

## SYMBOLIC RHETORIC IN QUOTATIONS FROM CHAIRMAN MAO TSE-TUNG 《毛泽东语录》

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### Abstract

This research article aims to analyze symbolic imagery in the speeches of Chairman Mao Tse-tung, as found in Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung 《毛泽东语录》. The study reveals that the symbols used in Mao’s rhetoric include 白纸 “white paper,” 文字 “characters,” 画图 “drawing,” 枪杆子 “gun barrel,” 怪物 “monster,” 乌云 “dark clouds/storm clouds,” 黑暗 “darkness,” 曙光 “dawn light,” 骨干 “backbone/core,” 旗帜 “flag,” 桥梁 “bridge,” 曲折的路 “winding path,” 红色区域 “red zone,” 灰尘 “dust,” 微生物 (生物) “microorganism (biology),” 风雨 “storm,” 齿轮和螺丝钉 “gears and screws,” and 风浪 “waves/stormy waves.” These symbols reflect the beauty of the language used by the leader to inspire a sense of patriotism in the hearts of the people.

**Keywords:** symbolic imagery, Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung 《毛泽东语录》

### Introduction

The language used by national leaders holds tremendous importance, as it can evoke emotional resonance and sway public sentiment. Particularly in promoting patriotism, leaders often employ eloquent and engaging language to foster national pride. This language allows recipients to think or interpret according to the leader’s intended message. Figurative language is one rhetorical style often used by national leaders, as it can powerfully stir emotions and inspire alignment with the leader’s vision.

Rhetoric refers to the use of language or oratory aimed at conveying deep, powerful meanings that affect the emotions or feelings of the listener or reader. It involves an artful selection of words and an elegant, prominent style that makes the message vivid, potent, and capable of inspiring profound interpretation and sentiment. The words used often carry indirect

meanings, conveyed through metaphor or emotionally impactful language. Specifically, "symbolic rhetoric" is a form of rhetoric that can evoke the emotions of readers or listeners, encouraging a shared perspective. Symbols may be animate or inanimate, yet they function as representations of something else, which may be tangible or abstract. Symbols are widely used in everyday life and literature, and while some symbols carry universally understood meanings, others are recognized only within specific cultures (Subparang Yinthararoon, 2002, pp. 89–112).

This research article analyzes the figurative language found in the statements and words of former Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung, spoken on various occasions during his lifetime. Mao Tse-tung, the founder of the Communist Party of China, served as Chairman of the People's Republic of China from 1954 to 1959. His speeches and statements have greatly influenced Chinese public thought from the past to the present. It can be said that Mao's words conveyed his ideological beliefs through a structured, methodical use of language. It cannot be denied that speaking is one of the essential qualities of a leader, as it is used for communication, understanding, persuasion, and boosting the morale of subordinates or followers. The ability to speak effectively is thus crucial for ensuring the success of various activities" (Sumet Sangnimnuan, 2009:19). Moreover, if the language used by a leader possesses literary elegance that evokes vivid imagery, it can leave a profound impression on listeners or readers. Mao Zedong himself exemplified this quality to a remarkable degree.

### **Research Objective**

To analyze the "symbolic rhetoric" found in the statements of Mao Tse-tung from Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung 《毛泽东语录》.

### **Scope of Research**

The population for this research comprises Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung 《毛泽东语录》, published by the People's Liberation Army Publishing House (中国人民解放军总政治部), second edition, 1966. This qualitative research involves a document analysis of works related to symbolic rhetoric in both Thai and Chinese contexts. The study collects and analyzes content featuring symbolic rhetoric, presenting findings through descriptive analysis. Conclusions are drawn based on the research findings, followed by a discussion and recommendations.

This research is a qualitative study. The population scope focuses on the book "Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung" 《毛泽东语录》, published by the People's Liberation Army General Political Department of China (中国人民解放军总政治部), 2nd edition, 1966. The content scope involves the analysis of rhetorical symbols found in the "Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung".

### **Research Methodology**

The research employs document analysis and interpretation as its methodology. The research process is conducted as follows:

1. Collect relevant documents on rhetorical symbolism theories and related research studies.
2. Analyze the content that demonstrates the use of rhetorical symbolism within the scope of the study.
3. Present the findings descriptively and analytically.

#### 4. Conclude and discuss the results, along with providing recommendations.

##### Research result

From the analysis of Mao Tse-tung's statements, it is evident that Mao employed symbolic rhetoric, as demonstrated in the following example:

1. 除了别的特点之外，中国六亿人口的显著特点是一穷二白。这些看起来是坏事，实是好事。穷则思变，要干，要革命。一张白纸，没有负担，好写最新最美的文字，好画最新最美的画图。(p.33)

Translation: "Among the many characteristics, a notable feature of China's 600 million people is their poverty and lack of resources. While these may appear as disadvantages, they are, in fact, advantages. Poverty inspires the desire for change, the drive to act, and the need for revolution. A blank sheet of paper, without burdens, is ideal for writing the newest and most beautiful characters, for drawing the latest and most beautiful images."

The symbol of 白纸 "white paper" represents human life in its undefined state, a blank slate where the path is yet to be determined. It suggests that individuals must chart their course, much like a blank piece of paper that needs to be filled by oneself. Using "paper" as a symbol signifies the openness and potential of human life.

文字 "characters" here symbolize the path of life that each individual must define. In this context, "characters" represent the choices and directions of one's journey, emphasizing that life's course is self-determined.

画图 "drawing" conveys the content and story of one's life that individuals create themselves. The use of "drawing" as a symbol reflects the narrative and events of life, shaped and crafted by personal decisions and experiences.

2. 每个共产党员都应懂得这个真理：“枪杆子里面出政权”。(p.56)

Translation: "Every Communist Party member should understand this truth: 'Political power comes from the barrel of a gun.'"

The phrase 枪杆子里面出政权, "political power comes from the barrel of a gun," signifies that political authority is achieved through force or military strength. Here, the "gun" symbolizes immense power, emphasizing that strength and force are fundamental to establishing and maintaining political control.

3. ....俄国共产党的枪杆子造了一个社会主义。我们要造一个民主共和国。帝国主义时代的阶级斗争的经验告诉我们：工人阶级和劳动群众，只有用枪杆子的力量才能战胜武装的资产阶级和地主；在这个意义上，我们可以说，整个世界只有用枪杆子才可能改造。(p.57-58)

Translation: "...The Russian Communist Party built socialism through the power of the gun. We want to build a democratic republic. The experience of class struggle in the age of imperialism tells us that the working class and the laboring masses can only overcome the armed bourgeoisie and landlords through the strength of the gun. In this sense, we can say that the entire world can only be transformed through the gun."

The term 枪杆子 "gun barrel" uses the gun as a symbol of state power, representing the ability to coerce or compel people to act according to the will of those who hold power.

This symbolism emphasizes the role of force in achieving and sustaining control, reflecting the view that societal transformation often relies on the strength of armed authority.

4. 战争——这个人类互相残杀的怪物，人类社会的发展终久要把它消灭的，而且就在不远的将来会要把它消灭的。(p. 58)

Translation: "War—this monstrous act of human slaughter—is something that human society will eventually eliminate, and it will be eradicated in the not-too-distant future."

The term 怪物 "monster" uses the image of a monster as a symbol of the evil within humanity or of human cruelty akin to a monstrous force that drives people to destroy each other. Here, the monster symbolizes the destructive and immoral nature of war, an entity that human progress strives to eradicate.

5. ....当着天空中出现乌云的时候，我们就指出：这不过是暂时的现象，黑暗即将过去，曙光即在前头。(p.75-76)

Translation: "When dark clouds appear in the sky, we point out that this is merely a temporary phenomenon; darkness will soon pass, and the dawn light lies ahead."

The term 乌云 "dark clouds" symbolizes impending misfortune, ominous events, or approaching evil. It represents unfavorable situations on the horizon.

黑暗 "darkness" serves as a symbol of despair or sorrow, reflecting a period lacking hope or clarity.

曙光 "dawn light" symbolizes hope, fulfillment, and the promise of a brighter future, representing the optimism and positive outcomes that lie ahead after hardship.

6. 只有领导骨干的积极性，而无广大群众的积极性相结合，便将成为少数人的空忙。但如果只有广大群众的积极性，而无有力的领导骨干去恰当地组织群众的积极性，则群众积极性既不可能持久，.....(p.116)

Translation: "Only having the enthusiasm of the core leaders, without combining it with the enthusiasm of the masses, will result in the futile efforts of a few. But if there is only the enthusiasm of the masses without strong core leaders to effectively organize it, then the enthusiasm of the masses will not be sustainable..."

The term 骨干 "backbone/core" symbolizes individuals or elements of utmost importance and value, serving as the essential foundation or core of any story or entity. It represents key figures or foundational elements crucial for the success and stability of a movement or organization.

7. 成千成万的先烈，为着人民的利益，在我们的前头英勇地牺牲了，让我们高举起他们的旗帜，踏着他们的血迹前进吧！(p.157)

Translation: "Tens of thousands of martyrs have courageously sacrificed themselves for the benefit of the people, leading the way before us. Let us raise their flag high and move forward on the path marked by their blood!"

The term 旗帜 "flag" here symbolizes independence and victory over sovereignty. It represents the ideals of freedom, triumph, and the legacy of those who have fought and sacrificed, urging future generations to continue their mission with honor and determination.

8. ....你们是全中华民族的模范人物，是推动各方面人民事业胜利前进的骨干，是人民政府的可靠支柱和人民政府联系广大群众的桥梁。(p.159)

Translation: "You are exemplary figures of the entire Chinese nation, the backbone driving forward the success of the people's endeavors, the reliable pillars of the people's government, and the bridge connecting the government to the masses."

The term 桥梁 "bridge" symbolizes a medium of connection between one entity and another. It represents a link or conduit, facilitating communication and understanding between the government and the broader population.

9. ....我们还要告诉人民，告诉同志们，道路是曲折的。在革命的道路上还有许多障碍物，还有许多困难。.....

.....世界上没有直路，要准备走曲折的路，不要贪便宜。不能设想，那一天早上，一切反动派会统统自己跪在地下。总之，前途是光明的，道路是曲折的。  
.....(p.168)

Translation: "We must also tell the people, tell our comrades, that the road is winding. There are still many obstacles and difficulties on the path of revolution. ... In this world, there are no straight roads; we must be prepared to walk winding paths and not seek easy routes. We cannot imagine that one morning, all reactionaries will simply kneel on their own. In short, the future is bright, but the road is winding."

The term 曲折的路 "winding road" symbolizes the various obstacles and challenges that lie ahead. It represents the difficulties and barriers one must face and overcome on the journey, particularly within the context of revolution and progress.

10. ....他们要到大城市不是为了去工作，而是为了去享乐。他们最不乐意的是在生活艰难的红色区域里工作。(p.210)

Translation: "They go to big cities not to work, but to seek pleasure. What they least want is to work in the difficult conditions of the red zones."

The term 红色区域 "red zone" symbolizes a dangerous area, often associated with conflict, terrorism, or war, as well as possibly areas affected by drugs or other hazardous activities. It represents regions where conditions are harsh and potentially perilous.

11. 我们同志的思想，我们党的工作，也会沾染灰尘的，也应该打扫和洗涤。“流水不腐，户枢不蠹”，是说它们在不停的运动中抵抗了微生物或其他生物的侵蚀。  
(p.223-224)

Translation: "Our comrades' thoughts and our party's work can also accumulate dust, and they should be cleaned and purified. 'Flowing water does not stagnate, nor does a moving door hinge rust,' meaning they resist the erosion of microorganisms or other life forms through continuous movement."

The term 灰尘 "dust" symbolizes negative or impure thoughts, reflecting ideas that are corrupt or detrimental, akin to mental or ideological "dirt" that requires cleansing.

微生物 (生物) "microorganisms (life forms)" symbolize harmful influences or malicious forces, representing undesirable thoughts, destructive behaviors, or interference from opposing forces that erode or undermine purity and integrity.

12. ....我们共产党员应该经风雨，见世面；这个风雨，就是群众斗争的大风雨，这个世面，就是群众斗争的大世面。(p.236)

Translation: "We, as Communist Party members, should withstand the wind and rain and experience the world; this wind and rain refer to the great struggles of the masses, and this word refers to the broad reality of the people's struggles."

The term 风雨 "wind and rain" symbolizes hardships and various obstacles encountered in life. It represents the challenges and adversities that individuals, particularly those engaged in the struggle for the people, must endure and overcome.

13. ....无产阶级的文学艺术是无产阶级整个革命事业的一部分，如同列宁所说，是整个革命机器中的“齿轮和螺丝钉”。..... (p. 258)

Translation: "The literature and art of the proletariat are part of the entire revolutionary cause of the proletariat, as Lenin said, they are the 'gears and screws' within the entire revolutionary machine.

The term 齿轮和螺丝钉 "gears and screws" symbolizes the essential components and driving forces of the revolution, elements that must function in harmony to propel the revolutionary movement forward. This metaphor highlights the importance of each part working cohesively within the larger revolutionary mechanism.

14. ....还有一些人很骄傲，读了几本书，自以为了不起，尾巴翘到天上去了，可是一遇风浪，他们的立场，比起工人和大多数劳动农民来，就显得大不相同。..... (p. 269-270)

Translation: "There are also some very arrogant people, having read a few books, thinking they are exceptional, with their tails up in the air. Yet, when they encounter wind and waves, their stance is noticeably different from that of the workers and the majority of laboring farmers."

The term 风浪 "wind and waves" symbolizes obstacles and challenges encountered in life. It represents difficulties and problems that arise, testing individuals' resilience and character in the face of adversity.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The analysis reveals that Mao Zedong's use of various comparative forms to convey meaning or emphasize his intentions to his audience reflects the beauty of language and the skill of a leader who knows how to select appropriate expressions. By employing comparisons to communicate his message without directly stating or elaborating at length, Mao demonstrates a profound command of language. This indicates that Chinese, like Thai, features figurative language with similarities in its use and cultural implications.

As noted by Zirivarnphicha Thanajirawat (2016) in a comparative study of cultural reflections through Thai, Chinese, and English idioms, the use of figurative language reflects cultural aspects such as life experiences, expressions of personality, ways of living, human actions, emotions, speech, beliefs, social interactions, friendships, kinship, attitudes, thoughts, and values. These cultural elements align with the rhetorical symbols employed by Mao Zedong, which serve to reflect attitudes, thoughts, character traits, and behaviors that are intrinsic to human nature.

The study reveals that Mao Tse-tung's speeches and statements contain a total of 18 distinct symbolic expressions. These symbols are frequently repeated and represent various aspects of life and society through metaphorical language. Each symbol carries a specific, abstract meaning. For instance, "white paper" symbolizes an empty life awaiting its path, signifying the human ability to shape one's destiny, reflecting the concept of life choices.

Additionally, positive and negative symbols are used to convey a spectrum of situations and emotions. For example, "dark clouds" or "rainstorms" represent obstacles, evil, and hardship, whereas "dawn light" signifies hope and new opportunities. Such rhetorical choices encourage readers to interpret and gain a deep understanding. Symbols related to power, such as "gun barrel," suggest authority that influences or controls people's lives, while the "flag" symbolizes state power and independence, invoking national pride and a readiness to defend one's heritage.

Symbols like "backbone" or "core" highlight the importance of individuals or ideas that contribute to a nation's strength, emphasizing the value of civic participation in building national stability. The "bridge" symbol represents unity, demonstrating the significance of cooperation and solidarity among people, which serves as a foundation for a strong nation. Furthermore, symbols like "wind and rain" and "storm" represent challenges that the nation may face, underscoring the need for unified perseverance. "Dawn light," in turn, represents hope and progress toward a brighter future, mirroring a commitment to the nation's development.

The content of Mao Tse-tung's use of "symbolic rhetoric" reflects his political ideology and the Communist Party's goal to revolutionize China toward a system he and the party viewed as ideal. His ideology is systematic, playing a powerful role in inspiring individuals and groups to take action in response to their needs or the needs of society. This was conveyed through various forms, such as behaviors and language that were believed to guide people toward a complete vision (Kriangkrai Kongseng, 2019, p. 16). Thus, Mao Tse-tung's symbolic rhetoric exemplifies outstanding oratory, befitting a national leader capable of resonating with the public through eloquent language.

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