



 Research Article

Stylistic Interpretation Of Gastronomic Metaphors In Chinese Economic News

Submission Date: July 19, 2025, **Accepted Date:** August 15, 2025,

Published Date: September 17, 2025

Crossref doi: <https://doi.org/10.37547/ijasr-05-09-02>

Journal Website:
<http://sciencebring.com/index.php/ijasr>

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a stylistic analysis of gastronomic metaphors found in Chinese economic news. It examines the origins, semantic meanings, and metaphorical interpretations of these expressions. Particular attention is given to their stylistic functions in the text—whether negative or positive—their emotional coloring, and how figurative meanings are conveyed in economic discourse.

KEYWORDS

Conceptual metaphor, gastronomic metaphor, “油水”, “土包子”, “迷魂汤”, “硕果”.

INTRODUCTION

Metaphor is considered an indispensable cognitive tool used by humans to structure conceptual systems, and it is defined as a means of understanding one thing through another.

To define the concept of gastronomic metaphor as a linguistic term, we rely on the understanding of gastronomy as an interdisciplinary field. This

scientific discipline studies food — that is, “everything edible,” including its taste and methods of preparation (cooking).

Below, we analyze the stylistic function of several gastronomic metaphors encountered in Chinese economic news articles.

“矿业巨头市值飙升4000亿元·高毅邓晓峰“蹭”了30亿元“油水”

(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1794959396635375191&wfr=spider&for=pc> 2024-03-30)

“The market value of the mining giant sharply rose to 400 billion yuan, and Gaoyi Fund manager Deng Xiaofeng managed to ‘extract nearly 3 billion yuan in profits’ from the situation.”

The Chinese term “油水” (yóushuǐ) — literally “oil and water” — is a culinary metaphor that figuratively refers to easy money, juicy profits, or financial gain.

In Chinese cuisine, dishes that are rich in oil and moisture are often considered delicious, hearty, and luxurious. Over time, this literal meaning has taken on a figurative sense.

In a positive context, it can refer to earning a substantial profit or gaining good benefits from a certain activity.

In a negative or ironic sense, it can imply corruption, exploitation, or profiting off someone else’s labor.

“但就是这样一个“土包子”品牌，却在近年来坚持走高端路线，不断上探产品定位。”

(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1799813510807947283&wfr=spider&for=pc> 2024-05-23)

“Yet it is precisely such a “local” brand that, in recent years, has been steadily moving toward a high-end direction, consistently elevating its products.”

The term “土包子” (tǔ bāo zi) — literally “rural steamed bun” — originally referred to a simple, honest person from the countryside. Over time, it has taken on a more figurative meaning, often used to describe someone perceived as unsophisticated or lacking worldliness.

“包子” (bāozi) is a type of traditional Chinese steamed bun filled with various ingredients, similar to a dumpling or manty, and is considered a popular, affordable everyday food.

“土” (tǔ) in this context implies “rural,” “unsophisticated,” or “unfashionable.” Semantically, the term describes people or things that appear simple, traditional, or far removed from modern trends.

Although originally related to food, “土包子” has come to be used metaphorically for people, brands, or styles — often in a slightly mocking or dismissive tone, but sometimes with a sense of endearment or underdog charm.

In the economic text above, the term refers to a brand with a low-end, outdated, or unsophisticated appearance. Stylistically, it conveys a tone of ironic critique.

The passage is written in an analytical style and uses subtle irony to describe the phenomenon of a brand that is “rising from simplicity to elite status.” While the tone carries a hint of sarcasm, it also acknowledges the brand’s upward trajectory.

At times, this culinary metaphor can also take on a more positive, nostalgic meaning — evoking memories of simplicity and authenticity.

“第一，万万不能掉进新自由主义经济理论的“迷魂汤”，重蹈美国经济“空心化”的覆辙。”

(<https://www.ceweekly.cn/cewse/2024/0115/434786.html> 2024-04-15)

“First of all, under no circumstances should we fall for the “magic soup” of neoliberal economic theory; otherwise, we risk repeating the 'hollowing out' of the U.S. economy.”

The term “迷魂汤” (mí hún tāng) — literally “soul-bewondering soup” — is a Chinese culinary metaphor. Though it appears to be a simple and beneficial soup, it is, in fact, deceptively powerful and manipulative in effect. It can be translated as “bewitching broth,” “deceptive soup,” or “magic soup.”

Used in a negative, ironic, and cautionary tone — particularly in economic or political discourse — the phrase refers to seductive yet harmful ideas or systems that mislead people or societies under the guise of positive promises.

In the example above, it criticizes a damaging economic ideology that, while seemingly appealing, leads to internal weakness or manipulation. Stylistically, the metaphor emphasizes the need for vigilance and resistance against manipulation.

“粤藏合作结 “硕果”，17个项目在东莞现场签约。”

(<https://news.10jqka.com.cn/20250514/c668145473.shtml> 2025-05-14)

“Guangdong-Tibet cooperation has achieved significant results, with 17 projects signed on site in Dongguan.”

The term “硕果” (shuòguǒ) is a culinary metaphor that literally translates to “large, ripe fruit.” As is well known, ripe fruit represents the peak of harvest — the most valuable and high-quality yield. When used metaphorically, “硕果” symbolizes success, achievement, or a fruitful outcome.

In economic texts, it often appears to describe successful agreements, well-executed projects, or expected positive results. This metaphor carries a distinctly positive emotional tone, and it is widely used to highlight meaningful accomplishments.

In many cases, Chinese dish names encode cultural values and symbols, which can be understood through metaphorical or metonymic analysis. One of the features that distinguishes Chinese cuisine from that of many other cultures is that each dish is not only a culinary item but also often carries its own historical background and symbolic meaning.

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