

A Study on the Metaphor Translation Strategies in “Xi Jinping: The Governance of China”(Volume IV) from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor

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Received: October 2, 2024

Accepted: November 27, 2024

Online Published: February 24, 2025

doi:10.5539/ells.v15n1p70

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v15n1p70>

Abstract

As the core priority of political discourse translation, metaphor translation in “*Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*” (Volume IV) undoubtedly sets a paradigm, showcasing the unique role of metaphors in political communication. Drawing upon Lakoff’s theory, this study categorizes the metaphors in the book into structural, ontological, and orientational types, and identifies 16 metaphorical expressions with the aid of the Metaphor Identification Procedure(MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group. By combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, it employs Charteris-Black’s “Source Domain Resonance Value” theory to quantify the proportion of metaphorical keywords and their resonance values. Through case studies, this research delves into the translation strategies and techniques employed for metaphors in various mapping contexts, aiming to provide strategic guidance for practitioners in the field of political discourse translation. It seeks to enhance the professionalism and international communicative power of China’s political metaphor translation, thereby showcasing the unique charm and value of China’s voice in the global context.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, governance, translation strategies

1. Introduction

Metaphor research, a profound academic field, can be traced back to ancient Greece, with Aristotle being one of the earliest scholars to focus on the rhetorical function of metaphors (Feng, 2021). In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson co-authored “*Metaphors We Live By*,” creating a new conceptual metaphor theory that elevated metaphor research from the rhetorical level to new heights in cognitive science (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Subsequently, Lakoff made a significant breakthrough in theory and practice by conceptualizing the American political landscape in his work “*Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don’t*” (Lakoff, 1997). Semino further revealed that metaphor functions like a kaleidoscope in discourse, showing various forms and functions in different contexts, emphasizing its core status in political discourse (Semino, 2008). Thompson used the metaphor “politics without metaphor is like a fish without water” to vividly depict the indispensable role of metaphor in political communication (Thompson, 2018). In China, following Zhao Yanfang’s introduction and deep interpretation of “*Metaphors We Live By*” (Zhao, 1995), conceptual metaphor theory gained traction, with Lin Shuwu’s “*A Review of Foreign Metaphor Studies*” introducing foreign metaphor research theories from a cognitive perspective (Lin, 1997). Since then, Chinese scholars have made significant progress in the field of conceptual metaphor, particularly in the area of political discourse translation, which has garnered increasing academic interest.

The “*Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*” series, as an important vehicle for disseminating Xi Jinping’s thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, has been globally published in multiple languages and has become a key bridge for the international community to gain insights into contemporary China. In recent years, many scholars have explored the metaphor translation strategies in the “*Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*” series. For instance, Chen Guoxing and Jian Aili studied the English translation strategies of scientific metaphors based on a parallel corpus (Chen & Jian, 2019); Dong Juan and Wang Kaiwen focused on the translation methods related to the concept of ecological civilization (Dong & Wang, 2019); Zhao Jing analyzed the translation of titles from a case-based perspective (Zhao, 2020); Gong Yuhang examined metaphor

translation and cognitive mechanisms in the second volume based on the principle of thematic coherence (Gong, 2020). Furthermore, Zhang Lei conducted social cognition studies on the translation of political metaphors (Zhang, 2021), while Dou Zhi, Fan Ming, and Feng Xinyi proposed diverse translation strategies from a conceptual metaphor perspective for the second, first, and third volumes, respectively, summarizing over ten translation strategies (Dou, 2018; Fan, 2019; Feng, 2021). Xu Xinyuan later applied Sheng Dandan's four translation strategies to systematically review the conceptual metaphors in the fourth volume (Xu, 2023).

The "Xi Jinping: The Governance of China" series contains rich metaphorical content; however, research on its English translation strategies remains sparse. Existing literature is limited in quantity, lacks depth in metaphor-related content, and is often restricted to specific domains. Furthermore, it mostly follows traditional translation theories without systematic studies of conceptual metaphors, and the diversity of translation strategies is not well-established. This highlights the importance of conceptual metaphor translation methods and the research gap in this area. This paper aims to apply conceptual metaphor theory, combined with metaphor identification, to conduct a comparative analysis of the Chinese and English texts, summarizing the translation strategies for various types of metaphors. The goal is to enrich research on political text translation, promote the global dissemination of Chinese wisdom and voice, and enhance global understanding of China in the new era, fostering mutual cultural exchange between China and other civilizations.

2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

2.1 Definition of Conceptual Metaphor

The theory of conceptual metaphor was first proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their book "Metaphors We Live By," where they defined a conceptual metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This theory goes beyond language alone, delving into the conceptual structure of human thought. Its core elements include: metaphors acting as a bridge for cognition; being rooted in the conceptual system; facilitating systematic cross-domain mappings; following consistent logical patterns in the mapping process; and often operating unconsciously when applied in discourse.

2.2 Working Mechanism of Conceptual Metaphor

In terms of structure, metaphors involve mappings between two conceptual domains, referred to as the source domain and the target domain, with the relationship between the two referred to as mapping. The fundamental premise of this theory is that "metaphors map relatively concrete, physical source domains onto more abstract, less tangible target domains" (Baker & Saldanha, 2019).

2.3 Types of Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson, based on the different origins of the source domains, classified conceptual metaphors into three main types: structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, and orientational metaphors. Structural metaphors include common types such as journey, building, war, disease, family, machine, and weather. Ontological metaphors encompass types like human beings, plants, water, animals, objects, metals, and containers. Orientational metaphors, on the other hand, are those that deal with spatial orientation, like up-down, front-back, center-periphery, etc.

2.4 Metaphor Identification Method

This study uses the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), developed by the Pragglejaz Group, to systematically identify metaphorical expressions in the text. The steps for this procedure are as follows:

- 1) Read the text: Comprehend the overall meaning and context of the text.
- 2) Identify lexical units: Clearly delineate each lexical unit in the text.
- 3) Meaning comparison and analysis:
 - a) Contextual meaning determination: Accurately interpret the specific meaning of each lexical unit based on the context.
 - b) Basic meaning tracing: Investigate whether the lexical unit has a more basic meaning that transcends the context, which is usually more concrete, bodily-based, precise, and historically older.
 - c) Contrast and understanding evaluation: Determine whether there is a significant contrast between the contextual meaning and the basic meaning, and whether this contrast is easily understood by the reader.
- 4) Metaphorical judgment: If the above analysis confirms a notable contrast and ease of understanding, the lexical unit is marked as a metaphorical expression.

3. The Study of Metaphors in “Xi Jinping: The Governance of China” (Volume IV)

3.1 Source of the Corpus

“Xi Jinping: The Governance of China” (Volume IV) (referred to as Xi IV hereafter) includes 109 articles, including speeches, talks, addresses, instructions, and congratulatory messages delivered by Xi Jinping between February 3, 2020, and May 10, 2022. It consists of 21 topics. Xi IV vividly documents the great practice led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, with Xi Jinping at its core, in facing the unprecedented and intertwined challenges of a global pandemic and changes unseen in a century, as well as unprecedented risks and challenges. It records how they coordinated both domestic and international interests, managed pandemic prevention and economic development, balanced growth and security, and led the people to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects on Chinese soil. The book highlights the latest achievements of the sinicization of Marxism and fully demonstrates the CPC’s contributions to building a community with a shared future for mankind and a better world. It is an authoritative text reflecting Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

3.2 Metaphor Statistics in “Xi Jinping: The Governance of China” (Volume IV)

This paper applies Charteris-Black’s concept of Source Domain Resonance Value to calculate the distribution of conceptual metaphors in the corpus and measure the frequency of source domains appearing in the text (Charteris-Black, 2004). The resonance value of a source domain is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Source Domain Resonance Value} = \sum \text{Types of Keywords} \times \sum \text{Frequency of Occurrence}$$

Based on the metaphor identification procedure, a total of 16 types of conceptual metaphors were identified, with the major types of metaphors related to journey, building, human, and warfare. Using the resonance value calculation method, the distribution and proportion of metaphors in Xi IV are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. The distribution and proportion of metaphors in Xi IV

Metaphor Type	Conceptual Metaphor	\sum Types of Keywords	\sum Frequency of Occurrence	Source Domain Resonance Value	Percentage(%)	Total Proportion(%)
Structural	Journey	120	3,141	376,920	34.65	73.12
	Building	45	2,797	251,730	23.14	
	Warfare	97	1,543	149,671	13.76	
	Disease	43	159	6,837	0.69	
	Family	10	226	2,260	0.21	
	Machine	13	366	4,758	0.44	
	Weather	34	75	2,550	0.23	
Ontological	Human	127	1,616	205,232	18.87	26.68
	Other Objects	118	447	52,746	4.85	
	Container	18	1,029	18,522	1.70	
	Water	33	162	5,346	0.49	
	Metal	37	129	4,773	0.44	
	Plants	27	105	2,835	0.26	
	Animals	24	36	864	0.08	
Orientational	Up-Down	33	759	2,607	0.24	0.44
	Front-Back	11	194	2,134	0.20	

As shown in the table, structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors in the text decrease in proportion. Among all conceptual metaphors, journey metaphors make up the largest share at 34.65%, followed by building metaphors at 23.14%, human metaphors at 18.87%, and warfare metaphors at 13.76%. In contrast, animal metaphors (0.08%), family metaphors (0.21%), and weather metaphors (0.23%) have relatively low proportions. The following sections will analyze the mapping relationships of conceptual metaphors in both the Chinese and English versions of Xi IV and systematically summarize the translation strategies employed.

3.3 Study of Metaphor Translation Strategies in “Xi Jinping: The Governance of China” (Volume IV)

Due to differences in cognitive styles and thought associations, metaphorical mappings in the original text may present three types of relationships in the translated text: equivalent mappings, differing mappings, and completely different mappings.

Based on the 16 types of conceptual metaphors listed in Table 1, this study collected a total of 12,784 metaphorical instances. By comparing the Chinese and English versions, it summarizes the translation strategies for these metaphorical instances. It was found that Xi IV flexibly employs various metaphor translation methods. Specifically, when the source and target languages have equivalent mappings, literal translation is often used. When there are differences in the mapping relationships, addition, metonymy, and simile strategies are commonly applied. When the mapping relationships are completely different, demetaphorization and omission become effective translation techniques. Notably, literal translation and metonymy are dominant, accounting for 78.41% and 10.01%, respectively. The specific proportions are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. The specific proportions

Type Translation	Method	Number of Cases	Proportion(%)	Total Proportion(%)
Equivalent Mapping	Literal Translation	10,024	78.41	78.41
Differing Mapping	Metonymy	1,280	10.01	10.75
	Addition	78	0.61	
	Simile	16	0.13	
Completely Different Mapping	Demetaphorization	1,271	9.94	10.84
	Omission	115	0.90	

3.3.1 Equivalent Mapping Translation of Conceptual Metaphors

Equivalent mapping refers to a close correspondence between the source and target domains, rooted in similar cognitive structures and shared experiences of the world. This similarity allows metaphors to cross linguistic boundaries, conveying similar or even identical meanings and emotions. When comparing metaphorical expressions in Chinese and English, it was observed that when the mapping relationships remain consistent, translators tend to use literal translation. This choice aims to preserve the vivid imagery and unique effects of the original metaphor, enabling readers to directly experience the resonance and connection between metaphors in different cultures, thus promoting deeper intercultural communication and understanding.

Example 1:

Original Text: 我们经过北伐战争、土地革命战争、抗日战争、解放战争，以武装的革命反对武装的反革命，推翻帝国主义、封建主义、官僚资本主义三座大山，建立了人民当家作主的中华人民共和国，实现了民族独立、人民解放。

Translation: Through the Northern Expedition (1926–1928), the Agrarian Revolutionary War (1927–1937), the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931–1945), and the War of Liberation (1946–1950), we fought armed counter-revolution with armed revolution, toppling the three mountains of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism, and establishing the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which made the people masters of the country. We thus secured our nation’s independence and liberated our people.

In this example, the metaphor “三座大山” (three mountains) vividly uses the metaphorical concept “evil forces are mountains,” with the “three mountains” representing the abstract target domains of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism, which imposed heavy oppression on the Chinese people in the old society. The translator uses literal translation, rendering “三座大山” as “three mountains,” effectively conveying the deep meaning of the original text and reflecting the equivalent mapping relationship between the two languages. This not only highlights the arduous nature of the revolutionary tasks but also allows foreign readers to feel the weight and difficulty of the struggle, promoting cross-cultural understanding and resonance.

Example 2:

Original Text: 栽下梧桐树，引来金凤凰。

Translation: A tall and luxuriant Chinese parasol tree attracts golden phoenixes.

Example 2 uses the metaphorical concept “scarce talents are phoenixes.” In Chinese mythology, the phoenix is the king of birds, adorned with colorful feathers, and second only to the dragon, symbolizing good fortune and nobility. In the Chinese context, “金凤凰” (golden phoenixes) commonly refers to extraordinary talents. In English culture, the phoenix represents rebirth and immortality, also denoting outstanding individuals. Therefore, despite the different cultural backgrounds, the phoenix carries a similar profound meaning in both Chinese and English, symbolizing exceptional talent. Thus, literal translation of “金凤凰” as “golden phoenixes” accurately conveys the metaphor, establishing a precise connection between the cultural imagery of the two languages and

emphasizing the value of talent as a precious resource.

Example 3:

Original Text: 抗疫斗争伟大实践再次证明，中国共产党所具有的无比坚强的领导力，是风雨来袭时中国人民最可靠的主心骨。

Translation: The fight against Covid-19 has once again demonstrated that the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China is the pillar that the people can rely on when crisis strikes.

Example 3 constructs the metaphor “the Communist Party is the backbone of the people,” emphasizing the CPC’s central leadership role. Here, “主心骨” (backbone) metaphorically represents the force providing solid support and core guidance. This is equivalent to the English metaphor “pillar,” which signifies an essential support structure, indicating a crucial and reliable role. Since the mapping relationships are highly equivalent, the translator uses literal translation, rendering “主心骨” as “pillar,” accurately conveying the deep meaning and emotional tone of the original text. It further underscores the irreplaceable role of the CPC in leading the people through challenges, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.3.2 Translation of Conceptual Metaphors with Differing Mapping

Due to differences in cognitive patterns and associative thinking, the metaphorical mappings between the original text and the translated text can sometimes exhibit discrepancies. To ensure that the original metaphor’s essence and impact are accurately conveyed, translators often use strategies such as addition, metonymy, and simile. Addition enriches the cultural context by including supplementary information or explanations, allowing readers in the target language to more fully grasp the deeper meaning behind the metaphor. Metonymy identifies similar expressions in the target language to construct new metaphorical relationships, ensuring that the translation remains faithful to the original while adapting to the cultural and linguistic conventions of the target language. Simile, on the other hand, explicitly highlights the similarity between the source and target domains using words such as “like” or “as,” helping readers directly experience the beauty of the original metaphor.

Example 4:

Original Text: 我在中央财经委员会第九次会议上对“双碳”工作作了全面部署，强调要坚持全国统筹、节约优先、双轮驱动、内外畅通、防范风险的原则。

Translation: At the ninth meeting of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs, I outlined our agenda for realizing peak carbon and carbon neutrality and highlighted the principles that we should follow to coordinate efforts nationwide, prioritize conservation, give play to the role of both the government and the market, ensure smooth domestic and international supply, and prevent risks.

In Example 4, the metaphor “government and market are dual wheels” compares the dual wheels of a vehicle, which are essential for its movement, to the coordinated efforts of the government and the market in advancing the carbon neutrality agenda. Directly translating “双轮” (dual wheels) as “two wheels” may lead to confusion for readers, especially those unfamiliar with the metaphor’s deeper implications—particularly the central role of the government in market regulation.

Therefore, the translator employs addition, translating “双轮” as “both the government and the market.” This translation not only retains the metaphor’s vividness but also clarifies the specific entities represented by the “dual wheels,” allowing readers to better understand the interdependent roles of the government and the market in China’s economic system. This strategy facilitates a deeper understanding of China’s unique political and economic philosophies and demonstrates the translator’s skill in navigating cultural differences.

Example 5:

Original Text: 要防止社会阶层固化，畅通向上流动通道，给更多人创造致富机会，形成人人参与的发展环境，避免“内卷”、“躺平”。

Translation: The aim is to create an enabling environment in which everyone participates. We do not want a rat-race, nor do we want a society of layabouts.

The term “躺平” (lying flat) originates from the internet, representing a lifestyle embraced by some young people who reject high-pressure work environments, competition, and the pursuit of material wealth, in favor of inner peace and a simpler life. In Example 5, the metaphorical concept of “lying flat” as a refusal to compete excessively” is used. However, a literal translation of “lying flat” as “lying flat” in English would only communicate the physical act of lying down, losing its cultural significance and the metaphor’s underlying meaning.

Given the differing metaphorical mappings in the two languages, the translator opts for metonymy, rendering “躺平” as “layabouts,” a term that reflects a similar attitude of passivity in the target culture. This strategy preserves the metaphor’s essence and ensures the translated text is readable and understandable within the target language’s cultural framework. It also showcases the translator’s ability to adapt the metaphor to the cultural norms and expectations of the target audience.

Example 6:

Original Text: 35 年坚守太行山的“新愚公”李保国。

Translation: Li Baoguo, who dedicated himself to poverty alleviation in the Taihang Mountains for 35 years, like the “foolish old man in the ancient fable who conquered the mountains through his persistence.”

The original metaphor “new Yu Gong” refers to the “Yu Gong Removes the Mountains” fable, where Yu Gong, despite his old age, persistently attempted to move mountains, symbolizing perseverance and selflessness. In this case, Li Baoguo is likened to a modern-day Yu Gong for his dedication to poverty alleviation. If translated literally as “new Yu Gong,” this might obscure the cultural significance of the metaphor for an English-speaking audience unfamiliar with the fable.

Here, the translator uses simile, employing “like” to bridge the gap between cultures. By describing Li Baoguo “like the foolish old man in the ancient fable who conquered the mountains through his persistence,” the translator not only maintains the core metaphor but also provides the necessary context for readers unfamiliar with the story. This strategy ensures that the target audience can appreciate the metaphor’s meaning while keeping the cultural background intact.

3.3.3 Translation of Conceptual Metaphors with Completely Different Mappings

The completely different metaphorical mappings arise from significant differences in the attributes, characteristics, and associations between the source and target domains in two different languages or cultures. Some Chinese cultural metaphors are deeply rooted in the unique social and cultural context of the Chinese nation, which presents a significant challenge in translation. Directly translating such metaphors may result in comprehension difficulties due to cultural barriers, rendering the expression obscure. Hence, when dealing with these types of metaphors in Xi IV, translators often resort to demetaphorization or omission, which helps bridge the cultural gap, ensuring that the translation conveys the core meaning of the original while maintaining readability and accessibility for the target audience. This approach highlights the translator’s deep understanding of cultural differences and flexibility in overcoming translation challenges.

Example 7:

Original Text: 面对复杂形势、复杂矛盾、繁重任务，没有主次，不加区别，眉毛胡子一把抓，是做不好工作的。

Translation: When dealing with complex situations and difficult problems, or tasked with a demanding workload, no one will do well by trying to attend to major and minor issues at one and the same time.

In Example 7, the metaphor “事情轻重是眉毛胡子” originates from the Chinese idiom “眉毛胡子一把抓,” which vividly describes the attitude of addressing tasks without distinguishing their priority. The idiom comes from a literary work by Li Yingru and metaphorically conveys the notion of disorder in handling matters of different importance. However, in English, eyebrows and mustaches do not carry the same metaphorical meaning, highlighting the divergence in metaphorical mappings between Chinese and English.

Therefore, the translator wisely opts for demetaphorization, translating the original text as “attend to major and minor issues at one and the same time,” which conveys the core idea of dealing with matters indiscriminately without using the metaphorical form. This translation approach preserves the key message of prioritizing tasks while omitting the culturally specific metaphor, ensuring that the translation is both clear and understandable to the target audience.

Example 8:

Original Text: 任何相互掣肘，任何无端“甩锅”，都会贻误战机、干扰大局。

Translation: Hindering each other’s efforts or casting around for targets to blame only causes needless delay in our response and distracts us from the overall objective.

Example 8 includes the metaphor “推卸责任是甩锅” (passing the buck is like tossing the pot). In Chinese, “甩锅” and related expressions like “背黑锅” (shouldering the blame) and “背锅” (carrying the pot) vividly depict the act of shifting responsibility to others or looking for scapegoats. While “scapegoat” has a somewhat similar

function in English, the specific metaphor of the pot is not present in English cultural associations, showing a significant divergence in metaphorical mappings.

In this case, the translator wisely chooses demetaphorization, translating “甩锅” as “casting around for targets to blame.” This translation avoids the direct rendering of the pot metaphor while accurately conveying the concept of shirking responsibility. By sidestepping the specific cultural metaphor, the translator ensures the message remains clear and accessible without the need for additional cultural explanation, facilitating smooth cross-cultural communication.

Example 9:

Original Text: 我是“婆婆嘴”反复讲，今天还是要敲敲木鱼、念念紧箍咒。

Translation: I have repeated this too many times, but today I still need to remind you again.

Example 9 includes the metaphor “警醒是敲木鱼、念紧箍咒” (warning is like striking the wooden fish and reciting the incantation). In the original text, “木鱼” (wooden fish) is a ceremonial instrument used in Buddhist and Taoist rituals, symbolizing constant vigilance, as fish do not close their eyes. “紧箍咒” (tightening spell) comes from the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, where it represents the control over Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, through a magic spell used by the monk Tang Sanzang. Together, these metaphors form a vivid depiction of warnings and constraints. However, the symbolic meaning of the wooden fish and tightening spell is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and would be unfamiliar to an English-speaking audience.

Thus, the translator chooses omission, translating the phrase as “remind you again.” This approach removes the metaphorical expressions while still conveying the intended message of repeated warnings or reminders. By omitting the culturally specific metaphors, the translator enhances the readability of the translation, ensuring that the core idea is conveyed without requiring the target audience to grasp unfamiliar cultural references.

4. Conclusion

Conceptual metaphor translation plays a crucial role in political discourse. This paper takes “Xi Jinping: The Governance of China” (Volume IV) as a case study to analyze conceptual metaphors and their translation strategies, pointing out that the diversity of mapping relationships between languages is key to choosing appropriate translation strategies.

When mappings are equivalent, literal translation can preserve the imagery and style of the original text, achieving a high degree of metaphorical correspondence. When mappings differ, the use of addition, metonymy, and simile strategies is essential for overcoming cultural differences and accurately conveying the deeper meanings of metaphors. In cases of completely different mappings, demetaphorization and omission strategies prove valuable in removing cultural elements and directly conveying the core message, facilitating seamless cross-cultural communication and deep understanding.

By systematically summarizing the translation strategies and methods adopted by translators in three different mapping relationships, this paper aims to provide reference and guidance for translators engaged in political discourse translation, thereby improving the overall quality of metaphor translation in China’s political discourse. This effort not only strengthens China’s international communication power but also enriches the global discourse system with unique Chinese wisdom, promoting deep understanding and mutual respect between cultures. It contributes positively to building a more harmonious and inclusive global communication environment.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors’ contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

The 15th Graduate Education Innovation Fund Project of Wuhan University of Engineering, “Research on the English Translation Strategies of Metaphors in Volume Four of ‘Xi Jinping: The Governance of China’ from the Perspective of Metaphorical Concepts” (Project Number: CX2023514).

Competing interests

Not applicable.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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