



METAPHORICAL SEMANTIC COMPARISON ANALYSIS OF WORDS RELATED TO “LIGHT” IN CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE

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Abstract:

This study applies cognitive linguistic theory and comparative qualitative analysis methods to investigate the perceptual metaphor of words related to “light” in Chinese and Vietnamese. The results showed that both Chinese and Vietnamese use the source domain of “light” to map to target domains such as “openness, transparency, hope, future, righteousness, morality, wisdom, enlightenment, and power.” The differences mainly lie in cultural nuances, while Chinese tends towards philosophical, religious, and political metaphors, Vietnamese is more about human values and folk experiences. The study contributes to affirming the universality of perceptual metaphors and clarifying cultural characteristics in the linguistic perception of the two peoples.

Keywords: “light”, metaphor, mapping, source domain, target domain

1. Introduction

Metaphor is not only a rhetorical measure in language, but also considered a basic way of thinking for people. Studies have shown that metaphors are heavily present in everyday communication, contributing to shaping and reflecting how people perceive the world. This shows the important role of metaphor in both language and thinking.

Within the scope of research on the “light” source domain, many works have made important contributions. Su, H.H. (苏慧慧, 2022) analyzes the fantastical characterization of the idiom containing the Chinese element “光” (light), affirming the dynamics and high level of abstraction of this metaphor. Hu, P., & Wang, H. N. (胡平, 王昊宁, 2018) emphasize the philosophical role of the metaphor of “light” combined with “power” in Nietzsche's thought. Chen, F. (陈芳, 2010) with Zhu, H. D. (朱华东, 2023) studies the

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cross-cultural comparison between Chinese and English, clarifies diversity in light metaphor mapping, and indicates the similarities and differences based on the units of perception.

In a closer approach to Sino-Vietnamese, Pham, N. H. (2017) analyzes the metaphorical characteristics of “太阳” (sun) and “月亮” (moon) in Chinese and Vietnamese, thereby clarifying the mapping of target domains such as gender, love, and hope in literature, and reflecting the idea of “*unified heavenly beings*” and showing the intersections and differences in the cultural languages of the two peoples. Bui, H. Y. (2017) focuses on “*the symbols of light and darkness in Luu Quang Vu’s plays*”, thereby showing the role of these symbols in expressing and conveying artistic intentions.

From the above overview, it can be seen that “light” as a familiar natural phenomenon is often used to conceptualize the abstract values such as knowledge, morality, belief, and enlightenment. In Chinese and Vietnamese, words related to light extend beyond their physical meaning, associated with the depth of cultural thinking. However, although the light is universal, its mapping mechanism to the target domains varies according to the culture and language of China and Vietnam.

In this context, it can be seen that although the studies of the “light” metaphor in China and Vietnam have made achievements, they mainly focus on Chinese or compare it with English, paying little attention to the direct comparison between Chinese and Vietnamese. This gap requires a systematic study of the metaphorical semantics of the word light in two languages to contribute to clarifying the cognitive mechanism and cultural and thinking characteristics of each ethnic group.

2. Perceptual metaphorical reasoning

2.1 From traditional conception to cognitive revolution

Until now, metaphors have been most studied as a decorative rhetorical measure of language. Webster's Dictionary defines “*Metaphor*” as a type of rhetoric, usually through a word or phrase that uses one thing in place of another, thereby implicitly indicating a similarity or inference between two things. Similarly, the Dictionary “*Ci Hai*” (辞海) considers metaphor as a form of implicit comparison, in which the relationship between the essence and the metaphor expresses intimate compatibility, often using words such as “*is/are*”, “*also*”, e.g., “*Children are the flowers of their Fatherland*”.

The turning point in metaphorical research came with the work *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M., 1980). The two authors assert that metaphor is not just a linguistic phenomenon, but a fundamental mechanism of thinking. According to them, “*metaphors are everywhere, in our language and in our thinking. In essence, the conceptual system of man is built based on metaphor*” (Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M., 1980: 4). Thus, metaphors become a fundamental tool to help people understand and experience abstract concepts through concrete, familiar things.

2.2 Nature and mechanism of perceptual metaphor

The theory “*embodiment*” was officially shown by Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999) in the study “*Philosophy in the Flesh*”. Accordingly, the human conceptual system is formed from experiential experience. Lakoff, G. (1987) has also put forward the view that “*the human conceptual system is the product of experience and that experience comes from the human body*”. Lakoff (1987) and Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006) also argue that it is through the unique characteristics of the body that humans create their own worldview and perception.

On that basis, the perceptual metaphor works through the mechanism of mapping between the domains of experience. This mapping process allows humans to understand abstract concepts (target domains) through specific, familiar concepts (source domains). (Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M., 1980). The basis of the perceptual metaphor is based on the mechanism of “*mapping*” between experiential domains. This mechanism allows humans to understand “*abstract*” concepts (target domains) through the selective transfer of attributes from “*specific, familiar*” concepts (source domains). The mapping structure includes:

- **Source domain:** The field used to explain and use as a means of comparison, formerly known as a “*vehicle*”, e.g., “*money*”.
- **Target domain:** The field to be explained, which is the object to be understood, formerly known as “*tenor*”, e.g., “*time*”.

The dynamics of the mapping mechanism are derived from embodiment, bodily experience, and human life experience in real life. It is thanks to this process that perceptual metaphors become a fundamental mode of thinking, helping people generalize and reorganize their perception of complex concepts.

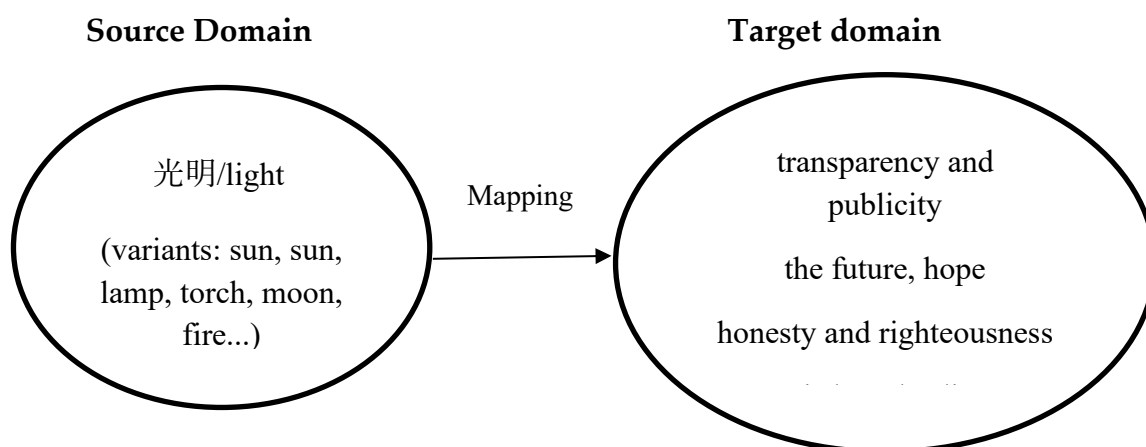
3. Research methods

Research and application of cognitive linguistic theory, combining comparison and analysis of qualitative linguistics and comparison of culture and language. The language consists of 80 examples (33 Chinese, 47 Vietnamese) selected from literature, journalism, idioms, and proverbs; each example is labeled with the source domain “*light*” (variations: sunlight, sun, lamp, torch, moon, fire) and the abstract target domain (transparency, hope, righteousness, wisdom, power, emotion). Process: identifying and extracting → encoding → grouping of internal languages → comparing to Sino-Vietnamese → interpreting according to the cultural and social context. The focus is on identifying mapping patterns from the source domain to the target domains, thereby highlighting similarities and differences.

4. Compare the metaphorical semantics of words related to “光明” (light) in Chinese and Vietnamese

4.1 Mapping models of “光明” (light) in Chinese and Vietnamese

Based on 80 examples (33 in Chinese, 47 in Vietnamese), this study outlines the mapping from the source domain “光明/light” (*sunlight, sun, lamp, torch, moon, fire...*) to six target domains: transparency, openness; future, hope; honesty, righteousness; wisdom, leading; power, glory; emotions, mental state. The mapping diagram from the source domain to the target domain is as follows:



4.1.1 The source domain “光明” (light) maps to the target domain “disclosure, public”

The cognitive basis of metaphor comes from self-realization: light allows people to see things clearly, while darkness implies concealment and makes things dark and elusive.

In Chinese, light through self-realization is mapped to the target domain, denoting “truth and information revealed”. Words such as “曝光” (*exposure, exposure to light*) often appear in official administrative and press documents, for example:

- 1) 日本细菌部队在北京的血腥人体试验曝光 (*The bloody human experiments of the Japanese bacterial army in Beijing have been exposed*) (Xinhua Newspaper, 2018). The word “说明” (*clarify, explain*) is more about an objective and rational presentation, for example:
- 2) 从银行来说,贷款回收率低,逾期贷款增加,这说明企业占用资金增加 (*From a banking perspective, the low loan recovery rate and the increasing number of overdue debts indicate that enterprises are appropriating more and more capital*) (People's Daily, 1986).

In addition, idioms such as “明码标价” (*clear price listing*), “明枪易躲,暗箭难防” (*stabbing spear (public) easy to dodge, sneak shooter difficult to defend*) meaning “Public attacks are easy to deal with, but covert attacks and tricks are more unpredictable and dangerous” show

the contrast between “明” (*bright, clarity, orthodoxy*) and “暗” (*dark, shady, unorthodox*) are deeply ingrained in Chinese thoughts.

In Vietnamese, this metaphor is equally rich but with more symbolic and strongly expressive nuances. Words such as “bóc trần” (*debunk*) and “phanh phui” (*expose*) are reminiscent of concrete, direct actions and are often used to expose negative truths, for example:

- 3) **Debunk** the terrible truths about milk. (Health and Life, 14/07/2014).
- 4) **Expose** the truth of extra classes at the homeroom teacher's house. (Vietnam Women's Newspaper, 05/01/2017)

Although the expression “*bringing to light*” is more formal, it still contains the positive meaning of discovering the truth. On the contrary, the word “*proof*” is inclined to the theoretical and scientific aspects, expressing rational thinking, for example:

- 5) Data **proving that** vaccination effectively prevents the epidemic. (Quang Ninh e-newspaper, 09/09/2021). This difference shows that, while Chinese tends to abstract the concept of “*transparency*”, Vietnamese concretizes it into detective and critical actions.

The differences are also imprinted in the culture and literature of the Vietnamese people. In addition to positive light images, such as “*lòng sáng như ban mai*” (*heart lights like early morning*) to refer to honesty and uprightness, there are also light images that are deeply socially critical. For example, the image of electric lights “*lóa lên khắp phố*” (*flashing all over the street*) (“*Dumb Luck*”, Vu Trong Phung) is not just a light of exposure but a light that reflects the chaos and falsehood of a half-western society, where flashy appearances are only to hide injustices and internal contradictions.

Thus, it can be seen that the metaphor “*light is disclosure, public*” is a metaphorical phenomenon, reflecting the human experience, throughout both Chinese and Vietnamese cultures. However, the differences in the way of mapping and nuances of expression have clearly shown the cultural characteristics and thinking of each ethnic group.

4.1.2 The source domain “光明” (light) maps to the target domain “future and hope”

The metaphor of “*light*” refers to “*the future and hope*” that comes from the realization of the natural cycle, the dawn ending the night to start a new day. This experience is mapped to the abstract destination, where difficulties are seen as “*darkness*” and positivity and good are visualized as “*light*”.

The metaphor of “*light*” refers to “*the future and hope*” that stems from the personal experience of the natural cycle: the dawn dispels darkness and opens a new day. In

Chinese, this image is often associated with macro symbols, which are collective. “旭日东升” (*the sun rises from the east*) became a metaphor for the beginning and belief in a bright future, appearing in many literary works such as Yu Xiang's (余翔) 《赠居易叔》 (*Giving the Weird Soul*), or Bi Ye (碧野) 《闪光的浪花》 (*Sparkling Waves*). In the context of politics, the revolutionary song “东方红” (*Oriental Hong*) or the slogan “曙光初照大地” (*The first dawn to illuminate the ground*) both affirm the metaphorical model of “*behind the darkness is light*” as a manifesto of faith and development.

In Vietnamese, light is associated with everyday images and is more personal. The idioms “*Sau cơn mưa trời lại sáng*” (After the rain the sky is bright again), “*Hết cơn bão cực, đến hồi thái la*” (The darkest hour is just before the dawn) reflect the optimistic philosophy. In literature, light is often a symbol of personal aspiration, such as the “*Bình minh lên*” (dawn) in “*Dế mèn phiêu lưu ký*” (Cricket Adventures) (To Hoai, 1955), or “*Ánh sáng le lói*” (the glitter of light) in “*Hai đứa trẻ*” (Two Children) (Thach Lam, 1938). Small light sources such as “*ngọn đèn dầu*” (oil lamps) and “*vệt sáng đom đóm*” (firefly streaks) contrast with the bright light of the train, suggesting a different world, full of longing. Similarly, the image of “*Đầu súng trăng treo*” (Hanging Moon on the barrel of the gun) (Nguyen Duy, 1966) is a unique metaphor that combines “*gun-war*” and “*moon-peace*” to express belief in rebirth and hope for victory.

In general, both languages carry the metaphor of “*a good future is light*”. However, the Chinese tend to use vibrant, macro images, while the Vietnamese exploit intimate, simple images that reflect the optimistic and resilient spirit of the people.

4.1.3 The source domain “光明” (light) maps to the target domain “honesty and righteousness”

The metaphor of light refers to “*honesty and righteousness*” stemming from the fundamental opposition between “*light*” denoting clarity and transparency, and “*darkness*” associated with concealment and shady. This experience is translated into the realm of morality, where good is visualized as the light of uprightness, and evil is associated with the darkness of deceit.

In Chinese, this metaphor is codified through many idioms, philosophical concepts, and religious symbols. Expressions such as “*明人不做暗事*” (a prince who does not work shady), “*光明正大*” (radiant and aboveboard), or “*光明大道*” (the bright path) became moral standards, reflecting the ideal of a noble personality. In the Buddhist tradition, “*大光明普照菩萨*” (The Bodhisattva of Great Radiant Light, Shining Universally) or “*佛光普照*” (The Buddha’s Light Universally Illuminates) both show that light has a spiritual meaning, symbolizing wisdom, compassion, and truth that can triumph over evil and ignorance.

In Vietnamese, this metaphor is also rich, but is often expressed more closely and concretely. The idiom: “*Cây ngay không sợ chết đứng*” (A straight tree doesn’t fear standing-death) does not directly refer to light, but it contains the concept of uprightness, corresponding to “*光明正大*” (radiant and aboveboard) in Chinese. The influence of the

Three Religions deepens the meaning, expressed in expressions such as “*ánh sáng từ bi*” (the light of compassion) or “*ánh sáng của trí tuệ xua tan si mê*” (the light of wisdom to dispel ignorance). In literature, light is often in direct opposition to darkness to affirm the power of goodness. The scene of “*cho chữ*” (giving words) in “*The Letter of a Death Row Prisoner*” (Nguyen Tuan, 1940), with the bright light of a bunch of torches, symbolizes the victory of “*thiên lương*” (*innate moral sense*) over the darkness of prison and evil. In political discourse, light is associated with the national cause, such as the phrase “*chính khí sáng ngời*” (*shining righteousness*) in “*Bình Ngô Đại Cáo*” (Proclamation of Victory over the Ming) (Nguyen Trai, 1428), where light is a symbol of patriotism and rightness.

In general, both Chinese and Vietnamese are metaphorical for “*honesty, righteousness is light*”. The difference is that Chinese is more about codification in idioms, philosophy, and religious symbols, while Vietnamese is more about specific and vivid expressions in idioms, literature, and political opinion, reflecting the spirit of upholding goodness in practical life.

4.1.4 The source domain “光明” (light) maps to the target domain “wisdom and guidance”

One of the important conceptual maps of the “*light*” source domain in both Chinese and Vietnamese is the “*wisdom and guidance*” target domain. The perceptual basis of this metaphor comes from the realization that the body, like the light that dispels the darkness, helps people to orient and see the path clearly. The intellect is visualized as the light of the spirit, capable of dissipating gloom and distorted perception and leading people to wise choices.

In Chinese, this metaphor is clearly expressed and highly systematic. Expressions such as:

- 6) 深入生活，认识生活，用思想的亮光去烛照生活，用生活的活水去滋养文学。
(*Penetrating life, understanding life, using the light of thought to illuminate life, using the vivid flow of life to nurture literature.*) (People's Daily, 2014)
- 7) 从中古建筑的奇迹和聪明的城市规划，到科学文化的结晶和文学艺术的创造，处处都显现了法兰西人民智慧的光芒。
(*From the marvels of medieval architecture and smart urban planning to the quintessence of science, culture, and literary and artistic creation – everywhere shines the wisdom of the French people.*) (People's Daily, 1979)

The above examples show that wisdom is not only visualized as a source of light, but also as something that can “*shine a light*” (illuminate) on matters, making perception clear and deep. Furthermore, fixed idioms and phrases such as “*心里有光*” (*light in the heart*), “*智慧之光*” (*light of wisdom*), and “*明灯*” (*bright lamp*) affirm light as a metaphor throughout for inner clarity and the ability to lead. It is not only pure understanding but also a force that helps people overcome the “*darkness*” of ignorance and cynicism.

Similar in terms of the mechanism of mapping, the Vietnamese language also uses the metaphor of light in a common way to express the concepts of wisdom and guidance. The phrases “*ánh sáng trí tuệ*” (*intellectual light*), “*soi sáng*” (*illumination*), and especially “*ngọn đèn tri thức*” (*lamp of knowledge*) have become familiar metaphors, emphasizing the enlightening and guiding role of knowledge. The difference may lie in the figurativeness and the nuances of expression. While Chinese is more inclined to abstract concepts such as “*光*” (*light*) and “*明*” (*light*), Vietnamese often concretizes intellectual light sources into intimate images such as “*lamps*”, “*torches*” of visible luminous objects, emphasizing the practicality and tools of knowledge in guiding.

This similarity is also reflected in the literature and culture of both peoples. In the work “*Những ngôi sao xa xôi*” (*Distant Stars*) (Le Minh Khue, 1970), the image of “*những ngọn điện trên quảng trường lung linh*” (*the lights on the shimmering square*) not only brings faith but also symbolizes wisdom and civilization, the light that leads people to overcome the harsh circumstances of war. In the architecture of the Hue citadel, the “*高明*” (*noble light*) sign at Ngo Mon gate is a testament to the fact that the wise men are always expected to use their wisdom to rule the country and lead the country on the righteous path. These examples show that, whether expressed through different forms of art or material culture, light in both languages is consistent in symbolizing the enlightening and guiding power of the intellect.

Thus, it can be seen that the metaphor of “*wisdom and guidance*” is “*light*” is a universal conceptual model that exists firmly in both Chinese and Vietnamese cultures. This similarity once again affirms that the human experience is the basis for metaphorical mapping. Although there are small differences in expression, abstraction in Chinese and symbolism, specifically in Vietnamese, both languages express a profound conception that wisdom is the most powerful light that can dispel the darkness of ignorance. Leading people towards understanding and development.

4.1.5 The “*光明*” (*light*) source domain maps to the “*power*” target domain

In both Chinese and Vietnamese, “*light*” is not only associated with knowledge, openness, transparency, or a bright future, but is also mapped to the target domain of “*power*”. With its brilliance, pervasiveness, and ability to dispel darkness, light becomes a metaphorical symbol of dominance, flourishing, and authority.

In Chinese, expressions such as “*弃暗投明*” (*leaving the darkness in favor of light*) not only represent a righteous choice but also imply an act of submission to legitimate authority. The idiom “*光耀门楣*” (*radiating the clan*) also reflects prestige, honor, and prosperity, which is likened to a pervasive light, associated with social status. Even in political essays, “*光明*” (*light*) is often opposed to “*黑暗*” (*dark*) to affirm the righteousness and legitimacy of an ideology.

In Vietnamese, light also has a metaphorical nuance of power, but it is more about social and personal life. Expressions such as “*trương lai rực rỡ*” (*bright future*), “*sự nghiệp sáng lạn*” (*bright career*), or “*con đường sáng sủa*” (*bright path*) all use light to conjure up

images of success, advancement, and solid status. On the contrary, the expressions “*bỏ tối theo sáng*” (leaving the dark for the light), “*quay đầu là bờ*” (turning to the shore) emphasize the aspect of choosing the right path, giving up the bad to aim for safety and benefits, and also implying attachment to power and social order.

Comparative comparison shows that, while Chinese associates “light” with political power, ideology, and social justice, the Vietnamese emphasize more personal power, achievement, and prestige in everyday life. In addition, “light” in Vietnamese is also used to symbolize economic development, social status, and even a change of fate, as in expressions: “*cuộc đời anh ta bước sang trang mới, sáng sủa hơn*” (his life has turned a new, brighter page), “*tương lai rực rỡ đang chờ đón*” (a bright future awaits).

Thus, it can be asserted that in both languages, light is metaphorically used to refer to strength, power, and flourishing. However, the differences in scope and nuances clearly reflect cultural and social characteristics. Chinese is more about philosophical and political thinking. Vietnamese is more about human experience, social relations, and success in personal life

4.1.6 The “光明” (light) source domain maps to the “emotional state” target domain

The metaphor of “light” refers to an emotional state derived from the correlation between visual sensations and psychological experiences. Bright or gentle light, warm or cold, all can evoke corresponding emotional reactions in people. On that basis, both Chinese and Vietnamese use light as a medium to express and portray a wide range of emotions, from positive to negative.

In Chinese, this metaphor manifests itself in the direct connection between light and mental state. The phrase “*生活充满了阳光*” (*life full of sunshine*) does not merely describe living conditions but becomes a standard metaphor for a happy, optimistic, and energetic life. Similarly, the idiom “*满面红光*” (*rosy and radiant face*) has directly mapped the radiance on the face, with a state of joy, happiness, and abundant health within. In literature, light is also used to express more complex emotions. The image of “*月明如昼*” (*the moon is as bright as day*) in “*Shui Hu*” not only creates the atmosphere for the gathering scene but also reflects the excitement, bubbling atmosphere, and belief in the cause of the heroes of Luong Son Bac. In contrast, the moonlight in Tang poetry, as in “*床前明月光*” (*Bright moonlight on the headboard*, Li Bai), is covered with a layer of sadness, expressing the nostalgia for the homeland. The light here becomes cold and lonely, evoking spatial distances and loneliness in the mind.

In Vietnamese, the metaphor of emotions through light is also extremely subtle and diverse, often associated with close images of nature. Moonlight is a multi-meaning symbol, which can evoke serenity and peace, for example: “*Trăng trong, gió mát, cảnh nhàn*” (clear moon, cool breeze, light scenery), or barbaric and nostalgic sadness, such as “*Lô xô xe ngựa hồn thu thảo/ Nền cũ lâu đài bóng tịch dương*” (On the old road, carriages fade into autumn weeds/Upon the ruined halls, the sunset casts its final shade) or reflections on human life such as “*Trăng bao nhiêu tuổi trăng già*” (How old is the moon,

that it grows old). This flexibility shows that light in Vietnamese is not only a simple emotional expression but also a means of expressing spiritual depths and human philosophies. Besides, small artificial light sources often hide great emotional power. The image of the "fire stove" (Bang Viet) does not shine brightly but contains a "persistent fire of faith", becoming a symbol of family love, inner strength, and rich in emotional symbolism, associated with family memories.

It can be seen that both languages are just a metaphor for "emotions, mental feelings are light". The difference lies in the shade and the object chosen. The Chinese language tends to systematize this connection into fixed idioms, and at the same time uses light, especially "moonlight", to express deep, cosmic inner emotions such as "nostalgia, loneliness". Meanwhile, the Vietnamese often portray emotions through light in a simple, intimate, and rich cultural symbolism, such as "fire stove", "moonlight", "sunset", and expand the range of expression from personal emotions to community and national feelings. This difference shows how each culture receives and encodes emotional experiences into language through light imagery.

4.2 Table of systematization of metaphorical mapping model "光明" (light)

In order to clarify the results obtained from the analysis and comparison, we have systematized the metaphorical target domains from the source domain "光明" (light) in Chinese and Vietnamese through the table below.

Table 1: Mapping model from the source domain "光明" (light) to the target domain

Source Domain	Target domain	Chinese Examples	Vietnamese Examples
"光明" (light)	Transparency and publicity	曝光 (expose); 说明 (clarify, explain clearly); 明码标价 (clear price listing); 明枪易躲, 暗箭难防 (stabbing spear is easy to dodge, sneak shooters are difficult to defend)	exposing the truth; expose; bring to light; demonstrate
"光明" (light)	The future, hope	旭日东升 (the sun rises in the East; 曙光 (the first dawn); 光明普照 (light shining everywhere)	after the rain, the sky is bright again; lighting at the end of the tunnel; dawn
"光明" (light)	Honesty and righteousness	光明正大 (righteous light); 明人不做暗事 (the prince who does not do shady things).	The tree is not afraid of dying; righteousness triumphs over wickedness.
"光明" (light)	Wisdom, guidance	智慧之光 (light of wisdom); 真理之光 (light of truth); 明灯 (bright lamp); 心里有光 (light in the heart)	the lamp of knowledge; illuminate the path; wisdom light
"光明" (light)	Power, status, glory	光宗耀祖 (radiating the clan); 弃暗投明 (leaving the dark for the light)	the glory of victory; a bright career; brilliant future

“光明” (light)	Emotional and psychological state	心明眼亮 (bright eyes); 满面红光 (rosy and radiant face); 月明如昼 (the moon is as bright as day)	bright heart; inner stomach; brighten up faith; fire stove, moonlight
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From the table above, it can be seen that both Chinese and Vietnamese are from the source of “light” to the target domain of “*transparency, hope, righteousness, wisdom, power, and emotion*”.

However, the difference is also quite clear: Chinese tends to generalize, abstract, and associate with philosophical and political discourses, while Vietnamese tends to be more specific and closer to life, such as “*exposing the truth*”, “*the lamp of knowledge*”. This reflects the unique cultural characteristics and thinking of each ethnic group and shows the diversity in the mechanism of perceptual metaphors.

5. Conclusion

Comparative research shows that “光明” (light) in Chinese and “light” in Vietnamese are not only a physical phenomenon, but also a rich source domain, which is systematically mapped to many abstract target domains such as transparency, honesty, righteousness, wisdom, power, and emotions. The results show that this is a relatively common and stable metaphorical model in both languages. Besides the similarities, the two languages still show their own nuances: Chinese is more about generalization, associated with philosophy, beliefs, and political discourse; while Vietnamese prioritizes concrete, intimate, and emotional images, reflecting folk experiences and daily life.

Theoretically, the study contributes to clarifying the mechanism of conceptual mapping from the source domain of “light” to the abstract target domain, thereby affirming the close relationship between language, thinking, and culture. In practical terms, the results of the research can be applied in language teaching, translation, and discourse analysis, especially in explaining the cultural-linguistic differences between Chinese and Vietnamese.

However, the study still has some limitations as the survey language is mainly based on idioms and literature, not covering modern media language and the discourse of everyday life. Further studies may expand the scope of the literature to contemporary journalism, advertising, social media, or empirical surveys to further clarify the universality and cultural specificity in the “light” metaphor.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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