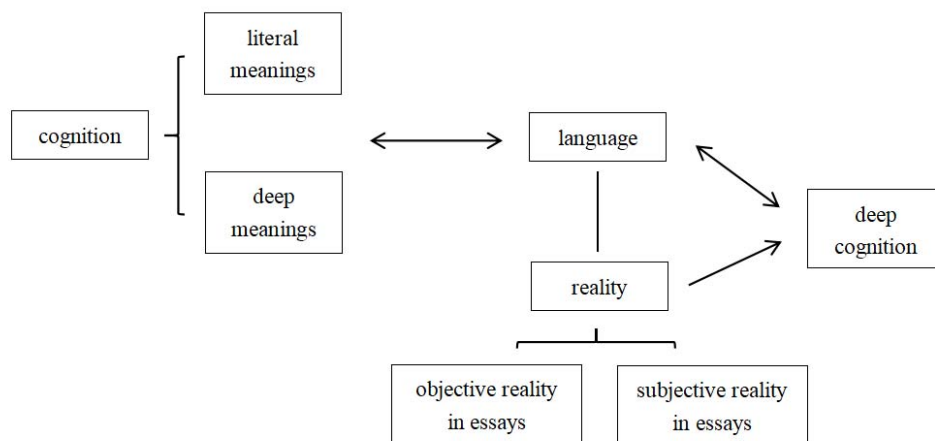


Figure 1. Framing framework for translating modern Chinese essays

The framing framework for translating modern Chinese essays mainly consists of four aspects: cognition, language, reality, and deep cognition. Cognition serves as the foundation of language and deep cognition, while reality assists language in promoting deep cognition. Deep cognition, in turn, can deduce reality and confirm the accuracy of language. If language is correct, then cognition is also confirmed.

Cognition includes the literary and deep meanings of vocabulary. Literal meaning refers to the basic meaning of vocabulary, which can be analyzed based on whether the vocabulary is specific, clear, closely related to physical activity, or has an ancient history. Deep meaning refers to the implicit meaning of vocabulary that exceeds the basic meaning in the context. If vocabulary is identified as metaphorical, language can be inferred. Reality includes the objective reality and subjective reality present in the English translation of modern Chinese essays. The former involves real social events that occurred during the period of essay creation, such as the May 4th Movement, while the latter refers to the subjective experience and understanding that writers experience in society, such as the dark social reality exposed by writers in essays. Based on reality, language can deduce deep cognition, that is, the values reflected in essays. The communication between cognition, language, and deep cognition is bidirectional, but reality only interacts with deep cognition in both directions.

4. Analysis of Frames in Selected Modern Chinese Essay 1

4.1 Analysis of Surface Frames

After statistical analysis, it was found that there are a total of 1275 metaphorical words in the corpus. Following categorization and summary, four main metaphorical surface frames are identified, comprising a total of 1074 metaphorical words. These frames include people frame, nature frame, journey frame, and object frame. The distribution of metaphorical surface frames and the frequency of metaphorical words in the discourse of the English translation of modern Chinese essays are shown in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of metaphorical frames

Metaphorical Frames	Metaphorical Words	Frequency	Percentage
People Frame	Mr. Chabuduo, father, Carpenter Lao Chen, child, smile(s, ing), an old woman, mother, Professor Su Lin, Chen Yilin, He(husband), young woman(wife), scholar, scholar’s wife, grandpa, family, home, homeland, motherland, Chinese, native land, heroic spirit, flunkey, old self, name, strength,	533	41.80%
Nature Frame	vermin, flies, mosquitoes, predawn, crab(s), cackler, non-cackler, peanut(s), white poplar, seed(s), plant, grass, date stone, flowers, cold, coldness, warmth, warm, nanmu, autumn	258	20.24%
Journey Frame	wooden boat, steamer(s), aircraft, airplane, journey, lane, Peiping, China, air ticket	144	11.29%
Objective Frame	great, useful, fragile, sharp, filth, gem, petticoat, resilient, attachment, lamp, firewood, black, darkness, white, snow white, brightness	139	10.90%

From Table 1, we can see that People Frame is the most common one, with a frequency of 533 words, accounting for 41.80% of the total. The second one is Nature Frame, with a frequency of 258 words, accounting for 20.24%. The third metaphorical frame is Journey Frame, with a frequency of 144 words, making up 11.29%. The fourth one is Objective Frame, with a frequency of 139 words, accounting for 10.90%.

#### 4.1.1 People Metaphorical Frame

The people metaphorical frame mainly employs vocabulary associated with human behavior to convey complex concept and evoke vivid imagery. In the corpus, metaphorical words, such as “assail”, “see through” and “savor” transcend their literal meanings, serving as a medium for deeper exploration of concepts, emotions and ideas.

a. After Mr. Cha Buduo’s death, people all praised him for his way of *seeing through* things and his philosophical *approach* to life.

The phrase “see through” is used to describe the act of something penetrating or passing through something transparent or barriers to the other side. So when you say that you can see through the window, you mean you can see outside through the window. In example (a), “see through” transcends its literal meaning but refers to Mr. Cha Buduo’s ability to discern the truth and essence of things, thus leading a generous life. Another metaphorical word “approach” denotes the act of getting closer to something, and as a noun, it means a road or path, while, in example (a), it refers to a lifestyle instead of a physical road. When used together, these two words activate the people frame in readers’ minds and reinforce the “positive” perception of Mr. Cha Buduo.

b. You’ll never have an opportunity to see it and *savour* its gentle *poise* until you have become truly attached to the small town after living there for a long time.

c. The lane, though *cut off* from the hustle and bustle of busy cities, does not *taste* of the countryside at all.

“Savour” is a word used to depict the act of relishing the full flavor of food or drink, and the word “poise” means a graceful and confident way of moving or standing. In example (b), these two words convey the meaning that prolonged residence in the small town will foster an appreciate for its charm. “Cut off” typically refers to the act of dividing something away from a larger part, while “taste” refers to the particular flavor of food or drink. However, in example (c), they are metaphorically used to illustrate that the lane is secluded from the noisy cities and does not resemble the countryside. By personifying the lane as a person with these four words, they convey the notion that the lane is a person, thus activating the people frame. This frame vividly portrays the elegance and tranquility of the lane, thus leaving a lasting impression on readers.

d. Thereupon I saw with my own eyes...the road stained with their blood for some *li* and their cries *rending* the air.

e. They indulged in noisy drinking game...The deafening uproar *rocked* the house.

In example (d) and (e), the metaphorical words “rending” and “rocked” deviate from their original meanings. “Rending” originally refers to the act of tearing something into pieces with force. In the text, however, it is used to depict the sharp cries of peasants, implying the distress of their life. Likewise, “rocked” signifies a gentle movement back and forth or from side to side. But, here, the translator employs it to convey that the heated conversation of guests almost cause the house collapse. The use of exaggeration aims to express the depressed and noisy atmosphere more vividly to readers and enhance the artistic effects of the essay. Both words activate the people frame, contributing to the portrayal of intense emotion of the scene.

#### 4.1.2 Nature Metaphorical Frame

The nature metaphorical frame in the discourse of modern Chinese essay of English translation uses the imagery and symbolism found in the natural world to convey deeper meanings and insights into human experiences. Through metaphorical words like “predawn”, “mire”, “bloom”, and “stream”, the translator employs elements of nature to shed light on various aspects of life and society.

f. Is it exclusively due to the above-mentioned that I’ve developed a liking for *predawn* Beijing?

g. For 30 years, I’ve been bogged down in the *mire* of meetings.

The metaphorical words “predawn” and “mire” are closely connected to nature, thus activating the nature frame. “Predawn” refers to the period before sunrise, a natural phenomenon when the sky begins to lighten before dawn, while “mire” means an area of deep mud in nature. However, in the context, “predawn” is likely to signify the period of time free from the disruption of sudden meetings, enabling the writer ample time to create works reassuringly. Conversely, the word “mire” is used metaphorically to emphasize the feeling of the writer being trapped by the notice for attending a meeting. These two words within the nature frame vividly express that

countless meetings have heavily influenced the writer's daily life, making him nervous and fidgety.

h. With the passing of time, however, it became known that the *cackler* had in fact laid very few eggs while the *non-cackler* kept laying one egg a day.

In the text, "cackler" and "non-cackle" literally refer to a cackling hen and a non-crackling hen respectively. However, taking into account the context, these two words may carry deeper connotations. "Cackler" is likely to denote a person who boasts about themselves without making any substantial contribution, while "non-cackler" is someone who never seeks others' praise but work hard modestly to contribute to society and country. The writer uses these metaphorical words to ironically criticize those "cacklers" in society while speaking highly of the commendable qualities of "non-cacklers". Through these two words, readers are allowed to gain deeper insight into the prevalent social status at that time.

i. Often at this moment, I'll feel at once happy and sad...a photo of her taken in the *bloom* of her youth.

j. Look, how they are still covered with frostlike *bloom* when they are put on the market!

In nature, "bloom" is the flower of a plant, representing its most beautiful and flourishing stage. However, in example (i), "bloom" metaphorically refers to the golden period of the old lady's youth. The second example of "bloom" denotes the white frost on the surface of fruits, implying their ripeness and readiness for consumption. In these examples, both words are employed to emphasize vitality, with the first conveying the vigor of the youth and the second highlighting the maturity of fruits. Despite their metaphorical use, both are symbols of beauty and growth and connected with their literal meaning.

k. It seemed as if she would never pouring out the *stream* of venomous and biting words...far away to hear them.

l. To my mind, if you...going with the *stream*...and making a common effort to revitalize China.

The literal meaning of "stream" is a narrow river or a flow of liquid or gas, which is a part of the nature. But in these two examples, "stream" conveys a deeper meaning. In example (k), "stream" implies that the woman's malicious words flow continuously, akin to the relentless flow of liquid. This usage vividly portrays the shrewish image of the woman and the tense atmosphere. The second example of "stream" metaphorically depicts the phenomenon of people keeping up with the times, employing the imagery of water rushing forward. In the text, the word is employed to urge his friend to take swift action to revitalize China.

m. Nevertheless, from grandpa I've learned that apart from *coldness* and hatred, there is also *warmth* and love in life.

Climate refers to a long-term weather patterns or trends in a particular region. In example (m), "coldness" and "warmth" literally denotes the low and high temperatures, respectively. However, considering the context, these two metaphorical words are employed to symbolize a kind of emotion. "Coldness" conveys a sense of unkindness and indifferent, akin to the chill of winter, while "warmth" implies the presence of friendliness and affection, akin to the warmth of sunlight. This example signifies that life is filled with not only indifference and malice but also love and hope. 4.1.3 Journey metaphorical frame

As a powerful device, the journey metaphorical frame utilizes elements of travel and exploration to convey deeper meanings metaphorically. Through this frame, words like "steamer", "carriage", "lane" and "path" go beyond their literal meaning, allowing readers to travel between physical journeys and metaphorical ones. This shift from the tangible world to the abstract realm facilitates the exploration and analysis of the underlying concepts and emotions.

n. To complicate matters, there are bandits lurking around...reduced to the disreputable business as a last *resort*.

Literally, "resort" refers to a place where people go on holiday. However, in example (n), "resort" means the final choice that a person have to make due to the urgency of a situation. These two meanings carry some connections, with the former one being a choice a person actively makes to relax themselves, while the latter being a choice one is forced to make because there's no way out. In this example, this word is metaphorically employed to imply that those bandits cannot help but rob the passengers of their belongings due to unbearable starvation. This metaphorical usage highlights the desperation and inevitability of their actions, emphasizing the extreme circumstances that lead to such drastic measures.

o. Now, on reflection, I realized that in the days before *steamers* and *aircraft* came into use, people used to travel by *wooden boat*...the Yangtse River.

In life, "steamers", "aircraft" and "wooden boat" are vehicles people use to reach their destinations during their

journeys. While a “wooden boat” represents a more traditional and slower form of transportation, “steamers” and “aircraft” symbolize modern and efficient approaches. Yet, considering the whole context, these words go beyond their literal meanings. A “wooden boat” is likely to reflect the writer’s attitude, symbolizing the adherence of one’s true self and a refusal to compromise on personal values, while, “steamers” and “aircraft” represent a totally different attitude as symbols of the prevailing trend in society. Thus, these modes of transportation serve as metaphors for the choices people make in their lives. They reveal the darkness of society at that time as well as the writer’s pursuit of his own self and criticism of social norms.

p. When he looked askance at me, superciliousness gushed from his eyes down the *bridge* of his nose...mouth.

During a journey, “bridge” is a common structure that we may encounter, which is a connection or passage between two areas. However, in example (p), this word carries a different meaning and refers to the hard top part of the face between the eyes, akin to the role of a physical bridge in supporting and connecting two sides. In the text, it denotes how the character’s expression of superciliousness seems to emanate from his eyes, travel down the bridge of his nose, and eventually reach his mouth. This metaphorical usage of “bridge” connects the physical feature of the face with the concept of support and connection, enriching the description and helping to portray the arrogant image of the character.

q. Those who given to profound meditation and a quiet life without worldly desires, welcome to the *lane* !

The word “lane” refers to a narrow street with buildings on both sides, an common sight often encountered during a journey. However, in example (q), the “lane” metaphorically represents a spiritual shelter that people can seek to calm their hearts and temporarily flee from the stresses of life, rather than a merely physical space. This sense of calm and tranquility reflected in the “lane” sharply contrasts with the hustle and bustle of the city life, implying the writer’s longing for a peace and quiet place to console his own soul amidst the chaos of urban living. The metaphorical usage of “lane” highlights the necessity of pursuing calm and tranquility amidst the rapid pace of modern life.

#### 4.1.4 Object Metaphorical Frame

The object metaphorical frame delves into the properties and characteristics of objects, employing their nature, color and other attributes to vividly convey their deeper meanings which are closely connected with their literal ones. By drawing on the readers’ past experiences and cognitive associations, these metaphorical words enhance their reading process and enable them to capture the abstract ideas and emotions implied in the physical world.

r. Such association is of course *fragile*, especially in this modern age of prevailing *sharp* conflicts.

The literal meaning of “fragile” refers to something easily broken and damaged. However, in example (r), this word metaphorically signifies that the association is weak and likely to be broken at any moment. On the other hand, “sharp” literally means something that has a fine edge and point, capable of cutting through objects, while in this example, it portrays a tense atmosphere caused by the prevalent conflicts. Through these two words, the whole sentence conveys that the association between people is vulnerable and unstable in society, heavily influenced by those conflicts in the current modern age. This highlights the vulnerability of social connections amidst prevailing tensions.

s. Shooting a glance at me, he continued with *undiminished* patience...

t. Her ardent love for agriculture production remained *undiminished* even in her old age.

In these two examples, the word “undiminished” is metaphorically employed to describe an abstract emotion instead of the literal meaning which refers to the decrease of objects. In example (s), “undiminished” signifies the Lao Chen’s enduring patient. Here, the word conveys the idea that despite opposition and poor attitude from others, Lao Chen’s patience remains strong and steadfast. Similarly, in example (t), “undiminished” denotes the maintenance of the mother’s enthusiasm for farming. Rather than diminishing over time, her passion and excitement for farming activities persist, portraying a diligent and simple image of the mother. Thus, in both cases, “undiminished” is used metaphorically to emphasize the resilient and unwavering qualities and personality of characters.

u. There are a great many kind-hearted people...and who never place themselves and their families *above* anything else.

v. They give me things which it is *beyond* my family to give.

The words “above” and “beyond” are typically used to describe the physical location of objects, with “above” denoting a higher position and “beyond” signifying a further one. However, in these two examples, they take on metaphorical meanings. “Above” means that those people never prioritize themselves or their families over



anything else, reflecting a selfless attitude. Likewise, “beyond” conveys the meaning that the things they give exceed what the writer’s family offers, indicating an exceptional level of generosity. Although these two words are not verbs, reader can still grasp their implied meanings due to the close connection between their literal and metaphorical meanings.

w. Only at the turn of July and August...have the best of autumn—the *golden* days in a year.

x. The angel in *white* was smiling on me with a bunch of flowers in his arms, his wings flapping.

“Golden” and “white” typically describe the color of objects. In example (w), the word “golden” literally signifies the bright yellow color, but here metaphorically refers to the best period of a year and the harvest time, symbolizing warmth and brightness. This word unconsciously reminds people of the golden leaves in autumn and a sense of maturity and fulfillment associated with the harvest season. In example (x), “white” refers to the color of the angel’s clothing, implying a symbol of purity and sacredness, akin to a sheet of paper, which evokes a sense of clarity and holiness, enhancing the image of the angel as a figure of purity and enlightenment. In both cases, the colors convey specific emotions and associations, serving to rich the imagery in the text.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Deep Frames

Wang and Zhang (2017, pp. 146–157) proposed that deep frames play a crucial role in shaping people’s values and moral systems. Based on the surface frames analyzed above, they activate deep frames centered around the pursuit of personal qualities, nostalgia for hometown and family, criticism of social reality, and the struggle for the country. These values contained within deep frames provide ideas for a deeper understanding of the themes in the texts. They resonate deeply with readers, reflecting the personal and social situations of the time and providing insights into the nation’s development path.

##### 4.2.1 Pursuit of Personal Qualities

One of the values reflected in *Selected Modern Chinese Essay I* is the pursuit of personal qualities. Writers often express their quest for positive personal qualities by comparing them with negative aspects of society. This value highlights the writer’s longing for the improvement of the flawed personal attributes and the darkness of the surrounding environment.

For example, in the essay *The Lane* by Ke Ling, the writer portrays the calm and tranquil atmosphere of the lane while highlighting his disgust with the hustle and bustle of urban living. This mirrors his aspiration for a serene lifestyle. Consequently, this metaphorical word “lane” within the nature frame activates the writer’s personal qualities of detachment and serenity, symbolizing a retreat from the complexities of modern urban life.

Similarly, the essay *I Took a Wooden Boat* by Ye Shengtao portrays a social phenomenon where people of the time tend to take steamer or aircraft despite the price of buying “black” tickets, seeking connections, constantly running around, and even changing their names, thus highlighting the particularity of choosing wooden boat for transportation. Through the comparison of these modes of transportation, the writer conveys his disdain and disgust for the trend mentioned above. The metaphorical word “wooden boat” within the journey frame represents the writer’s admirable personal qualities of uprightness and integrity.

##### 4.2.2 Nostalgia for Hometown and Family

The nostalgia for hometown and family is an eternal and unchanging value in the literary works. Writers convey their profound emotions of yearning and longing for their roots and loved ones by recalling cherished memories of the past. This value transcends the boundaries of time and culture, activating readers’ deep sentiment generation after generation. The author selects two essays from *Selected Modern Chinese Essay* to explain this value.

In the essay *The Sight of Father’s Back* by Zhu Ziqing, the writer portrays, in plain and simple language, the scene where a father bids farewell to his son, who was studying in Beijing, and buys tangerines for him despite the inconvenience. However, behind those seemingly ordinary acts lie the father’s deep and sincere love for his son, which is both simple and passionate. The word “father” within the people frame transcends the presentation of a simple title, but metaphorically reflects the writer’s profound longing for his own father, activating a sense of nostalgia and intimate family connection in the readers’ minds.

Besides, the essay *Date Stones* by Xiao Qian conveys sentiments of homesickness. It mainly depicts that the writer’s former schoolmate, who has settled in United States, asks the writer to bring some raw date stones to him in order to plant in his back garden. Despite the change of nationality, the man never forgets his homeland and tries to evoke memories by recreating layers of his hometown. Here, the word “date stones” within the nature frame symbolizes more than just a plant; it metaphorically expresses the strong attachment for individuals

residing in a place far from home, serving as a reminder of his Chinese nationality.

#### 4.2.3 Criticism of Social Reality

The straightforward nature of essay provides writers with an emotional vent. Through this medium, they can freely expose social ugliness, convey their observation, and express their inner criticism and dissatisfaction. As a result, readers are directed to reflect on these issues and resonate with the writer's strong sentiments. Ultimately, this value reflects the writers' longing for positive change in social flaws, urging people in the country to consider and solve these issues collectively.

In the essay *Mr. About-the-Same* by Hu Shih, the writer portrays a sloppy and imprecise image of a man who never pays attention to details. Even when he is about to die, he still believes that the physician and the veterinarian are about the same, ultimately leading to his tragic death. More ironically, people praise Mr. Cha Buduo's generous attitude toward life after his death. The entire text is full of satire. The name "Mr. Cha Buduo" within the people frame is not merely a character in the essay but is the symbol of individuals across China. The writer uses this metaphorical figure to depict the negative realities in society, conveying his criticism and strong desire for change.

The essay *A Slave Mother* by Rou Shi is a short story that depicts the plight of a married young woman in a rural area who is hired by a fifty-year-old scholar to bear him a son, as his wife is barren. Ultimately the young woman is forced to leave the scholar's home after finishing the task. At the same time, she loses her younger son and is forgotten by her oldest son, plunging her into a torrent of despair. Despite her suffering, no one cares for her feelings or situation. The word "mother" within the people frame is not only an identity or character but also the representation of all rural working women in the East of Zhejiang. Metaphorically, this word reflects the harsh realities faced by these poor women and evokes deep sympathy from the readers.

#### 4.2.4 Struggle for the Country

The country, society and individuals are interconnected communities with a shared future. The prosperity of the country contributes to the stability of society and the happiness of individuals. Modern Chinese essays emerged after the May 4th Movement, a period when China faced domestic trouble and foreign invasion. Therefore, the theme of striving for the country's well-being became an indispensable value at that time. This value drives the overcoming of challenges and the construction of a better future for all people through collective efforts and national unity.

*Be a Fighter* by Ba Jin is an essay that depicts the writer's encouragement to young people in confusion. Written at the beginning of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the essay appeals to them to combat the darkness in society for the better future of citizens and the integrity of the country. The words such as "darkness", "filth", "vermin", "flies" and "mosquitoes" represent the gloomy social situations and the crisis of the country, while the word "cleanse" serves as an appeal to take action to eliminate these challenges. The writer closely links individuals, society, and the country, urging individuals to engage in the improvement of society and the country. The essay *Tribute to the White Poplar* by Mao Dun was written in the midst of the War of Resistance Against Japan. It praises the uprightness and unyielding of the white poplar by imbuing the white poplar with human characteristics. However, what the writer actually aims to praise are the front-line soldiers who shed their blood for the liberation of the Chinese nation, as well as their simple yet resilient spirit. Through the metaphorical use of the word "white poplar", the writer pays homage to the noble qualities and indomitable spirit displayed by these soldiers as they bravely fought for the country in the face of adversity.

### 5. Conclusions

Under the guidance of the framing theory proposed by Lakoff, this study first analyzes the surface frames and the corresponding activated deep frames in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays I*. First of all, compared with non-metaphorical words, metaphorical words are more prevalent in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays I*. The use of metaphorical words provides a better reflection of the values present in the essays. The corpus contains a total of 1080 metaphorical words. These words activate various metaphorical surface frames, conveying complex and abstract meanings that transcend their literal ones. Secondly, with the help of the Metaphor Identification Procedure, four main metaphorical surface frames are identified, totaling 835 metaphorical words. These frames consist of the people frame, nature frame, journey frame, and object frame. It is observed that words that efficiently reflect values are typically those closely related to the essays' themes. Taking *Tribute to the White Poplar* as an example, the most representative word reflecting values is the plant "white poplar" the writer praises. However, not all metaphorical words convey values. For example, within the journey frame, the metaphorical use of "flight" refers to the steps between two floors, lacking any useful value connotations in the

essays. Thirdly, the deep frames activated by the analyzed surface frames center around the pursuit of personal qualities, nostalgia for hometown and family, criticism of social reality, and the struggle for the country. The values depicted in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays I* focus on individuals, society and the country, exhibiting distinct characteristics of the time, especially highlighting the value of criticism of social reality. These values are prominently set against the backdrop of the country's situation at that time and still resonate with contemporary society, remaining of great significance in Chinese literature.

Although many scientific methods are adopted to develop the study, there are still some limitations. Firstly, despite the use of the MIP during the process of metaphor identification to ensure accuracy and objectivity, there may be omissions and misjudgments in the final results due to the author's knowledge and personal comprehension. The result cannot guarantee complete objectivity and it is inevitable to be affected by the author's thoughts to enhance the accuracy and objectiveness during the process of metaphorical identification and classification, as well as the analysis of the values implied in deep frames, it is necessary to check the results multiple times or invite more students or professionals to participate in the process. This approach will efficiently avoid the unreliability and subjectivity of the results. Secondly, the study only takes *Selected Modern Chinese Essays I* as the corpus, and several essays in it have not been analyzed due to the author's selection. Therefore, the research object may not be comprehensive enough and requires further improvement in the future. the corpus used in this study may not be comprehensive, thus potentially causing incompleteness. Therefore, scholars can further analyze another three books by Zhang Peiji to refine discourse strategies for the English translation of modern Chinese essays based on framing theory.

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### **Authors' contributions**

Kaifang Fan was responsible for study design and revising. Jingyue Shi was responsible for data collection. Jingyue Shi drafted the manuscript and Kaifang Fan revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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