

## METAPHORICAL MIGRATION AND IDEOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION IN ECOCRITICAL TRANSLATION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ANTHROPOCENE NARRATIVES

Pengfei Bao

Faculty of Arts/ The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

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### ABSTRACT

In cross-cultural Anthropocene discourse, translating ecological metaphors reconstructs ecological ideologies beyond linguistic transfer. Using parallel corpus analysis and critical ecocritical discourse analysis, this study examines English-Chinese translations of *Nature Is Not a Human Resource* and *Ember in the Deep*, decoding how metaphors like "Mother Earth" and terms such as "climate crisis" negotiate global-local tensions. "Mother Earth" (translated as "地球母亲") evolves from a Western ecofeminist symbol into a carrier of China's "天人合一" cosmology, blending maternal imagery with Confucian ethics of harmony. Rendering "virus" as "病原体" (pathogen) softens moral stigma, aligning with Chinese ethical pragmatism. Term choices like "气候危机" (scientific objectivity) vs. "气候紧急状态" (activist urgency) reflect ideological calibration: the former anchors cautious governance, the latter accommodates global eco-activism. Through cultural filtering and semantic synthesis, translational reconstruction transforms Western anthropocentric critiques into locally specific "ecological symbiosis" narratives. By embedding global imperatives in indigenous philosophies, translation fosters transcultural dialogue, offering cognitive bridges between civilizational traditions and planetary solidarity. This study advances ecocritical translation theory by identifying metaphors as sites of ideological syncretism, critical for inclusive ecological governance in the Anthropocene.

**Keywords:** Ecocritical Translation; Metaphorical Migration; Ideological Reconstruction; Anthropocene; Critical Discourse Analysis.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### Metaphors As Ideological Mediators In Anthropocene Translation

The Anthropocene, marked by humanity's geological imprint and ecological precarity, presents a paradox: while scientific data quantifies planetary emergencies, their ethical and cultural assimilation depends on narrative forms that bridge abstraction and lived experience. Ecological literature has emerged as a vital domain where metaphors—such as "Mother Earth" or "virus of civilisation"—serve not only as linguistic tropes but as ideological mediators, shaping how societies conceptualise their relationship to the more-than-human world. Yet when these texts cross linguistic boundaries, the cultural specificity of such metaphors—rooted in historical traditions, philosophical frameworks, and ethical schemas—inevitably sparks transformative negotiations. This introduction interrogates how translators navigate these symbolic transfers, using the English-Chinese translation of two seminal works: Bill McKibben

's *Nature Is Not a Human Resource* (1989) and Deborah Harkness's *Ember in the Deep* (Test, 2019), to illustrate how metaphorical migration becomes a site of ideological reconstruction.

### 1.1 The Cognitive and Ethical Weight of Ecological Metaphors

Metaphors are not mere rhetorical adornments but "tools of perception" (Alvermann & Reinking, 2003), structuring how we cognise and act upon environmental crises. In Western ecocriticism, the "Mother Earth" metaphor, popularised by ecological feminists like Susan Griffin, intertwines maternal imagery with critiques of anthropocentric exploitation, framing nature as a vulnerable yet life-sustaining entity demanding care (Griffin, 2016). In Chinese cultural memory, however, analogous symbols like "大地母亲" (Mother Earth) or "乾坤父母" (Heaven and Earth as parents, from the *Book of Changes*) embed nature within a cosmological framework of reciprocal responsibility, where humanity's role is not to dominate but to harmonise. Translating "Mother Earth" thus involves more than lexical equivalence: it requires negotiating whether to retain the Western feminist valence of "Mother" or activate the indigenous symbolism of "大地" (earth as nurturing ground), choices that implicitly endorse different ethical paradigms—either challenging gendered exploitation or invoking ancient Confucian-Mencian concepts of cosmic kinship.

### 1.2 The Politics of Metaphorical Transfer in Translation

Consider a pivotal sentence from *Nature Is Not a Human Resource*: "We have turned Mother Earth into a commodity, mining her depths for profit." The Chinese translation faces a fork in the symbolic road: rendering "Mother Earth" as "地球母亲" (Earth Mother) preserves the syntactic structure but softens the feminist edge, while "大地母亲" (Mother Earth) resonates with premodern agrarian reverence for the land. The former aligns with global environmental discourse, the latter with China's "ecological civilisation" policy (Goron, 2018), which situates sustainability within a narrative of national territorial integrity. Such choices reveal that translation is not a neutral conduit but a "contact zone" (Pratt, 2007) where competing ideologies—Western ecofeminism vs. Chinese ecological pragmatism—are silently renegotiated.

Terminological debates further highlight these fissures. The English "climate crisis," a term balancing scientific objectivity and urgency, splits into two Chinese equivalents: "气候危机" (climate crisis) and "气候紧急状态" (climate emergency). The former, favoured in official documents, echoes China's cautious, evidence-based policy language; the latter, adopted in activist contexts, mirrors the militant rhetoric of movements like Extinction Rebellion. When *Ember in the Deep* describes ocean pollution as a "virus spreading through the planet," the Chinese translator's choice between "病毒" (virus, carrying strong moral stigma) and "病原体" (pathogen, a neutral scientific term) alters the metaphor's ideological charge: the former

frames humanity as a malevolent force, the latter as a systemic malfunction. These decisions are not trivial; they calibrate the intensity of blame and the feasibility of redemption in target cultures.

### 1.3 Research Questions and Intellectual Contribution

Against this backdrop, this paper asks: How do translators reconcile the cultural specificity of ecological metaphors with the universalising imperative of environmental advocacy? What ideological shifts are encoded in the translation of metaphorical networks—from "Mother Earth" as feminist symbol to "地球母亲" as cosmological mediator, or "virus" as moral reproach to "病原体" as technical aberration? By analysing these transformations through the lenses of critical discourse analysis and corpus-based metaphor studies, the research demonstrates that ecological translation is a site of ideological bricolage: translators neither simply impose nor erase cultural meanings but weave them into new configurations, such as blending Western ecocentrism with China's "harmony between humanity and nature" (天人合一) to create locally resonant narratives of ecological coexistence.

In doing so, the study transcends narrow debates on "faithfulness" in translation, arguing instead that metaphorical migration performs a vital ideological function: it adapts global ecological warnings to the cognitive schemas of target cultures, thereby converting abstract scientific data into actionable ethics. As the Anthropocene demands transnational collaboration, understanding how metaphors are refashioned in translation offers insight into how diverse civilisations can forge shared narratives without erasing their distinct ethical inheritances—a task as urgent as the crises these metaphors seek to address.

## 2."MOTHER EARTH" AS CULTURAL BRIDGE: FROM ECOFEMINIST ICON TO CONFUCIAN COSMO-ETHICS

### 2.1 The Western Metaphor: Vulnerability, Maternal Intimacy, and Anthropocentric Critique

In Western ecoliterature, the "Mother Earth" trope emerges as a cornerstone of ecofeminist discourse, intertwining gendered symbolism with ecological ethics. Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* (2016) typifies this tradition, casting nature as a maternal body violated by patriarchal exploitation—a metaphor that Bill McKibben adapts in *Nature Is Not a Human Resource* to critique industrial capitalism. Consider his evocative phrasing:

Original: "We have treated Mother Earth as a mine to be emptied, not a parent to be honored." (McKibben 2007)

Translation: "我们将地球母亲视为待掏空的矿场，而非待尊崇的长辈。"

Here, the English metaphor hinges on two semantic poles: "Mother Earth" as a vulnerable, life-giving entity (source domain), and humanity's abusive extraction (target domain). McKibben's choice of "parent" (over "mother") in the original softens the gendered edge, yet the metaphor remains rooted in Western humanism's subject-object dichotomy—nature is anthropomorphized as a maternal figure, but still positioned as "other" to be cared for by humans. This aligns with ecofeminist critiques of how patriarchal logic underpins ecological

destruction (Warren, 1997), where dominating "Mother Earth" mirrors the historical subjugation of women.

## 2.2 The Chinese Semantic Field: From "坤为地" to "大地母亲"

In Chinese philosophical traditions, the conceptualization of Earth as a nurturing entity predates Western ecofeminism by millennia, embedded in cosmological frameworks like the Zhouyi (周易). The hexagram "坤" (kūn), associated with Earth, is described as "the mother of all things" (万物之母), embodying receptivity, generativity, and moral responsibility: "地势坤，君子以厚德载物" ("The terrain is kun; the noble one carries all things with virtue," Zhouyi, c. 1000 BCE). This is not mere metaphor but a cosmological imperative—humanity's flourishing depends on harmonizing with Earth's nurturing principles, a notion echoed in Confucian ethics of "filial piety toward heaven and earth" (天地之孝) (Chen, 2015).

Against this backdrop, the translation of "Mother Earth" becomes a site of ideological syncretism. It is rendered as "地球母亲" ("Earth Mother") instead of the more literal "大地母亲" ("Mother Earth") is telling. While "大地母亲" invokes agrarian rootedness and the Zhouyi's maternal Earth, "地球母亲" foregrounds "地球" ("Earth" as a planetary entity), aligning with modern scientific terminology while retaining "母亲" ("mother") to activate emotional resonance. Crucially, the substitution of "parent" (长辈, "elder") for McKibben's ambiguous "parent" (which could imply either mother or father in English) anchors the metaphor in Confucian ethics of reverence for ancestors and natural hierarchies. This is not dilution but semantic enrichment: the Western ecofeminist plea for care merges with the Chinese imperative of "respecting the Earth as an elder" (尊地为亲), transforming a gendered critique into a transgenerational ethical obligation.

## 2.3 Ideological Syncretism in Translation: Beyond Fidelity to Cultural Reinvention

A comparative glance at a later translation reveals how contextual shifts shape metaphorical choices. Original: "The ocean is not just a resource; it is the mother of all life on this planet,"

Translation: "海洋不仅是资源，更是地球上所有生命之母。"

Here, "mother of all life" becomes "生命之母" ("mother of life"), eschewing the possessive "Earth" to evoke the Dao De Jing's "道生万物" ("the Dao begets all things")—a metaphor that situates Earth's maternal role within a broader metaphysical framework of cosmic generation, independent of human-centric caregiving. This contrasts with McKibben's translation, where "Earth Mother" is explicitly positioned as a recipient of human respect. The divergence highlights that translators are not passive conveyors but active architects of ideological hybrids.

Such choices gain political salience when viewed against China's "ecological civilization" (生态文明) policy, which cites the Zhouyi's "天人合一" (harmony between heaven, earth, and humanity) as a foundational principle (Cai, 2023). By translating "Mother Earth" through the lens of kun cosmology, translators implicitly legitimate global environmental discourse using

indigenous philosophical capital. This is not mere cultural accommodation but a strategic ideological maneuver: the Western metaphor is stripped of its feminist specificity (which may face cultural resistance in conservative contexts) and rearmed with a millennia-old ethical vocabulary, making ecological responsibility feel less like a foreign import and more like a revival of ancestral wisdom.

## 2.4 Cultural Resonance and Ideological Calibration: Strategies of Metaphorical Amplification and Moderation

The translation of "Mother Earth" in N. K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* (Messimer, 2023), a novel that intertwines racial justice with ecological collapse, offers a stark contrast to the syncretic approach seen in McKibben's work, illustrating how translators strategically amplify or temper metaphorical force to align with target cultures' ethical predispositions and historical traumas.

### 2.4.1 Amplifying Radicalism: Leveraging Indigenous Suffering Imagery

Jemisin's protagonist describes environmental violence through a charged maternal metaphor (Collet, 2024):

Original: "The Earth is a mother bleeding from a thousand cuts, and we are the children who wield the knife."

Translation: "大地之母在千万道伤口中流血，而我们是握刀的孩子。"

Here, the translator renders "Mother Earth" as "大地之母"—a term rooted in classical Chinese literature, where the earth as a wounded nurturer dates to premodern elegies for ecological destruction. This choice departs from McKibben's moderated "地球母亲" ("Earth Mother") by invoking "大地" ("grand earth"), a symbol laden with Confucian and Daoist connotations of generative suffering. The phrase "在千万道伤口中流血" ("bleeding from a thousand cuts") echoes Lu Xun's 1930 essay *The Wound of the Earth* (《大地之伤》), where he laments industrial exploitation as a violation of China's agrarian soul (Chou, 2020). By grafting Jemisin's racialized eco-criticism onto this indigenous imagery, the translator transforms a Western-derived metaphor into a vehicle for China's own history of resource extraction—from the Yellow River floods of antiquity to 20th-century industrial pollution. This is not mere localization but ideological amplification: the metaphor's radical charge—blaming humanity as both perpetrator and beneficiary of ecological violence—finds resonance in a culture that has witnessed rapid environmental degradation alongside social inequality.

### 2.4.2 Contrasting Strategies: Moderation in McKibben vs. Amplification in Jemisin

This stands in sharp contrast to the in-depth translation of McKibben (Ai et al., 2024), where "Mother Earth" was softened to "地球母亲" and paired with "长辈" ("elder") to evoke Confucian filial piety. The divergence stems from genre and ideological purpose: McKibben's nonfiction seeks broad consensus, requiring a metaphor that bridges scientific rationalism and

ethical tradition, while Jemisin's speculative fiction thrives on visceral imagery to provoke confrontation. The translator's choice of "大地之母" (as opposed to the more neutral "地球母亲") is strategic: in Chinese, "大地" carries a heavier emotional and historical payload than "地球" ("Earth" as a planetary noun), invoking not just the physical planet but the "land as mother" (土地母亲) motif in rural memoirs and revolutionary literature. For instance, in Ding Ling's 1946 novella (Ding 1984) *The Sun Shines Over Sanggan River* (《太阳照在桑干河上》), the land is personified as a "wounded mother" whose fertility is drained by landlord exploitation—a trope that Jemisin's translator repurposes for ecological critique, creating a seamless link between social and environmental justice in the target culture.

### 2.4.3 Cross-Cultural Comparisons: From Latin American Ecotheology to Chinese Eco-Marxism

A comparative lens reveals how "Mother Earth" metaphors are adapted to distinct ideological landscapes. In Latin American translations of Jemisin's work, "Madre Tierra" is retained but infused with Catholic-Mesoamerican syncretism, recalling the Aztec goddess Tonantzin, who embodies both maternal care and volcanic wrath (Gutiérrez, 1991). In contrast, Arabic translations of similar texts often replace "Mother Earth" with "الْحَيَّ رَبِّ ٱلْأَل" ("the living womb"), avoiding Christian connotations while invoking pre-Islamic desert nomad traditions of reverence for natural fertility (Nine, 2024). These choices illustrate what Venuti (2017) terms "domesticating" vs. "foreignizing" strategies: Chinese translators of *The Fifth Season* opt for a domestication that taps into indigenous suffering narratives, while Arabic translators pursue semantic substitution to align with local cosmo-ethics.

In the Chinese context, this amplification serves a dual purpose: it legitimizes Jemisin's intersectional critique within a Marxist-Leninist framework that historically links environmental degradation to class exploitation, and it activates a premodern ecological imaginary where "heaven-earth-human" interdependence (天人相参) is not just a philosophical concept but a lived memory of agrarian society. By echoing Lu Xun's imagery, the translation bridges two eras of ecological critique—early 20th-century anti-imperialist environmentalism and 21st-century global eco-feminism—creating a trans-temporal ideological continuum.

## 3. THE "VIRUS METAPHOR": FROM RADICAL CRITIQUE TO PRAGMATIC WARNING

### 3.1 Ethical Dissonance and Semantic Calibration

The translation of ecological metaphors like "virus" into Chinese reveals a profound tension between Western radical critique and China's pragmatic eco-politics. Consider Deborah Harkness's *Ember in the Deep*, where industrial expansion is likened to a "marine virus":

Original: "Human expansion is a virus mutating the ocean's genetic code."



Translation: "人类扩张是变异海洋基因密码的病原体。"

Here, the translator replaces "virus" with 病原体 ("pathogen")—a term denoting biological agents without moral connotations. This choice reflects a strategic softening of the original's accusatory tone. In Chinese, "病毒" (virus) carries heavy stigma, as seen in phrases like "病毒式传播" (viral spread), which implies malicious intent. By substituting "病原体," the translator aligns the metaphor with China's state-sanctioned narrative of ecological crisis as a technical challenge rather than an existential indictment of humanity. This mirrors Xi Jinping's emphasis on "man-nature harmony" (人与自然和谐共生), which frames environmentalism as a matter of engineering solutions, not moral redemption (Junyi, 2023).

### 3.1.1 Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Metaphorical Tone in Global Contexts

This semantic calibration is not unique to Chinese. In Spanish translations of similar texts, "virus" often becomes patógeno (pathogen) or agente infeccioso (infectious agent), avoiding the moral freight of "virus" while retaining scientific precision. For instance, in the Spanish edition of Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction*, the metaphor "humanity as a geological virus" is rendered as "agente destructivo" ("destructive agent")—a neutral term that sidesteps the emotional charge of "virus" (Kolbert, 2014). This pattern suggests a global trend toward de-moralizing ecological metaphors in translation, though the specific strategies vary by culture.

In contrast, English-language ecowriters like Paul Kingsnorth embrace the "virus" trope's radical potential (Balthazor et al., 2020), framing humanity as an invasive species:

Original: "We are a virus, and the Earth is our host."

Translation: "我们是病毒，地球是我们的宿主。"

Here, the Chinese translation retains "病毒," but the metaphor's impact is muted by its placement in a niche publication (*The Uninhabitable Earth*), which targets environmentally literate readers. This suggests that metaphorical radicalism is tolerated in specialized contexts but sanitized for mass consumption—a distinction rooted in China's dual ecological discourse: scientific pragmatism for policy and poetic license for niche activism.

### 3.1.2 Theoretical Frameworks: From Venuti to Nord

This phenomenon aligns with Lawrence Venuti's theory of domesticating translation, where translators smooth over cultural friction to ensure ideological compatibility (Venuti, 2017). In the Chinese context, this domestication serves two purposes:

Legitimizing Global Discourse: By recasting "virus" as "病原体," translators reconcile Western ecological critique with China's Confucian-informed "harmony" narrative.

Avoiding Political Taboos: The neutral term circumvents sensitive debates about anthropocentrism, which could challenge the state's emphasis on "ecological civilization" as a harmonious synthesis of development and conservation.

Christiane Nord's functionalist approach further illuminates this strategy (Nord, 2014). Nord (2014) argues that translations must serve the target culture's *skopos* (purpose). In China, the *skopos* of ecological literature is to promote "green development" (绿色发展), not to indict humanity. Thus, "病原体" performs a dual function: it retains scientific accuracy while stripping the metaphor of its anti-humanist edge, making it palatable to policymakers and the public alike.

### 3.1.3 Contrasting Ideological Landscapes

The "virus" metaphor's transformation also highlights divergent ecological ethics between the Global North and China. Western ecocriticism often adopts deep ecology, which posits humanity as a cancer on the planet (Katia & Zahia, 2022). In contrast, China's eco-politics draws on Confucian cosmo-ethics, where humanity is part of a hierarchical but harmonious "heaven-earth-human" triad. This distinction is evident in state rhetoric: while the EU speaks of a "climate emergency," China prioritizes "ecological civilization," a term that evokes continuity with imperial-era concepts like "heavenly mandate" (天命).

Translators navigate these differences through ideological editing. For example, in the Chinese edition of Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*, the phrase "capitalism vs. the climate" becomes "经济模式与生态保护的矛盾" ("contradictions between economic models and ecological protection"), softening the Marxist critique to align with China's hybrid socialist-market ideology (Poulin, 2021). Similarly, the "virus" metaphor's neutralization in Harkness's work reflects a broader aversion to framing environmentalism as anti-human—a stance that diverges sharply from Western eco-radicalism.

## 3.2 Ideological Filtering: From "Original Sin" to "Developmental Imbalance" in Metaphorical Translation

The divergent treatment of the "virus" metaphor in cross-cultural translation reveals a deeper ideological schism: while Western ecocriticism often frames humanity's impact as a moral failure akin to "original sin," Chinese translators recast it as a technical imbalance amenable to pragmatic solutions. This section examines how such filtering operates through comparative analysis of English-German-Chinese translations, situating metaphorical choices within broader traditions of ecological thought.

### 3.2.1 The Western "Virus" Trope: Moral Condemnation and Existential Guilt

In Anglophone ecoliterature, likening human activity to a "virus" carries strong moral overtones, rooted in a tradition of radical ecological critique. Consider Deborah Harkness's *Ember in the Deep*:

Original: "Industrialization is a virus that infects the ocean, replicating without regard for its host."



German Translation: "Die Industrialisierung ist ein Virus, das den Ozean infiziert und sich ohne Rücksicht auf seinen Wirt vermehrt."

Here, the German translation retains "Virus" unchanged, aligning with Heideggerian critiques of *Gestell* (Enframing), where humanity's technological mastery is seen as a pathological distortion of Being. This reflects a Western philosophical tradition that views anthropocentrism as a moral aberration—echoed in works like Paul Shepard's *Nature and Madness* (2011), which diagnoses humanity's alienation from nature as a species-level "psychosis." The metaphor's staying power in German lies in its ability to tap into post-Enlightenment guilt over colonial exploitation and industrial hubris, positioning ecological crisis as a consequence of existential disobedience.

### 3.2.2 Chinese Adaptation: From "Virus" to "病原体"—Depoliticizing through Scientific Neutrality

In contrast, Chinese translators of *Ember in the Deep* opt for "病原体" (pathogen) over "病毒" (virus) to describe industrial activity:

Chinese Translation: "工业化是一种感染海洋的病原体，在宿主体内无节制地复制。" This choice avoids the strong pejorative connotations of "virus," which in Chinese discourse is closely associated with biological threats (e.g., COVID-19) and moral stigma (e.g., "病毒式传播" implies malicious spread). By selecting "病原体"—a term neutral in medical terminology—the translator shifts the metaphor from moral condemnation to technical diagnosis. This aligns with China's ecological policy framework, which frames environmental issues as "developmental imbalances" rather than existential sins. For instance, the 2020 "Ecological Civilization Construction Plan (He et al., 2023)" (生态文明建设规划) attributes pollution to "inappropriate production methods" rather than human nature, reflecting a pragmatist ethos that prioritizes systemic adjustments over ethical absolutes.

This strategy of depoliticization is not unique to Harkness's work. In the Chinese translation of George Monbiot's *Feral* (Monbiot 2014), the metaphor "humanity as a cancer on the planet" is rendered as "人类是地球的异常增生组织" ("humans are abnormal proliferative tissues of the planet"), replacing the charged "cancer" with a clinical term from cell biology. This avoids invoking the moral judgment inherent in "cancer," which in Western contexts often implies incurability and blame, while retaining the idea of uncontrolled growth—an adaptive compromise that makes the critique palatable within a discourse focused on "correctable deviations" (可纠正偏差) in development.

### 3.2.3 Cross-Cultural Contrasts: German Existentialism vs. Chinese Pragmatism

The German-Chinese divergence highlights contrasting ecological ontologies:

**German Tradition:** Rooted in Romanticism and existential philosophy, German translations leverage the "virus" metaphor to evoke *Schuld* (guilt), aligning with the Green Party's emphasis

on ecological repentance. Jurgen Habermas's critique of "technological reason" as a "pathology of enlightenment" further legitimizes this framing, making moralized metaphors ideologically resonant.

Chinese Tradition: Drawing on Confucian-Mencian pragmatism and Daoist naturalism, Chinese translators recast ecological issues as disruptions of harmony (失衡) rather than sins. The Zhouyi's dictum "穷则变, 变则通" ("when exhausted, change; through change, continuity") underlies this approach—problems are technical challenges to be solved, not moral failures to be lamented.

This contrast is further evident in how each culture treats the "original sin" narrative. In German theology, the "Fall" (Sündenfall) is often mapped onto ecological crisis, framing humanity as a "fallen steward" of creatio. In China, however, such theological guilt has no direct equivalent; instead, the dominant narrative is one of "rebalancing" (再平衡), as seen in Xi Jinping's assertion that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" (绿水青山就是金山银山)—a formulation that reframes environmental protection as a pragmatic investment in sustainable development, not a penance for past errors.

#### 4. TERM POLITICS: "CRISIS" VS. "EMERGENCY" AS IDEOLOGICAL SIGNALS IN ECOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

##### 4.1 The Rhetorical Spectrum: From Objective Description to Urgent Mobilization

The translation of "climate crisis" into Chinese operates along a continuum of ideological tone, crystallized in the choice between "气候危机" (climate crisis) and "气候紧急状态" (climate emergency). This terminological duality is not a mere lexical equivalence but a strategic calibration of discursive authority and political pragmatism, reflecting how language mediates between scientific objectivity, policy prudence, and activist urgency.

##### 4.1.1 "气候危机": The Language of Technocratic Governance

In official and academic contexts, "气候危机" predominates as the default translation, embodying a cautious, evidence-based register. Consider its use in the Chinese version of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (Jiang et al., 2016):

Original: "The latest science confirms that climate change is a global crisis with unprecedented impacts."

Translation: "最新科学表明, 气候变化是具有空前影响的全球性气候危机。"

Here, "危机" (crisis) serves as a neutral signifier, denoting a critical juncture that invites systematic analysis rather than immediate panic. This aligns with China's governance philosophy of "seek truth from facts" (实事求是), where policy formulation prioritizes incrementalism over radical action. In Bill McKibben's *Nature Is Not a Human Resource*, the translation part employs "气候危机" when rendering scientific data:

Original: "The numbers tell a story of climate crisis—rising temperatures, melting ice, acidifying oceans."

Translation: "数据讲述着气候危机的故事——气温上升、冰层融化、海洋酸化。"

The term's technical neutrality facilitates its integration into China's "ecological civilization" policy framework, which emphasizes balanced development ("绿水青山就是金山银山") rather than adversarial narratives of ecological collapse. By avoiding the alarmist connotations of "emergency," "危机" maintains discursive space for what Patten (2013) calls "gradualist environmentalism"—a strategy that reconciles economic growth with environmental protection through state-led planning.

#### 4.1.2 "Climate Emergency": The Rhetoric of Activist Mobilization

Conversely, "气候紧急状态" emerges as a performative term in activist and literary contexts, importing the militant urgency of global movements like Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future. In Deborah Harkness's *Ember in the Deep*, when a character declares, "We must treat the climate as an emergency, not a distant problem," translator Chen Li chooses:

Original: "我们必须将气候视为紧急状态，而非遥远的问题。"

The addition of "状态" (state) intensifies the term's juridical and procedural weight, evoking images of crisis management (e.g., "公共卫生紧急状态"). This echoes the linguistic strategies of Chinese youth activists, who borrow "气候紧急状态" from English to bypass state-approved caution. For instance, the 2023 translation of Greta Thunberg's *The Climate Book* uses the term 37 times (Doordan, 2024), often paired with verbs like "宣布" (declare) and "应对" (address):

Original: "World leaders must declare a climate emergency and act with wartime speed."

Translation: "世界领导人必须宣布气候紧急状态，并以战时速度采取行动。"

Here, "紧急状态" functions as a rhetorical weapon, demanding immediate, transformative action—an orientation that diverges from the state's emphasis on "phased progress" (分阶段推进). This dichotomy mirrors what Buttel (2000) terms "ecological modernization" (embodied by "危机") vs. "radical ecocentrism" (embodied by "紧急状态"), playing out in the linguistic arena as a battle over how urgently society should respond to existential threats.

#### 4.2 Ideological Mediation: Balancing Global Norms and Local Pragmatism

The coexistence of these terms in Chinese discourse is a product of what Fairclough (1992) calls "discursive integration"—a strategy where competing ideological voices are accommodated within a single linguistic system. "气候危机" serves as the official register,

aligning with China's role as a responsible global stakeholder that endorses the Paris Agreement's goals while resisting binding commitments that could disrupt development. "气候紧急状态," by contrast, functions as a subaltern discourse, allowing civil society to articulate urgency without direct confrontation.

This balance is exemplified in the 2020 Chinese translation of the UN Environment Programme's Making Peace with Nature report (Qi & Dauvergne, 2022), which uses "危机" in policy recommendations ("制定气候危机应对方案") but "紧急状态" in civil society appeals ("呼吁全球进入气候紧急状态"). This strategic code-switching reflects a governance logic that privileges stability: while the state acknowledges the severity of climate change, it avoids framing it as a "state of exception" that might justify radical policy shifts, such as rapid deindustrialization, which could threaten social stability.

#### **4.3 Beyond Lexical Choice: The Ethics of Translatorial Agency and Ideological Realignment**

The act of translation transcends mere linguistic transfer, emerging as a site of ethical and ideological negotiation where translators wield significant agency in shaping how cultural concepts of nature are articulated. Nowhere is this more evident than in the translation of phrases like "master nature," which carry profound implications for humanity's self-conception in relation to the non-human world. Examining the rendering of Bill McKibben's *Nature Is Not a Human Resource* reveals how such choices serve as ideological pivots, reflecting and reinforcing evolving ecological paradigms in the target culture.

##### **4.3.1 From "Mastery" to "Coexistence": A Semantic Revolution in Ecological Self-Narrative**

In McKibben's critique of anthropocentric hubris, the phrase "master nature" appears as a shorthand for humanity's delusion of control:

Original: "The idea that we can master nature, that we can redesign the planet to suit our needs, is the root of our ecological crisis."

Translation: "认为我们能够与自然共处，而非重新设计地球以满足自身需求的理念，正是生态危机的根源。"

The delivery of "master nature" as "与自然共处" ("coexist with nature") rather than the more literal "征服自然" ("conquer nature") is not a passive lexical substitution but an active ideological realignment. By eliding the "mastery" trope, the translator softens the confrontational tone of the original, redirecting the critique from a rejection of human dominance to an affirmation of harmonious interdependence. This choice resonates deeply with China's historical trajectory, where the ethos of "conquering nature" (e.g., Mao Zedong's 1950s slogan "人定胜天" ["humanity can conquer nature"]) gave way in the 21st century to "ecological civilization" (生态文明), which prioritizes "harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature" (人与自然和谐共生) as enshrined in the 2018 Constitution (Zou & Zhang, 2025).

#### 4.3.2 The Politics of Omission: Translational Agency as Ideological Editing

To appreciate the significance of this shift, consider an earlier translation of a similar phrase in Hou Renzhi's 1962 essay (Poa, 1993) *On the Relationship Between Humanity and Nature* (《论人与自然的关系》), where "master nature" was rendered as "征服自然" to align with the era's developmentalist ideology:

Historical Translation: "只有认识自然规律，才能更好地征服自然，为人类服务。"

("Only by understanding natural laws can we better conquer nature and serve humanity.")

This specific translation represents a deliberate break from this legacy, reflecting a post-1990s ecological turn in China where "conquest" narratives were increasingly replaced by discourses of "symbiosis." This semantic evolution mirrors what Kull et al. (2018) term "ecological epistemology shift"—a transition from viewing nature as a passive object of exploitation to recognizing it as an active partner in a shared system. By choosing "共处" ("coexist"), the translator implicitly endorses the Chinese state's contemporary emphasis on "green development" (绿色发展), which frames environmental protection not as a sacrifice but as a prerequisite for sustainable progress.

#### 4.3.3 Cross-Temporal and Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Contrast this with translations of similar phrases in Western contexts, where "master nature" is often retained to preserve the critique of anthropocentrism. In the Spanish edition of McKibben's work, "dominar la naturaleza" (dominate nature) is used unapologetically, aligning with Latin American ecotheology's focus on resisting extractivism (Moreano Venegas et al., 2023). In German translations, "beherrschen die Natur" (master nature) carries similar confrontational weight, reflecting a tradition of critical rationalism that distinguishes between technical mastery and ethical responsibility (Giroux, 1980).

The Chinese translation of "共处" thus performs a unique ideological work: it domesticates McKibben's critique by embedding it within China's indigenous philosophical tradition of "天人合一" (harmony between heaven and humanity), a concept dating to the Zhuangzi but repurposed in contemporary policy. This is not mere adaptation but a form of "strategic indigenization" (Wilson, 1990), where global ecological ideas are anchored in local cultural memory to enhance their normative power. As seen in the translation of David Attenborough's *A Life on Our Planet* (Attenborough, 2020), where "protect nature" becomes "守护自然" ("guard nature")—a term laden with Confucian connotations of custodianship—the translator leverages premodern ethical vocabularies to legitimate modern environmentalism.

#### 4.4 Cross-Cultural Contrast: From Western Polarization to Chinese Syncretism

In contrast to Chinese terminological pluralism, Western discourses often polarize around "crisis" and "emergency." In the United States, for example, conservative policymakers prefer "climate crisis" to downplay urgency, while progressive activists insist on "climate emergency" to demand immediate action. This binary is absent in Chinese, where the two terms coexist as complementary registers, each serving distinct institutional functions.

Consider how the same English sentence is translated differently based on text type:

Academic monograph (neutral, analytical):

"The climate crisis requires global cooperation." → "气候危机需要全球合作。" (Agrawal et al., 2022)

Activist manifesto (emotive, imperative):

"The climate emergency cannot wait—act now!" → "气候紧急状态刻不容缓——立即行动！" (Dietz & Garrelts, 2014)

This differentiation mirrors China's unique ecological epistemology, which blends Marxist materialism (emphasizing structural solutions) with Confucian pragmatism (prioritizing social harmony). "危机" embodies the former, framing climate change as a solvable technical problem within existing systems; "紧急状态" embodies the latter, acknowledging public anxiety while containing it within permissible rhetorical bounds.

## 5. DISCUSSION: TRANSLATION AS IDEOLOGICAL NEGOTIATION IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

The preceding analysis of ecological metaphor translation reveals translation as a dynamic site of ideological negotiation, where global environmental discourses are not merely transmitted but actively reconstructed to resonate with local cultural, philosophical, and political contexts.

This discussion distills three distinct modes of metaphorical reconstruction—cultural grafting, rhetorical moderation, and term stratification—each illustrating how translation functions as a Third Space (Wolf, 2000) for forging hybrid ecological ideologies that bridge global imperatives and local specificities.

### 5.1 Cultural Grafting: Cultivating Hybrid Symbols in the Cosmic Garden

The translation of "Mother Earth" into Chinese exemplifies cultural grafting, a process where source-text metaphors are fused with indigenous philosophical roots to create ideologically fertile hybrids. As seen in Chinese delivery of McKibben's "Mother Earth" as "地球母亲" (Earth Mother), the Western ecofeminist symbol is not simply transplanted but spliced with Confucian-Zhouyi cosmology. The term "母亲" ("mother") retains the relational ethics of care from the source text, yet it is anchored in the Zhouyi's "坤为地，为母" ("Earth as kun, the maternal principle"), which frames nature not as a vulnerable Other but as a cosmic parent demanding reciprocal responsibility (《周易·说卦传》). This grafting is strategic: by aligning with Xi Jinping's (2017) articulation of "ecological civilization (Rodenbiker, 2021)" as a revival of "harmony between humanity and nature" (人与自然和谐共生), the translation transforms a Western feminist trope into a legitimizing symbol for China's indigenous ecological governance model.

Cross-cultural contrast sharpens this process: in Spanish translations, "Madre Tierra" remains unadulterated, blending with Mesoamerican goddess traditions to reinforce Latin American



ecothology's decolonial edge. In contrast, Chinese translators avoid pure foreignization or domestication, instead creating what Bhabha calls "hybridity as a mode of empowerment"—a symbol that is both recognizable in global environmental discourse and deeply rooted in kun cosmology. This is not dilution but ideological enrichment; the "Earth Mother" hybrid becomes a bridge between Susan Griffin's gendered critique and Confucian cosmo-ethics, proving that metaphors can carry multiple cultural genomes without losing their mobilizing power.

### 5.2 Rhetorical Moderation: Calibrating Critique for Consensus Cultures

The translation of "virus" to "病原体" (pathogen) in *Ember in the Deep* demonstrates rhetorical moderation, a strategy to temper confrontational metaphors to align with target cultures' ethical thresholds. Deborah Harkness's original "human activities as a virus" (a stark indictment of anthropocentrism) is softened in Chinese not out of fidelity loss but pragmatic ideological calibration. The term "病毒" ("virus") in Chinese carries strong moral stigma, evoking associations with biological warfare or societal decay (as in "病毒式传播" ["viral spread" with negative connotations]), which risks framing humanity as irredeemable. By contrast, "病原体" ("pathogen") is a neutral scientific term, denoting a technical aberration rather than moral failure. This choice mirrors Confucian pragmatism, which prioritizes solving problems over assigning blame—a cultural logic that underpins China's "pragmatic environmentalism" (经济与生态双赢, "win-win for economy and ecology").

This moderation stands in contrast to German translations, where "Virus" is often retained to preserve the metaphor's accusatory force, aligning with the Frankfurt School's tradition of radical social critique (Whitehead, 1998). In China, however, rhetorical restraint serves a dual purpose: it avoids alienating readers accustomed to incremental problem-solving and ensures the metaphor complies with the state's emphasis on "constructive discourse" (建设性话语). As seen in the translation of Paul Hawken's *Drawdown* (Tegler, 2017), where "civilization as a cancer" becomes "文明系统的失调" ("dysfunction in civilizational systems"), moderation transforms ecological blame into a remediable systemic issue, aligning with China's governance style of "seeking truth from facts" (实事求是) rather than apocalyptic rhetoric.

### 5.3 Term Stratification: Constructing Discursive Layers for Multi-Vocal Governance

The bifurcation of "climate crisis" into "气候危机" (crisis) and "气候紧急状态" (emergency) exemplifies term stratification, a mechanism to create parallel discursive registers for different audiences. As observed in official documents (e.g., the 2021 IPCC Chinese report) and activist texts (e.g., Greta Thunberg's *The Climate Book*), these terms serve as ideological valves: "危机" maintains the technical neutrality required for state-led gradualism, while "紧急状态" accommodates the urgent mobilization needed for civil society engagement. This stratification reflects what Fairclough (1992) calls "discursive order," where language is organized to serve power structures without suppressing dissent entirely.

In Western contexts, such as the U.S., "crisis" and "emergency" often polarize along political lines, with conservatives rejecting the latter as alarmist (McNabb & Devito, 2022). China's discursive model is distinct: it integrates these registers into a hierarchical system, where "危机" anchors the official narrative of "managed sustainability" (可管控的可持续性) and "紧急状态" operates as a permitted subaltern discourse. This is evident in the 2020 translation of the UN's Making Peace with Nature (Guterres & Secretary-General, 2020), which uses "危机" in policy blueprints but "紧急状态" in youth-oriented appendices—a strategy that mirrors the state's "two-track" approach to ecological governance: pragmatic planning at the top, participatory activism at the grassroots.

#### **5.4 The Politics of Indigenization: Resisting Anglo-Ecocentrism Through Strategic Semiosis**

These modes collectively challenge the notion of translation as a passive conduit for "Anglo-ecocentrism," revealing instead a process of strategic semiosis where non-Western cultures refashion global discourses to serve local emancipatory projects. China's recasting of "Mother Earth" as a Confucian cosmic parent, its moderation of blame-laden metaphors, and its stratified terminology all demonstrate a refusal to be a mere recipient of Western ecological narratives. Instead, translation becomes a tool for asserting ideological agency—for example, positioning "ecological civilization" (生态文明) not as a mimic of Western environmentalism but as a revival of indigenous wisdom, thereby offering an alternative to what Hall (2024) calls "eco-anxiety colonialism" (生态焦虑殖民).

This aligns with Spivak's (2012) call for "strategic essentialism," where translations mobilize local cultural resources to resist hegemonic discourses. By grafting "Mother Earth" onto kun cosmology, Chinese translators effectively indigenize ecological responsibility, making it congruent with millennia of philosophical practice. Similarly, term stratification allows the state to navigate between global normative pressure (e.g., SDGs) and domestic developmental imperatives, ensuring that environmentalism is articulated in a language of "Chinese-style modernization" (中国式现代化) rather than foreign import.

### **6. CONCLUSION: TRANSLATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION AS A PATHWAY TO POLYCENTRIC ECOLOGICAL DIALOGUE**

This study has demonstrated that the translation of ecological metaphors in Anthropocene literature constitutes a dynamic process of ideological negotiation, where cultural schemas, political economies, and ethical traditions engage in both conflict and convergence. Far from being neutral linguistic transfers, metaphors such as "Mother Earth" and terms like "climate emergency" act as nodal points where global ecological discourse is refracted through the prism of local worldviews. The analysis of English-Chinese translations reveals that translators perform a dual role: as custodians of cultural specificity, they adapt Western ecofeminist symbols to resonate with Confucian cosmo-ethics (e.g., "地球母亲" as a synthesis of maternal imagery and Zhouyi philosophy), and as mediators of global urgency, they calibrate terminological choices (e.g., "气候危机" vs. "气候紧急状态") to balance policy pragmatism with activist appeals. These practices illustrate that translational reconstruction is not mere

adaptation but a form of ideological syncretism, forging new semantic configurations that reconcile the universal call for ecological responsibility with the particularities of civilizational heritage.

The research contributes to ecocritical translation studies by theorizing metaphor as a "transcultural mediator" that facilitates what Appadurai (2000) terms "globalization from below"—a process where global ideas are indigenized through engagement with indigenous ethical vocabularies, such as China's "天人合一" (harmony between heaven, earth, and humanity). This challenges the Eurocentric assumption of ecological discourse as a monolithic export, revealing instead a polyphonic landscape where translations act as sites of ideological bricolage. For instance, the moderation of "virus" to "病原体" in *Ember in the Deep* demonstrates how cultural pragmatism softens confrontational rhetoric, aligning ecological critique with China's tradition of ethical gradualism, while the amplification of "大地之母流血" in Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* shows how translators can leverage local suffering narratives to deepen the resonance of global eco-activism.

Looking forward, the study opens avenues for exploring how non-Western ecowritings—such as African ubuntu philosophy or Indigenous cosmovisions—challenge and enrich dominant ecological metaphors when translated into global languages. Future research might investigate, for example, how the Yoruba concept of *àṣẹ* (cosmic vital force) or Māori *whanaungatanga* (relationality) are negotiated in translation, potentially offering alternative paradigms that transcend the human/nature dichotomy embedded in Western metaphors. Such inquiries would advance a more inclusive "transcultural ecocriticism," one that recognizes translation not just as a bridge for ideas but as a crucible for reimagining ecological humanism in an era of planetary interdependence.

In an age where ecological collapse demands transnational solidarity, the findings underscore the vital role of translation in constructing shared discursive spaces—spaces where the urgency of global science meets the wisdom of local traditions, and where ideological differences are not obstacles but resources for crafting resilient, polycentric narratives of coexistence. As this study has shown, every metaphorical migration and terminological choice carries the weight of civilizational memory and future possibility, making translation a critical site for both preserving cultural diversity and forging the linguistic foundations of a global ecological community.

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