

The Semantics of Landscape Terms in Chinese: A Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach

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Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my original work and, to the best of my knowledge, does not include any material previously published or authored by another individual, nor any material substantially used for the attainment of any other degree or diploma, except where proper acknowledgment is given within the thesis.

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT for grammar checking and reviewing my writing during the final stage of my thesis. I used prompts such as 'check grammar' and 'suggest ways to improve clarity, without rewriting my text'. I critically evaluated the feedback provided and revised my work using my own words and expressions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Xu Rao". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Xu Rao

May 2025

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This thesis is not merely an academic endeavour but also a reflection of the personal and intellectual growth over the past years that will continue to shape the trajectory of my future. This research would not have been possible without the invaluable support of academics and the meaningful connections I have formed along the way.

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Abstract

Concepts for describing the physical world, such as ‘mountain’ and ‘river’, are often assumed to reflect ‘brute fact’ (Searle, 1995, pp. 1–4). However, research has revealed that landscape concepts are not only determined by the physical features of the world; rather, they are more often generated by anthropocentric perspectives (Wierzbicka, 1989). Different languages and cultures categorise landscapes in various ways (e.g., Bromhead, 2018; Burenhult, 2008; Mark, 1993; Mark & Turk, 2003; Mark et al., 2007).

To date, there is limited linguistic research on Chinese landscape terms. This study seeks to bridge this gap by conducting a detailed semantic analysis of selected landscape terms in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), revealing unique aspects of Chinese conceptualisation of the physical world. It also demonstrates how the semantic analysis of landscape terms can offer valuable insights into the distinctive worldview embedded in a particular culture.

This study employs the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to provide a fine-grained semantic analysis of 27 landscape terms in MSC, resulting in 25 NSM explications. The semantic analysis in this study adopts a ‘human-centred perspective’ to uncover the ‘folk picture’ of the physical world as discussed by Apresjan (2000, see also Bromhead, 2018; Wierzbicka, 1996, 1997). The use of the NSM approach helps to avoid both circular explications and conceptual ethnocentrism (see, e.g., Bromhead, 2018; Goddard, 2013; Wierzbicka, 1985; Ye, 2017). Through reductive paraphrase

explications (see, e.g., Wierzbicka, 1985, pp. 43–49), this study systematically unpacks the meanings of selected MSC landscape terms.

Through conceptual analysis, this study identifies 29 semantic molecules that serve as ‘building blocks’ (Goddard, 2018, p. 127) in the meanings of MSC landscape concepts. It further identifies both common and culture-specific component types in the explications of landscape terms, as well as recurring patterns, laying the groundwork for future research on semantic templates, which are ‘structured sets of component types shared by words within a particular semantic class’ (Goddard, 2012, p. 724).

Overall, the findings of the present study suggest that Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape is shaped by four key factors: physical environment, human interactions with the land, cultural ideas, and the utility of language. A fine-grained semantic approach proves essential for understanding how different factors work together to shape the conceptualisation of the landscape within a specific language and culture.

In conclusion, this thesis delves into the often-overlooked categorisation of landscape features in MSC, uncovering the intricate internal mechanisms underlying Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the semantic and cultural dimensions of landscape concepts in MSC, offering valuable insights into the distinctive Chinese perspective on the physical world and contributing to the broader multidisciplinary study of landscapes.

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List of Key Acronyms and Abbreviations

BCC	Beijing Language and Culture University Chinese Corpus
GISs	Geographical Information Systems
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
ILCASS	Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
IP	Institute for Planets
MEPRC	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China
MPI	Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics
MSC	Modern Standard Chinese
MWC	Modern Written Chinese
MWRPRC	Ministry of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China
NSM	Natural Semantic Metalanguage
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Note: All landscape terms and corpus data are presented using the contemporary Pinyin system, the official romanisation system for Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), which is taught throughout primary education in China (Years 1 to 6).

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Chapter 1 Introduction

‘Typographical concepts are not determined by the physical structure of the world. They, too, involve conceptualisation and interpretation. They, too, embody the anthropocentric perspective.’

(Wierzbicka, 1989, p. 57)

‘Landscape is not merely what we see, but rather a way of seeing.’

(Taylor, 2009, p. 8; see also Cosgrove, 1984, p.1)

1.1 Background, Significance, and Rationale

Landscape features, such as *shān* 山 (‘mountain’) and *hé* 河 (‘river’), are often considered as “‘brute facts” that exist independently of human institutions’, in contrast to ‘institutional facts that require human institutions for their existence’ (Searle, 1995, pp. 1–4). However, as Smith and Mark (2003) point out, while the existence of individual objects such as organisms, fruits, or tools can be considered brute facts, geographic entities do not exist in the same manner as objects. Instead, the majority of geographic entities are ‘segments of the Earth’s surface that are delimited from adjacent segments in a variety of ways, some of which may be contingent on the conceptual system of the delimiters’ (Mark & Turk, 2003, p. 30).

Different languages and cultures have been proven to categorise landscapes in different ways (e.g., Bromhead, 2017, 2018; Burenhult & Levinson, 2008; Mark et al., 2010, 2011b). As Tuan (2001) notices, ‘people of different cultures differ in how they divide up their world, assign values to its parts, and measure them’ (p. 34). The reason for this, as Wierzbicka (1989)

demonstrates, is that 'natural language does not separate the subjective from the objective, nor the interpretation of the world from the world "as it really is"' (p. 57). The conceptualisation of the landscape is, therefore, anthropocentric in nature.

Before the twenty-first century, landscapes and landscape terminology have been an overlooked domain of linguistic scholarship, particularly in terms of how landscapes are conceptualised and categorised in different languages and cultures (see Bromhead, 2018; Mark et al., 2011b). Onomastics used to be the only branch of linguistics that expressed an interest in landscapes; however, studies in toponymy have been conducted in a manner that is 'divorced from the referential subject matter' (Mark et al., 2011a, p. 3).

Although scarce research has been conducted on the conceptualisation of landscape terms in linguistics in the past, many scholars have long been aware of the importance of linguistic study on the topic of landscapes. For example, Sapir (1912) claims that 'it is the vocabulary of a language that most reflects the physical and social environment of its speakers' (p. 228). Basso (1984) observes that toponymic patterns can reflect the cultural principles through which 'human communities organise and interpret their physical surroundings' (p. 79, as cited in O'Connor & Kroefges, 2008, p. 307). And Wierzbicka (1989), in her early work on linguistic relativity, suggests that topographical concepts can help reveal the anthropocentric perspective embedded in a studied language.

The twenty-first century has witnessed a surge of linguistic studies that focus on landscapes (see detailed Literature Review in Chapter 2), notably ethnophysiology studies (e.g., Mark, 1993; Mark & Turk, 2003, 2007; Mark et al., 2010, 2011b; Smith & Mark, 2001, 2003); the

linguistic studies conducted by the Language and Cognition Group at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (MPI) (Burenhult, 2008); the transdisciplinary studies featured in '*Landscape in Language: Transdisciplinary perspectives*' (Mark et al., 2011b); the ethnoecological approach (Johnson & Hunn, 2010); and the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach (NSM) (Bromhead, 2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018).

Despite their different perspectives, the ethnophysiology approach, the subsequent linguistic interest prompted by ethnophysiology studies, and the ethnoecological approach are all 'limited by the use of English glosses as the metalanguage for defining landscape terms in other languages' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 8). As Wierzbicka (2006a) highlights, using English as a metalanguage attributes an Anglocentric slant to the descriptions of terms in other languages. Therefore, a neutral metalanguage and semantic methodology must be identified to explore further the linguistic categorisation of the physical environment across languages and cultures.

Following Wierzbicka's (1989) pioneering linguistic work on linguistic relativity, Bromhead (2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018) has conducted research on ethnogeographical categorisation using the NSM approach, which enables her to propose an 'indigenous model of meaning' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 14). In her studies, Bromhead (2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018) examines and compares landscape terms in different languages, which include British English, Australian English, French, Spanish, and Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara. Wierzbicka (1985, 1989) and Bromhead (2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018) have convincingly demonstrated that the NSM approach serves as a reliable methodology for accurately describing a speaker's

cognitive world and uncovering the intricate elements and internal logic embedded in the meanings of landscape concepts across various languages and cultures.

Considering the diverse landforms in China, the extensive lexicographical history of the landscape in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) (see Chapter 3.6), and the profound reciprocal influence between the Chinese conceptualisation of landscape and Chinese culture (as detailed in Chapter 4), it is evident that Chinese landscape terms merit extensive semantic study. Such an in-depth investigation can provide valuable insights into how Chinese people interact with nature and categorise the landscape. It also allows us to explore the intricate relationships between the Chinese language, cultural beliefs and ideas, and the cognitive perception of the physical world.

Despite the significance of Chinese landscape terms, landscape terminology of the Chinese language has not attracted scholarly attention. This study aims to fill this gap by applying an NSM-based semantic approach to landscape terms in MSC.

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

This study, as the first systematic exploration of the semantics of landscape terms in MSC, aims to achieve three key aims. Firstly, it seeks to identify a full set of landscape terms in MSC and to reveal the criteria by which Chinese speakers classify various landforms, essentially uncovering the unique way Chinese people conceptualise the physical world. Secondly, it aims to uncover the semantic building blocks and foundational semantic components underlying the meanings of these landscape terms, and to identify the patterns of component types within the Chinese conceptualisation of landscapes. Thirdly, it strives to

investigate the driving factors shaping the Chinese conceptualisation of landscapes, while also examining the interactions among these factors to better understand how they collectively shape the Chinese perception of the physical environment. As part of this aim, the study also compares the identified factors with those reported in previous studies (e.g., Bromhead, 2017, 2018; Burenhult, 2008; Mark et al., 2011b), to shed light on how lexical and semantic variations in landscape terms across languages and cultures offer insights into different worldviews.

Guided by the research aims, this study will undertake a fine-grained semantic analysis of landscape terms in MSC to address the following research questions:

1. How do Chinese speakers conceptualise landscapes as reflected in MSC? What are the distinct features of the Chinese conceptualisation of the physical world?
2. How can the NSM approach uncover the way Chinese people perceive, feel and think about, and interact with their surrounding environment? What are the semantic building blocks and fundamental components in the meanings of landscape concepts in MSC, and can any discernible patterns be identified in the types of components?
3. Based on the conceptual analysis, what are the driving factors influencing MSC speakers' conceptualisation of the landscape?

1.3 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis comprises nine chapters. The current chapter, Chapter 1, outlines the background, significance, and rationale of the research, presents the research aims and questions, and provides an overview of the thesis structure.

In Chapter 2, I will review previous studies on language and landscape, focusing on the ethnophysiography approach, the linguistic studies conducted by the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (MPI), the ethnoecology approach, the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach and key studies of Chinese landscapes across various domains, namely ecolinguistics, humanist geography and cultural landscape studies. Through a detailed literature review, this chapter aims to identify existing gaps in linguistic research on landscape and position the current study within the broader field of landscape studies.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the present study, covering the process of initial data collection and screening, an introduction to the key concepts of the NSM approach, the use of corpus and linguistic evidence in semantic analysis, the ‘human-centred perspective’ and the ‘folk picture’ of the physical world, the language treated in this study, a sketch of Chinese terrains, and a summary of the terms analysed.

Chapter 4 examines the meanings of MSC terms for ‘landscape’ and ‘land’. The chapter begins by examining the MSC term *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit. mountains and rivers) to illustrate the aesthetic perspective intrinsic to Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape. It then analyses the compound terms *héshān* 河山 (territory, lit. river-1 mountain) and *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power/landscape, lit. river-2 mountain) to highlight the connection between the Chinese people’s understanding of the physical world and their national and

cultural identity. Through semantic analyses of these culturally embedded landscape terms, Chapter 4 highlights the importance of landscape concepts in the Chinese linguaculture.

The following four chapters (Chapters 5–8) constitute the core of this study, focusing on lexicographical tradition, semantic analysis, and comparative discussion of landscape terms across four major categories: (a) elevated places, (b) river-places, (c) enclosed-water places and (d) agricultural and cultural landscape. Furthermore, these chapters explore the role of semantic molecules as building blocks of meanings, identify recurring patterns among the component types that make up these concepts, and examine the factors shaping the Chinese conceptualisation of different landforms.

To conclude this thesis, the final chapter provides a summary of the study in response to the research questions outlined in the Introduction. It highlights the key findings, acknowledges the limitations of the study, and suggests avenues for future investigation.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

As Wierzbicka (1989) argues, topographical concepts do not reflect ‘hard facts’, they too ‘involve human conceptualisation and interpretation’ and ‘embody the anthropocentric perspective’ (p.57). Presently, people’s perceptions and cognition of landscapes have been studied in many disciplines—notably in anthropology (e.g., Basso, 1996; Hirsch & O’Hanlon, 1995; Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Hunn, 2010; Sapir, 1912, 1949); humanist geography (e.g., Tuan, 1974); cognitive geography (e.g., Mark, 1993; Mark & Turk, 2003; Mark et al., 2010, 2011; Smith & Mark, 2001, 2003); archaeology (e.g., Tilley, 1994); and linguistics (e.g., Bromhead, 2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018; Burenhult & Levinson, 2008; Enfield, 2008; Wierzbicka, 1989). Although these studies belong to different disciplines and adopt different research methods and perspectives, they are all conducted under the same hypothesis that ‘there resides in every language a characteristic worldview’ (Humboldt, 1999, p. 60).

As noted in Section 1.1, the categorisation of landscapes had received little attention in the field of linguistics until the early twenty-first century. The current surge of linguistic research in landscape studies has been driven by the ethnophysiography approach proposed by Mark and Turk (2003). This approach focuses on investigating landscape feature categories, particularly those denoted by common words (Mark et al., 2011a). Within the field of ethnophysiography, a series of studies on landscapes has been undertaken by the world-renowned geography professor David Mark and his fellow researchers (e.g., Mark, 1993; Mark & Turk, 2003; Mark et al., 2010, 2011b; Smith & Mark, 2001, 2003). In their research, Mark and Turk (2003) observe that while categories for geographic entities may ‘partially reflect the similarities and discontinuities in the landscape, they are also, to some extent, projected onto the landscape by human cognition and language’ (pp. 29–30).

Subsequently, ethnophysiology prompted further scholarly interest in people's perceptions and cognition of landscapes. Building on this interest, the Language and Cognition Group at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (MPI) conducted a cross-linguistic study (Burenhult & Levinson, 2008) on the relationship between landscape and language, examining linguistic categories of landscape terminology and place names across diverse languages. Johnson and Hunn (2010) proposed the ethnoecological approach to study 'people's relationship to the land or their environment, and their understanding of the environment and their relationship to it' (p. 204). Based on Wierzbicka's (1989) early work on linguistic relativity, Bromhead (2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018) conducts her extended semantic study of ethnogeographical categorisation by applying the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach.

To date, the semantic aspects of Chinese landscape terms have attracted limited scholarly attention. Nevertheless, the relationship between Chinese culture and the landscape has been explored within other disciplines, particularly ecolinguistics (e.g., Huang, 2016; Huang & Zhao, 2019); humanist geography (e.g., Tuan, 1974, 1976, 2001, 2007, 2008) and cultural landscape (e.g., Taylor, 2007, 2009, 2017; Zhang & Taylor, 2020).

This chapter provides a detailed synthesis of the four major approaches to landscape terminology previously mentioned—namely the ethnophysiology study (Section 2.1), the linguistic studies conducted by the MPI Language and Cognition Group (Section 2.2), the anthropological approach (Section 2.3) and the NSM approach (Section 2.4). It also reviews key studies on Chinese landscapes from the fields of ecolinguistics, humanist geography and

cultural landscape studies (Section 2.5). The chapter concludes with a comparative discussion of these studies, aiming to identify gaps in existing linguistic research on landscape and to position the current study within the broader context of landscape research, while underscoring its academic contribution.

2.1 Ethnophysiography and the Landscape in Language Workshop

In his early work on the theoretical framework for defining and representing different types of geographical entities, Mark (1993) declares that nature cannot be ‘cut at its joints’ (p. 271). He emphasises that different languages and cultures structure and interpret their worlds in diverse ways (Mark, 1993). It is believed that, unlike organisms and artefacts, ‘geographical features are often perceived in different ways across languages and cultures’ (Smith & Mark, 2003, pp. 411–412).

Building upon their foundational work in geographical ontology (e.g., Mark, 1993; Smith & Mark, 1998, 2001), David Mark and Andrew Turk initiated the ethnophysiography study in their study on landscape categories in Yindjibarndi (Mark & Turk, 2003). The basic hypothesis of the ethnophysiography study is that ‘people from different language groups have different ways of conceptualising landscape, as evidenced by different terminology and ways of talking about, and naming, landscape features’ (Mark, Turk & Stea, 2011, p. 36).

Together with the research program on space and landscape, coordinated by Stephen Levinson and Niclas Burenhult of the Language and Cognition Group at the MPI (see Section 2.3), an international ‘Landscape in language workshop’ was held, and a series of studies on landscapes was conducted from multiple perspectives. A key issue identified in the workshop

was the need for an integrated, transdisciplinary approach to ethnophysiology research, as landscape studies require collaboration among scholars from multiple disciplines (Mark et al., 2011b). A potential solution that Turk (2011, pp. 54–56) proposes is the use of phenomenology to provide ‘an overarching paradigm’ for ethnophysiology studies.

As Mark, Turk & Stea (2011) assert, ethnophysiology is the study of ‘different human conceptualisations of landscape, especially as indicated by the differences in how languages use generic terms and proper names (toponyms) for landscape features’ (p. 25). This field of study is primarily conducted through semantic comparisons of terms for landscape features across different languages. Although there are no fixed methods for data collection and analysis in ethnophysiology studies, terms used to refer to landscape and its components are often collected by consulting dictionaries and literature, as well as through fieldwork. In addition, photograph sorting and field interviews are often employed to identify the meanings of selected landscape terms, which are then explained and compared to their English counterparts (see Mark et al., 2011b).

Ethnophysiology studies have revealed notable differences in how languages conceptualise and describe landscape features, as well as the key factors that influence these linguistic patterns (see Mark, Turk, & Stea, 2011, pp. 38–41). The remaining question concerns how these factors interact with one another. The research results of ethnophysiology studies are presented through a descriptive model, which outlines all the ethnophysiological factors that can help people understand and explain the differences in how various languages refer to landscapes (Mark et al., 2011b).

2.2 The 2008 Special Issue on Landscapes of *Language Sciences*

Prompted by ethnophysiography studies, a series of linguistic studies exploring the relationship between language and landscape was conducted by the Language and Cognition Group at the MPI and subsequently published in the 2008 Special Issue of *Language Sciences* on Landscapes (Burenhult & Levinson, 2008). This collaborative work on landscapes mainly focused on the ‘formal and functional properties of place names’ and ‘the linguistic categorisation of the physical environment’ (Burenhult & Levinson, 2008, p. 140).

The novel aspect of this collection is that it proposed the term ‘semplates’ (i.e., ‘semantic templates’) as a general label for ‘prefabricated cultural or linguistic systems’ (see, Burenhult & Levinson, 2008, pp. 144–145). Although some individual landscape terms are examined semantically in the studies featured in this special issue, the main emphasis is on landscape category systems and on how broader linguistic issues can be approached through the lens of landscape (Bromhead, 2018).

Studies in this issue often begin with an outline of the sets of terms, providing both a descriptive foundation and a prerequisite to the article’s theoretical argument (Enfield, 2008). These sketches encompass the environment and its physical features, along with an inventory of landscape terms for each feature (e.g., Enfield, 2008, pp. 228–240). Data collection methods include the verification and exploration of dictionaries, as well as elicitation methods such as field trips, interviews, and casual conversations (e.g., Brown, 2008; Burenhult, 2008; Enfield, 2008). A recurring theme across the articles in this special

issue is the tendency for landscape terms to be organised according to ‘an imposed cognitive scheme or template’ (Burenhult & Levinson, 2008, p. 138).

The main findings of this special issue indicate that there is significant variation both within and across languages in how landscapes and place names are categorised (Burenhult & Levinson, 2008). Moreover, it has demonstrated that language exhibits considerable flexibility in representing the physical landscape, with attention also given to the underlying factors that shape such categorisation (Burenhult & Levinson, 2008). According to Levinson (2008), the primary factors driving the categorisation of landscapes include ‘perceptual or cognitive prominence, the affordances they provide or the limitations they place on human activities, and conceptual frameworks and cultural beliefs’ (pp. 257–258). At the same time, Enfield (2008) argues in his study of Lao landscape terms that a community's agreement on specific meanings for certain words is ‘not a direct result of perception or cultural practice’, but a ‘secondary outcome of these factors, mediated through language use’ (p. 252).

Both the transdisciplinary studies mentioned in Section 2.1 and the special issue of *Language Sciences* fall under the same research approach, each inspired by the theoretical framework of ethnophysiography introduced by Mark and Turk (2003). However, the studies discussed in the special issue are specifically conducted from a linguistic perspective.

2.3 The Anthropological Approach

As indicated in the Introduction, there is a history of interest regarding landscapes in the field of anthropology (e.g., Basso, 1996; Hirsch & O’Hanlon, 1995; Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Hunn, 2010; Sapir, 1912). The most recent and relevant theory in ethnoecology, introduced

by Johnson and Hunn (2010) in *Landscape Ethnoecology: Concepts of Biotic and Physical Space*, examines people's cultural understandings and interactions with the land, encompassing both cognised and embodied knowledge. This study was conducted through an in-depth exploration of people's 'knowledge of the land' (Johnson, 2010, p. 205). Further, the study of toponymy is also integrated into this investigation, as place names can help reveal focal points of the landscape that are preserved in memories, which, in turn, are critically important pieces of information for locating and acquiring resources (Hunn & Meilleur, 2010). This special volume offers valuable insights into human-environment interactions across diverse cultures.

All three of the approaches discussed above offer valuable insights into how people conceptualise the landscape and their relationship with it. However, these studies fall short of delving into the detailed meanings of individual landscape terms in the languages being studied. In addition, these studies rely on English and complex concepts to explain the meanings of landscape terms. As a result, these approaches inevitably face the risk of Anglocentric and ethnocentric biases, as well as circulation in their conceptual interpretations (see Bromhead, 2018; Ye, 2017).

2.4 The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) is 'a mini-language of semantic explanation' (Bromhead, 2018, p.11). It is considered the 'most well-developed cognitive approach to semantics' (Goddard, 2018, p. 6). The NSM approach uses a vocabulary of 65 words—known as semantic primes—to explain more complex words via reduced paraphrases. With its use of semantic primes and universal grammar, the NSM approach is believed to enable maximal

translatability between languages (Ye, 2017). Up to date, the NSM approach has also already been performed in many semantic domains, such as emotions (e.g., Travis, 1997; Wierzbicka, 1972), speech act verbs (e.g., Wierzbicka, 1987), kinship (Xue, 2016, 2024; Xue & Ye, 2022), and concrete nouns (e.g., Wierzbicka, 1985; Ye, 2017).

Landscape concepts were first discussed under the NSM framework by Wierzbicka (1989) in her pioneering work on linguistic relativity, where she argued that topographical concepts are also shaped by human conceptualisation and interpretation. Building on this, a series of NSM studies on landscape terms in English, French, and Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara have been conducted by Bromhead (e.g., 2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018). In her 2018 study, she provides full NSM explications for approximately 50 landscape concepts across six landscape categories (e.g., long flowing-water places and elevated places), discussing a total of around 60 landscape concepts and comparing their meanings across different languages and cultures (Bromhead, 2018).

Bromhead (2018) agrees with Wierzbicka (1989) that landscape concepts can be a human-centred perspective. Her research highlights both similarities and distinctions in how landscapes are categorised and how landscape terms are semantically structured across languages (Bromhead, 2018). As a result, she concludes that ‘landscape categorisation is based on both intellectual and utilitarian concerns’ (Bromhead, 2018, p. 196).

The key findings of NSM studies of landscape terms in English and other languages (see Bromhead, 2018, pp. 193–198; see also Bromhead, 2011a, 2011b, 2017; Wierzbicka, 1989) indicate that landscape categorisation can be language- and culture-specific, with concepts

grounded in human vision and spatial experience. While some elements of landscape categorisation are ‘common elements’, others are shaped by ‘culture-specific factors’ (Bromhead, 2018, p. 196). Furthermore, lexical semantic analysis can reveal ‘the relationships between lexical semantics and categorisation, on the other hand, and wider cultural models of land use’ (Bromhead, 2018, p. 196). Additionally, the NSM approach offers a common framework for comparing ‘local variations’ in the ways different cultures conceptualise the landscape (Bromhead, 2018, p. 198).

2.5 Research on Chinese Landscape

To date, Chinese landscape terms have not received significant attention in mainstream linguistics. Instead, studies of Chinese culture and landscapes have primarily been conducted within three domains: ecolinguistics (e.g., Huang, 2016; Huang & Zhao, 2019); humanist geography (e.g., Tuan, 1974, 1976, 2001, 2007, 2008); and cultural landscape (e.g., Han, 2008, 2012; Taylor, 2007, 2009, 2017; Zhang & Taylor, 2020).

‘Ecolinguistics’ encompasses two complementary strands of studies of landscape terms-- ‘the ecology of language(s)’ and ‘ecological linguistics’ (Fill & Penz, 2018, p. 2). Ecolinguistics ‘is the study of the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans with other species and the physical environment’ (Stibbe, 2021, p. 203). Its primary goal is to create linguistic theories that view humans not only as members of society but also as integral parts of the broader ecosystems essential for life (The International Ecolinguistics Association). Additionally, it seeks to demonstrate how linguistics can contribute to addressing critical ecological challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice (e.g., Fill & Penz, 2018; Stibbe, 2021).

Ecolinguistics research has been extensively developed in China, focusing on how Chinese people perceive the material world and utilising language to foster environmental awareness (e.g., Huang, 2016; Huang & Zhao, 2019). This field of study primarily adopts a pragmatic approach rather than a semantic one. While it provides valuable insights into the broader relationship between the Chinese people and their environment, with a focus on addressing ecological issues, it falls short of offering detailed analyses of how Chinese people conceptualise their environment.

Humanist geography is a subfield of geography that focuses on human experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the environment (Tuan, 2001). It aims to understand how individuals and communities interact with, experience, and ascribe meaning to the spaces and places around them (Tuan, 1976). Unlike traditional geography, which often focuses on physical landscapes or spatial patterns, humanist geography is concerned with subjective experiences and the cultural, emotional, and symbolic significance of places (see, e.g., Tuan, 1974, 1976, 2001). According to Tuan (1976), humanist geography seeks to uncover ‘how geographical activities and phenomena reveal the quality of human awareness’ while also ‘interpreting human experience in its ambiguity, ambivalence, and complexity’ (pp. 267-275).

In his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, the human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan proposed the experiential perspective of human conceptualisation of the landscape (Tuan, 2001). He argues that the term *experience* is ‘a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality’ and these modes can be ‘sensation, perception and conception’ (Tuan, 2001, p. 8). According to Tuan (2001, pp. 8–10), emotion

and thought influence every aspect of human experience. Though they exist at opposite ends of the experiential spectrum, both are essential for understanding the world (Tuan 2001).

While Tuan's research is not strictly linguistic and does not focus on analysing the meanings of individual landscape terms, his concept of 'experiential perspective' offers valuable guidance and insight for the present study (see Chapter 3.5).

Cultural landscape studies (e.g., Han, 2008, 2012; Lewis, 1979; Taylor, 2007, 2009, 2017; Zhang & Taylor, 2020) represent another significant branch of research that has been widely applied to the study of Chinese conceptualisation of landscapes. This field explores how cultural values, traditions, and practices are embedded within the Chinese understanding of the physical world, and how these cultural elements shape both the natural and man-made environments in China. A key topic in this line of research on Chinese landscapes is the exploration of perspectives on the World Heritage-listed West Lake Cultural Landscape. This discussion arises from the exclusion of the Longjing tea gardens (龙井茶园) as an integral part of West Lake. They were excluded on the grounds that they do not exemplify the ideals of landscape aesthetics, with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Advisory Body Evaluation (2011, as cited in Zhang & Taylor, 2020, p. 168) stating that 'the plantations represent a "farmed" landscape and do not contribute to the designed landscape'.

The exclusion of Longjing tea plantations (gardens) highlights the importance of a proper understanding of Chinese landscape concepts, specifically *cháyuan* 茶园 (tea garden), in recognising world heritage sites in China. Researchers of cultural landscape studies strive to argue that places like the tea garden in West Lake area are places 'where we ought to make

room for the physical experiences of routine life of ordinary people' (Harvey, 2015, p. 920) and where ordinary people 'reminisce and remember their personal and collective memories...find connection with Chinese culture values and meanings expressed as sense of feeling in the landscape' (Zhang & Taylor, 2020, p. 176).

Like the humanist geography approach, cultural landscape studies also adopt an experiential perspective, emphasising how ordinary individuals and communities interact with heritage sites within the Chinese context. This approach explores the deeper, subjective connections people have with these sites, considering not just their physical appearance but also the cultural, historical, and emotional significance they hold (Zhang & Taylor, 2020). By focusing on the lived experiences of those who interact with heritage landscapes, it seeks to understand how these places shape, and are shaped by, cultural identity and memory (Taylor & Xu, 2019). This perspective promotes a more comprehensive understanding of China's cultural heritage. It brings Eurocentrism into focus in cross-cultural heritage conservation discussions, particularly regarding landscapes, which 'demand rigorous debate in Asia'. (Taylor & Xu, 2019, p. 324).

Despite invaluable contributions from the aforementioned three approaches to Chinese landscapes, research on the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape still lacks a nuanced and detailed semantic perspective. A fine-grained semantic analysis can bridge this gap by uncovering the intricate ways in which cultural and cognitive factors shape landscape concepts. Explicating landscape concepts with a cross-translatable metalanguage like NSM (see Chapter 2.6) allows culture-specific perspectives to be conveyed in a way that is

accessible and comprehensible to speakers of different languages, thereby promoting a deeper cross-cultural understanding of how landscapes are perceived and categorised.

2.6 General Discussion

All the studies mentioned above concern people's understanding of landscapes and concur that 'the categorisation of landscape can be language and culture-specific' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 198). A key methodological issue is how to reveal the culture-specific meaning. Compared with the linguistic research of the MPI Language and Cognition Group and the ethnoecology approach, ethnophysiography study directs more attention to the semantics of landscape terms by taking advantage of a descriptive model. This descriptive model is designed to present all ethnophysiographical factors that can help people understand and explain the differences concerning how various languages refer to landscape, making it an incredibly comprehensive approach (Mark et al., 2011b). However, a key challenge with this descriptive model is its ever-expanding scope as new factors emerge. This makes it increasingly difficult to analyse individual landscape terms or an entire inventory of landscape terms in a given language using this model, particularly when their meanings have not yet been thoroughly unpacked through fine-grained semantic analysis.

Furthermore, the descriptive model proposed by ethnophysiography researchers adopts a broad, macroscopic perspective, considering all relevant factors rather than focusing on specific elements that shape people's perceptions and conceptualisations of particular landforms within a certain language and culture.

The linguistic research conducted by the MPI Language and Cognition Group places a strong emphasis on the categorisation systems of landscapes (Bromhead, 2018). Their studies often involve compiling inventories of landscape terms in various languages and analysing these in relation to their English counterparts. This comparative approach aims to uncover both universal patterns and language-specific differences in the ways landscapes are conceptualised and categorised (e.g., Enfield, 2008; O'Connor & Kroefges, 2008). Like the ethnophysiography approach mentioned earlier, the MPI linguistic approach does not delve into the detailed meanings of individual landscape terms.

Compared to the above-mentioned two approaches, ethnoecology takes a more holistic approach towards landscapes, aiming to recognise a single multidimensional landscape partition by exploring people's knowledge of their environment (Hunn & Meilleur, 2010, p. 20). Despite their different perspectives, the three approaches discussed above are all limited by the use of English as the metalanguage for defining landscape terms in other languages. As Wierzbicka (2006a) highlights, using English as a metalanguage attributes an Anglocentric slant to the descriptions of terms in other languages. Therefore, a neutral metalanguage, semantic theory, and methodology must be identified to explore further the linguistic categorisation of the physical environment across languages and cultures.

Bromhead's previous works on landscape terms revealed that the NSM approach provides 'a common measure for comparing "location variations"' and makes it possible to 'translate landscape categories without distorting their meaning' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 198). In addition, as the inventory of semantic primes and their syntax are believed to be universal (Goddard

and Wierzbicka 1994, 2002), it enables the present research to study the semantics of landscape terms in Chinese from a neutral position.

Moreover, the NSM approach enables a detailed comparison of the semantics of landscape terms across languages by employing ‘fine-grained, reductive paraphrases’ to explicate concepts (Bromhead, 2018, p. 3). Currently, there is no NSM-based research focused on landscape categories and terms in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC). The present study aims to fill this gap by building on the foundational work of Wierzbicka (1989) and Bromhead (2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2018). By conducting an extensive semantic analysis of landscape terms in MSC, this research will offer insights into the unique ways in which the Chinese language conceptualises the landscape, contributing to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural variation in the conceptualisation of the physical environment. The following chapter will provide a detailed introduction to the natural semantic metalanguage.

Chapter 3 Methodology

In this chapter, I will first introduce the methodology employed for the initial data collection and selection, as outlined in Section 3.1. This section is crucial for laying the groundwork of the present study by ensuring that the selected landscape terms for analysis are relevant, reliable, and, most importantly, representative of the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape.

In Section 3.2, I will introduce the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach employed in this study and discuss key concepts within this framework.

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 will detail the corpus and linguistic evidence used in this study to support the conceptual analyses. Section 3.3 will discuss the selection of the corpus and provide a detailed discussion of the linguistic data used in this study. Section 3.4 will discuss the specific linguistic evidence used in this study for semantic analysis.

Section 3.5 highlights that the conceptual analysis in this study focuses on the folk, rather than the scientific, perception of the world. This approach acknowledges the inclusion of anthropocentric perspectives and shared cultural biases, as discussed by Wierzbicka (1997). It also emphasises a conceptual analysis rooted in an experiential perspective (see, e.g., Taylor, 2009; Tuan, 2001). This approach aims to generate human-centred explications of Chinese landscape terms. To achieve this, the explications prioritise the use of 'place' as the first component rather than 'thing,' highlighting that landscape concepts represent locations

where ‘people can be and do things’ (Bromhead, 2018, p. 9), rather than merely objective, external entities.

Finally, Section 3.6 will define the language examined in this study. This clarification is crucial as it situates the research within the linguistic and cultural context of Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), ensuring that the analysis represents the general conceptualisation of MSC speakers.

3.1 Initial Data Collection

At the initial stage of this study, I undertook a preliminary investigation into the lexicographical treatment of landscape-related terms across the history of the Chinese language. This chapter provides a concise overview of that lexicographical tradition and outlines the data collection process employed in the present study.

Since the pre-Qin era (prior to 221 BCE), the ancient Chinese developed a deep understanding of diverse landforms and the influence of geographical environments on their way of life. Over time, these insights into nature became deeply embedded in the Chinese language, serving as a vital medium for articulating their worldview.

The systematic documentation of Chinese landscape terms can be traced back to *Ėryă* 尔雅 (second or third century BCE/2022). The *Ėryă* is regarded as the first comprehensive classificatory dictionary in China, organised according to semantic categories, with its definitions based on commonly used language norms (Hu & Fang, 2004) and it aims to ‘promote the correct and proper use of assorted Chinese vocabulary for educated Chinese’

(Xue, 2024, p. 31; see also Coblin, 1993). Despite the uncertainties surrounding its author and the time of compilation, the *Ěryǎ* had been ‘venerated as an authoritative guide to the language of the ancient texts since late Han Dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE, 25–220 CE) and Six Dynasties periods (220–589 CE)’, and it was ‘elevated to the status of a classic’ by the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) (Coblin, 1993, p. 95).

The *Ěryǎ* consists of 19 sections, with 12 focusing on concepts related to nature, of which four sections are dedicated explicitly to place names and landscape terms (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022). Section Nine, *Shìdì* 释地 (lit. to explain land), focuses on place names and landscape terms related to flatlands and grasslands (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, pp. 713–741). Section Ten, *Shìqīū* 释丘 (lit. to explain hills), and Section Eleven, *Shìshān* 释山 (lit. to explain mountains), cover place names and landscape terms for elevated areas (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, pp. 742–758). Section Twelve, *Shìshuǐ* 释水 (lit. to explain water), is devoted to water-related places and various related items, including islands and boats (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, pp. 775–794; see also Coblin, 1993, pp. 94–95). Altogether, the *Ěryǎ* provides explanations for 242 place names and landscape terms. The entries of definitions in *Ěryǎ* do not make a clear distinction between place names and landscape terms, as both types are interspersed throughout the sections dedicated to landscape features. With most sections of the *Ěryǎ* designated to explaining nature-related concepts and its significant role in Chinese classical literature, it serves as a vital starting point for exploring the Chinese perception of the physical environment.

Apart from *Ěryǎ*, *Shuōwén Jiězì* 说文解字 (100 CE), the ‘first comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters’ (Boltz, 1993, p. 429) compiled by Xu Shen (ca. 55–149 CE), also provides

explanations for landscape terms. Unlike the classification based on semantic categories in *Ėryǎ*, *Shuōwén Jiězhì* is arranged according to the radicals of Chinese characters (*Shuōwén Jiězhì*, 100 CE/2011). Some concepts are not explained in *Ėryǎ* but are explained in *Shuōwén Jiězhì*. For example, *Shuōwén Jiězhì* includes the explanation of *hú* 湖 ('lake') as 'shuǐ jù zhī 水聚之 (a place where water gathers)' (*Shuōwén Jiězhì*, 100 CE/2011, p. 1827), whereas the term is not explained in *Ėryǎ*. Along with *Ėryǎ*, *Shuōwén Jiězhì* functions as a reference point for tracing the etymology of the landscape terms examined in this thesis.

Throughout Chinese history, there are numerous texts that provide comprehensive geographical records during a specific historical period. Notable examples include the *Treatise on Geography* (Ban, 32–92 CE; see also Hulsewé, 1993, p. 129) of *Hànshū* 汉书 compiled by Ban Gu (32–92 CE), *Tàipíng Huányǔ Jì* 太平寰宇记 (*Universal Geography of the Taiping Era* [976–983 CE]) compiled during the Northern Song period (960–1127 CE) by Yue Shi (930–1007 CE), and *Dúshǐ Fāngyú Jìyào* 读史方輿纪要 (*Essentials of Historical Geography*) compiled during the Qing dynasty by Gu Zuyu (1631–1692 CE). These texts primarily record geographical names, along with other important types of geographical information focusing on areas such as agricultural products, administrative organisation, and strategic significance in governance and warfare, rather than providing definitions of geographical terms.

Additionally, geographical records have been compiled specifically for certain types of landforms. Among these records, the most notable one is the *Water Classic* 水经 (Sang, ca. 25–220 CE), which lists 137 big rivers in China, and the subsequent *Commentary on the*

Water Classic 水经注 (Li, 368–534 CE/2022), which records more than 1000 rivers in China, as well as the special features of these rivers and many other water courses along these rivers (see, e.g., Chen, 1987).

Other similar geographical works that focus on specific types of landforms, particularly rivers and mountains, include: *Shānhǎi Jīng* 山海经 (*Of Ancient Mountains and Seas*, sixth to eighth century CE), an ancient Chinese text that ‘depicts lands and seas, animals and plants, sometimes mythical, as well as divine beings’ (Lee, 2019, p. 6); *Yǔ Gòng* 禹贡, a section of *Shàngshū* 尚书 (*The Book of Documents*, fourth century BCE–fourth century CE), that describes the ‘geographical divisions of ancient China, focusing on rivers, lakes, mountains, and water management projects vital for governance’ (Shaughnessy, 1993, p. 377); and *Shuǐdào Tígāng* 水道提纲 (*Outline of Waterways*) compiled by Qi Zhaonan (1703–1768 CE), a detailed record of China’s water systems in Qing dynasty (Qi, 1703–1768 CE).

In MSC, which is the language treated in this study (see Chapter 3.7), landscape documentation also exist in two forms: landscape terms recorded in dictionaries, such as the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* 现代汉语词典 (*Modern Chinese Dictionary*) (ILCASS, 2005) and the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Fēnlèi Cídiǎn* 现代汉语分类词典 (*Modern Chinese Classification Dictionary*) (Su, 2017); and place names in encyclopaedic resources, such as *Zhōngguó Hé Hú Dàdiǎn* 中国河湖大典 (*Encyclopedia of Rivers and Lakes in China*) (Ministry of Water Resources of the People’s Republic of China [MWRPRC], 2010–2014). In the *Modern Chinese Classification Dictionary*, landscape-related terms are classified into 10 categories, encompassing over 500 entries with definitions. However, it is worth noting that within these entries, the dictionary

does not clearly differentiate between various types of concepts, such as geographical terms, place names, descriptive terms, or materials. For instance, landscape terms referring to elevated landforms, different soil types such as *hóngrǎng* 红壤 (red earth) and *huáng tǔdì* 黄土地 (yellow earth), and mountain names are all grouped under the overarching category of *shāndì* 山地 ('mountains') (Su, 2017, p. 42).

After consulting the two contemporary dictionaries mentioned above, a total of 526 entries relating to landscape terms in MSC were collected and examined. During this initial data collection phase, the study finds that all the landscape terms collected from the two dictionaries originate from ancient Chinese. They date back at least to the time of the two classical dictionaries mentioned above, and continue to be used today, either retaining their original meanings or undergoing some degree of semantic change.

A comparison of the definitions of landscape terms found in these two contemporary dictionaries and those in ancient Chinese dictionaries reveals a noticeable trend in the conceptualisation of the landscape: a shift from specific references to more general references over time. The ancient Chinese exhibited a more detailed and nuanced approach to categorising landscapes compared to the MSC. For example, the ancient dictionary *Ėryǎ* reveals that elevated places were classified based on factors such as their proximity to water features and roads, an example being *liè* 埭 (水潦所还, 埭丘 'A hill enclosed by water and boundaries is referred to as *lièqīū*') (*Ėryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, p. 745). This shift from a more detailed to a more generalised categorisation signifies a broader reorientation in the way the Chinese conceptualise and classify the physical landscape.

Additionally, the initial inquiry revealed that certain terms used in ancient Chinese as place names have gradually evolved into general landscape terms for specific landforms. For instance, the term *jiāng* 江 ('river') initially referred exclusively to the Yangtze River, but later came to denote large river-places in general in MSC. This semantic change may influence how MSC speakers perceive and interpret the term *jiāng* when referring to major rivers.

Furthermore, the investigation identified that elevated and water-related landforms hold a central place in the Chinese conceptualisation of the physical world, as evidenced by the extensive vocabulary used to describe these two categories of geographical features. The prominence of elevated and water-related landforms highlights their importance within the Chinese conceptualisation of the physical world.

Building upon the preliminary inquiry discussed above, this study has carefully selected 27 landscape terms from five distinct categories of landforms to investigate their meanings in a fine-grained manner. The five categories encompass various aspects of the physical environment, including MSC landscape terms for 'landscape' and 'land', elevated places, long flowing-water places, enclosed water places, and agricultural and cultural landscapes. They offer a comprehensive perspective on the way Chinese people conceptualise and articulate their relationship with their surrounding environment. By examining the meanings of these 27 terms, this study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the unique Chinese conceptualisation of the physical world and its integration with cultural practices and beliefs.

3.2 The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach

Inspired by Leibniz's concept of the 'alphabet of human thoughts' (as cited in Wierzbicka, 2021, p. 318), Wierzbicka created the NSM approach based on Leibniz's famous claim that 'if nothing could be understood in itself, nothing could be understood at all' (as cited in Goddard, 2018, p. 16). NSM is considered a mini-language that is universal (see Goddard, 2012, 2018; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; Ye, 2017). It is believed that the NSM approach is 'maximally clear, flexible and non-Anglocentric, and enables a fine-grained resolution of semantic detail' (Goddard, 2013, p. 247).

The NSM framework represents meanings through paraphrases using semantic primes, which are universal concepts, and semantic molecules, which are 'complex, but relatively simple concepts' and 'act as building blocks of more complex meanings' (Goddard, 2018, p. 127). This method allows researchers to analyse meanings systematically and with clarity. In this study, the NSM approach is employed to accurately explicate the meanings of selected Chinese landscape terms. It also helps identify nuanced differences in meanings between terms, ensuring a detailed and culturally sensitive understanding. Furthermore, the NSM approach helps to avoid the risks of terminological and conceptual ethnocentrism by avoiding reliance on language-specific frameworks (see, e.g., Bromhead, 2018; Ye, 2017).

In the following sections, the core concepts of NSM, particularly those essential for the detailed analysis of Chinese landscape terms in this study, will be thoroughly introduced and explored.

3.2.1 Semantic Primes

The most important concept in the NSM framework is semantic primes. NSM researchers believe that there are semantic primes that are shared by all people and that they can be used to explain complex linguistic meanings in a neutral way (see, e.g., Goddard, 2018; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1994, 2014; Wierzbicka, 1972, 1985, 1992, 1996; Ye, 2017). These semantic primes represent the ‘conceptual core shared by all people’ (Ye, 2017, p. 6).

According to Goddard (2018), a semantic prime is a word meaning or concept that cannot be further broken down into simpler terms without circularity. In other words, semantic primes are the irreducible building blocks of meaning. As Goddard (2015) explains, semantic primes serve as the ‘bedrock of linguistic meaning’, providing a universal framework for semantic analysis (p. 2).

Over the past four decades, scholars working in the field of NSM have identified 65 semantic primes. Table 3.1 lists the sets of semantic primes in their Chinese forms alongside their English equivalents.

TABLE 3-1

Chinese Semantic Primes with English Equivalents

Semantic primes and English equivalents	Syntactic and thematic grounds
我 wǒ, 你 nǐ, 某人 mǒurén ~ 有人 yǒurén ~ 人 rén, 什么 shénme ~ 某事 mǒushi ~ 东西 dōngxi, 人们 rénmen ~ 人 rén, 身体 shēntǐ I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING ~ THING, PEOPLE, BODY	Substantives
种 zhǒng, 部分 bùfen	Relational substantives

这 zhè, 同一 tóngyī ~ 一样 yīyàng, 别(的) bié (de) ~ 其他 (的) qítā (de) ~ 另 lìng THIS, THE SAME, OTHER ~ ELSE	Determiners
一 yī, 两 liǎng, 有的 yǒude ~ 有些 yǒuxiē ~ 一些 yīxiē, 都 dōu ~ 所有 (的) suǒyǒu (de), (很) 多 (hěn) duō ~ 许多 xǔduō, (很) 少 (hěn) shǎo ~ 一点 yīdiǎn ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH ~ MANY, LITTLE ~ FEW	Quantifiers
好 hǎo, 坏 huài ~ 不好 bùhǎo GOOD, BAD	Evaluators
大 dà, 小 xiǎo BIG, SMALL	Descriptors
知道 zhīdào, 想 xiǎng, 要 yào ~ 想要 xiǎng yào, 不要 bù yào, 感觉 gǎnjué, 看 kàn ~ 看到 kàndào, 听 tīng ~ 听到 tīngdào KNOW, THINK, WANT, DO NOT WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	Mental predicates
说 shuō, 字 zì ~ 词 cí ~ 话 huà, 真 zhēn SAY, WORDS, TRUE	Speech
做 zuò, 发生 fāshēng, 动 dòng DO, HAPPEN, MOVE	Actions, events, movement
在 zài, 有 yǒu, 是 shì BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	Location, existence, specification
(是) 我的 (shì) wǒde (IS) MINE	Possession
生活 shēnghuó ~ 活 huó, 死 sǐ LIVE, DIE	Life and death
时候 shíhòu, 现在 xiànzài, 之前 zhīqián, 之后 zhīhòu, 很久 hénjiǔ, 一会儿 yīhuìr, 一段时间 yīduàn shíjiān, 一刻 yīkè TIME ~ WHEN, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	Time

地方 <i>dìfāng</i> , 这里 <i>zhèlǐ</i> , 上面 <i>shàngmiàn</i> ~ 上- <i>shàng</i> , 下面 <i>xiàmiàn</i> ~ 下- <i>xià</i> , 远 <i>yuǎn</i> , 近 <i>jìn</i> , 边 <i>biān</i> , 里面 <i>lǐmiàn</i> , 接触 <i>jiēchù</i>	Place
PLACE ~ WHERE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH	
不 <i>bù</i> ~ 没 <i>méi</i> , 也许 <i>yěxǔ</i> , 能 <i>néng</i> , 因为 <i>yīnwèi</i> , 如果 <i>rúguǒ</i>	Logical concepts
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	
很 <i>hěn</i> , 多 <i>duō</i> ~ 还 <i>hái</i>	Intensifier, augmentor
VERY, MORE	
像 <i>xiàng</i> ~ 这样 <i>zhèyàng</i>	Similarity
LIKE ~ AS	

As shown in the table above, semantic primes are organised into categories based on syntactic and thematic grounds, such as ‘substantives’, ‘evaluators’, and ‘place’. These categories reflect the fundamental roles that semantic primes play in structuring meaning across languages. As Bromhead (2018) states, NSM semantic primes ‘exist as meanings of lexical units’ and ‘may take formally complex forms’ (p. 13). For instance, in Mandarin, the prime *dìfāng* 地方 (place) appears as a compound word, while *yīduàn shíjiān* 一段时间 (some time) exists in the form of a phrase. Despite their formal complexity, both convey irreducible primitive meanings within their respective semantic contexts.

NSM semantic primes are used in explications according to a certain ‘conceptual syntax,’ which is also known as ‘combinatorial properties’. These combinatorial properties can be summarised as a) basic combinatorics; b) basic and extended valences of predicates and quantifiers; and c) the complement options of the ‘mental’ primes KNOW, THINK, and WANT (see Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2002). The NSM approach posits that both its inventory of semantic primes and their syntactic combinations are universal. This hypothesis is supported

by extensive empirical research across diverse languages (e.g., Goddard, 2008; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1994; Peeters, 2006; Wierzbicka, 1972, 1992; Ye, 2017). The universality of NSM ensures that its explications are cross-translatable, making it possible to compare the meanings of landscape terms across linguistic and cultural boundaries in a tangible and systematic manner. This capability is crucial for uncovering the cultural nuances embedded in Chinese landscape terminology.

3.2.2 Semantic Molecules and Exemplars

Semantic molecules are another important theoretical concept of NSM. For complex concepts, explications cannot be generated with semantic primes alone because the concepts are based on simpler and non-primitive concepts. As Goddard (2018) notes, semantic molecules are ‘complex, but relatively simple, concepts that function alongside semantic primes as the building blocks of more complex meanings’ (p. 127). The only criterion for identifying a word as a semantic molecule is ‘semantic necessity, which can only be determined by detailed semantic analysis’ (Goddard, 2010, p. 130).

Semantic molecules are marked with ‘[m]’ in NSM explications. Their inclusion helps bridge the gap between primitive and complex meanings, enabling a structured and layered analysis of terms. To avoid circularity in explications, it is essential to carefully examine dependencies between concepts and explicate lower-level molecules before addressing higher-level ones. This method ensures logical consistency and clarity, especially when analysing culturally specific terms such as Chinese landscape concepts. Semantic molecules thus play a pivotal role in maintaining the precision and depth of semantic explications within the NSM approach.

Previous NSM studies (see, e.g., Bromhead, 2017, 2018; Goddard, 2010, 2018, 2021) have revealed that while some semantic molecules are universal across languages, others are unique to specific languages or cultural contexts. For instance, the concept of ‘water’ is widely recognised as a universal semantic molecule, often associated with water-related places across diverse cultures and languages (Goddard, 2021). However, certain semantic molecules are culturally specific and integral to understanding particular linguistic frameworks (e.g., Bromhead, 2018; Goddard, 2021). Bromhead (2018) highlights this in her research, identifying culturally specific molecules such as ‘*punu*’ (‘trees/bushes’) and ‘*mai*’ (‘plant food’) as critical for explaining Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara landscape terms like *puti* (‘bush’) and *puli* (‘rocky, hilly country’) (Bromhead, 2018, pp. 121–136).

Additionally, in explicating Chinese landscape terms, semantic molecules are also employed as ‘exemplars’. Unlike typical semantic molecules, exemplars are independently definable and represent typical examples of superordinate categories (Goddard, 2017). For instance, in my explication of the concept of *táng* 塘 (‘pond’) (see Chapter 7.4), I use *hé* 荷 (waterlily) and *wā* 蛙 (frogs) as exemplars of the living things that people commonly associate with *táng*. Incorporating exemplars into explications helps uncover culturally salient imagery associated with particular landscape concepts, adding both cultural and visual specificity to the term under analysis. Exemplars are marked with ‘[e]’ in the explications of this study.

3.2.3 Semantic Templates

NSM practitioners have observed that the explications for words of a particular semantic class tend to share the same structured set of component types known as semantic

templates (Goddard, 2015). Semantic templates can be regarded as ‘cognitive strategies put in place by language users to organise and structure a domain, and to cope with the complexity of meaning’ (Ye, 2017, p.12). A semantic template is frequently transferable across languages. Wierzbicka (1985) first proposed the concept of semantic templates for artefact and natural kind terms. Since then, the concept of semantic template has been developed for a variety of domains, including emotions, shape, colour, physical qualities, and verbs (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007, 2009; Wierzbicka, 1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2007).

Despite extensive semantic research into landscape terms conducted in languages such as English, French, Spanish, and Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, as documented by Bromhead (2018), no semantic template for landscape terms has been devised specifically for landscape terms. This gap in the research reveals the need for further exploration in this area. Exploring the semantic template of terms belonging to one domain is essential in that ‘semantic templates provide a fruitful means to explore domain-specific conceptual structures’ (Ye, 2017, p. 14). Building on Bromhead's work, this study aims to advance the development of semantic templates for landscape concepts across languages by providing a systematic framework for analysing and understanding the semantic structure of landscape terms in various linguistic and cultural contexts.

A semantic template does not involve preconceived notions; it involves a consistent organisational format that has a ‘natural “internal logic” by which the causal and temporal interconnections between the various components can be ordered coherently’ (Goddard, 2015, p. 14). Although Bromhead did not explicitly propose semantic templates for landscape terms across languages, her detailed explications revealed consistent patterns of

meaning components that can serve as a foundation for further exploration, such as the present study.

For example, Bromhead's (2018) explications for terms denoting flowing-water places and elevated places in different languages demonstrate identifiable patterns. In her analysis of small and long flowing-water places, such as 'stream' and 'creek' in English and Australian English, certain shared component types emerged: (a) category; (b) material; (c) shape; (d) parts; (e) size; (f) movement of water; and (g) typical attributes (Bromhead, 2018, pp. 34–39). Similarly, for larger flowing-water places, such as river, *un fleuve*, and *une rivière* in English and French, these terms incorporated all the aforementioned components with an additional component, (h) human activity (Bromhead, 2018, pp. 45–49). Building on these insights, this study examines whether Chinese landscape terms share similar component structures. Furthermore, it examines whether culturally specific components need to be incorporated into the explications of Chinese landscape terms, thereby expanding our understanding of how landscape concepts are linguistically and culturally encoded.

In Bromhead's (2018) explications of landscape terms in singular noun constructions, such as 'a mountain' and 'a river', the phrase 'a place of one kind' is typically selected as the top component [category] rather than 'a kind of place'. This choice is made for ease of substitution, as expressions like 'two rivers' are more naturally represented as 'two places of one kind' rather than 'two kinds of places' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 20). For non-classifier languages like English, this approach appears to be the most optimal, as it streamlines semantic representation while preserving internal consistency. However, the suitability of this approach varies significantly when applied to classifier languages.

In MSC, for instance, the equivalent of the English singular noun construction ‘a+ landscape term’ includes a classifier, forming phrases like ‘*yīzuò shān* 一座山 (a mountain)’, where the numeral *yī* — (one) is followed by the classifier *zuò* 座 and then by the noun *shān* 山 (mountain). Classifiers in Mandarin are not arbitrary; they reflect the inherent nature or physical properties of the noun they accompany (Jiang, 2017). As such, classifiers carry their own meanings and must be included in the semantic analysis. For instance, a full explication of *yīzuò shān* 一座山 requires consideration of the meaning conveyed by the classifier *zuò* 座.

Moreover, certain landscape terms may be used with more than one classifier, depending on which physical features are being highlighted. When used in isolation, Chinese landscape terms refer not only to an individual instance but also to ‘the sum and parts of their possible referents’ (O’Meara & Bohnemeyer, 2008, p. 324). In light of these factors, this study adopts the formulation ‘places of one kind’ as the top-level component in most explications of Chinese landscape terms, as it accommodates both the grammatical structure of MSC and the need for semantic clarity.

Explications of Chinese landscape terms in this study include various components that reflect the conceptualisation of these terms. In addition to the first component of categorisation, the analysis includes components such as size, shape, material, location and/or viewing angle, and human evaluation. It is notable that the components of size and shape are often closely interrelated. This conveys not only the visual form of river-places but also the idea of length. It reflects how people physically interact with rivers, whether by walking along their

banks or crossing them by boat, thereby linking visual perception with embodied experience in their understanding of this landscape concept.

It is also worth noting that although certain types of components appear in the explications of different categories of landscape terms, their significance and function within these explications may differ. For instance, in the case of elevated landforms, the material component typically indicates that the primary substance composing the landform, such as rock or soil, is essential to its conceptualisation (see Chapter 5). In contrast, for water-related landforms, the material 'water' serves as a defining feature, with its presence being the key factor in the classification of these places (see Chapters 6 and 7). Therefore, while the material component is relevant to a range of landscape terms, it carries particular importance in the conceptualisation of water places.

3.3 Data Sources

The detailed semantic analyses of the 27 terms in this study will be supported by corpus data. The individual corpora that are used for the conceptual analysis in this study include:

1. The Beijing Language and Culture University Chinese Corpus (BCC Corpus)¹
2. Chinese textbooks for students from Year 1 to Year 12
3. The Chinese Text Project website²

¹ Available from <http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn/>

² Available from <https://ctext.org/ens>

The Beijing Language and Culture University Chinese Corpus (henceforth the BCC Corpus), was developed by Beijing Language and Culture University. It is a comprehensive resource that incorporates a wide range of data types, including oral materials such as dialogues from films and television shows, online content like blogs and social media posts, as well as written texts across various genres, including literature, journalism, and academic writing. The diversity of its content enables a broad exploration of how landscape terms are used in various contexts, ranging from casual conversations to formal academic discussions. This corpus serves as the primary corpus for the semantic analysis in this study.

The BCC Corpus features a range of in-built tools that facilitate the identification of collocations and patterns of use, enabling the study to test collocational possibilities and validate semantic explications within real-world contexts. For instance, it enables the analysis of how frequently landscape terms are paired with various modifiers in natural language, offering insights into their meanings, nuances, and cultural connotations. The same feature of the search engine also allows testing of collocation possibilities.

As the BCC Corpus does not automatically provide an overview of a word's grammatical patterns and typical collocations like the Collins Wordbanks does through its 'Word Sketch' function (see e.g., Bromhead, 2018; de Schryver, 2009), this study mainly relies on manual screening of all linguistic data related to each landscape term, along with the use of the search engine to identify its collocations and grammatical behaviour. When using the identified collocations to support semantic analysis, they will be summarised without frequency counts if such data lacks interpretive value in the absence of relevant reference

data. However, if the frequency of a particular collocation is deemed informative, numerical evidence will be presented in the study.

The second corpus from which data sources are drawn is Chinese textbooks for students from Year 1 to Year 12. One of the significant roles of textbooks, as Olson (1980) explains, is ‘to make meanings more explicit in a manner which places those meanings above criticism’ (as cited in Luke & Luke, 1983, p. 112). Because of this role, textbooks ‘maintain historically grounded culturally significant information in a durable and objectified form across time and space’ (Luke & Luke, 1983, p. 113). The textbooks used in this study are the People’s Education Press edition, which are the unified Chinese textbooks required by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (MEPRC) used by primary and middle schools across the country since September 2017 (Liu, 2017).

There are 24 Chinese textbooks, spanning from Year 1 to Year 12, with two volumes for each grade. These textbooks feature texts about landscapes from both ancient and contemporary times, including works such as *Táohuā Yuán Jì* 桃花源记 (*An Account of the Peach Blossom Spring*) by Tao Yuanming (365–427 CE), as well as contemporary pieces like *Héhuā Diàn* 荷花淀 (*Lotus Shallow Lake*) by Sun Li (1913–2002). These texts are the primary sources where MSC speakers first encounter landscape terms and learn about landscape concepts, including the cultural connotations associated with the landforms denoted by these terms. They not only present and explain landscape vocabulary but also serve as a conduit for the development of a culturally rooted understanding of the physical environment. As such, Chinese textbooks offer a valuable source of data for examining both the historical context and the process by which landscape concepts are acquired among MSC speakers.

The last corpus, the Chinese Text Project website, is an online open-access digital library of classical Chinese texts that offers access to a vast collection of ancient Chinese texts from the pre-Qin period (before 221 BCE) to the Republican era (1911–1949 CE). As noted earlier, some ancient texts that focused on landscape terms are included in Chinese primary and secondary school textbooks, and these texts continue to play a significant role in shaping the landscape cognition of MSC speakers. This corpus is primarily employed to aid in analysing the material selection in these textbooks and to explore the lexicographical tradition of landscape terms throughout Chinese history.

3.4 Linguistic Evidence

This section outlines the range of linguistic evidence employed to support the semantic analyses conducted in the present study.

3.4.1 Classifiers

In MSC, ‘when a noun is quantified by a numeral, a classifier or a measure word is often needed’ (Lee et al., 2021, p. 40). According to Tai and Wang (1990), a classifier categorises a group of nouns by highlighting specific salient perceptual properties, whether physical or functional, that are inherently linked to the entities represented by those nouns. Therefore, classifiers function not as quantifiers of nouns but as qualifiers, highlighting specific semantic features (Lee et al., 2021). This makes them a useful linguistic tool for examining the Chinese conceptualisation of the world and the salient attributes associated with different noun categories.

The table below presents a selection of classifiers frequently associated with landscape terms as revealed in corpus data. It lists corresponding landscape terms that these classifiers typically collocate and the types of landforms these terms represent.

TABLE 3-2

Classifiers for Landscape Terms in MSC

Classifier	Numerical Word	Definition in the <i>Contemporary Chinese Dictionary</i>	Category of Landscape Features	Landscape Terms Examples
<i>gè</i> 个	1, 2, 3...	用于没有专用量词的名词 (Used for nouns without a dedicated classifier) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 462)	Elevated places Enclosed-water places	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain'), <i>qiū</i> 丘 ('hill'), etc. <i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake'), <i>chí</i> 池 ('pool'), etc.
<i>zuò</i> 座	1, 2, 3...	用于较大或固定的物体 (Used for relatively large and fixed objects) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1829)	Elevated places Enclosed-water places	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain'), <i>qiū</i> 丘 ('hill'), etc. <i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake'), <i>shuǐkù</i> 水库 (reservoir), etc.
<i>piàn</i> 片	1	用于地面或水面 (Used for ground or water surface) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1043)	Elevated places Enclosed-water places Flat lands and woodlands Agricultural places	<i>qiūlíng</i> 丘陵 ('mountain range'), etc. <i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake'), etc. <i>cǎoyuán</i> 草原 ('grassland'), etc. <i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden'), etc.
<i>tiáo</i> 条	1, 2, 3...	用于细长的东西 (Used for long and thin objects) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1352)	Long flowing-water places	<i>hé</i> 河 ('river'), <i>xī</i> 溪 ('creek'), etc.
<i>duàn</i> 段	1, 2, 3...	用于长段东西分成的若干部分 (Used for segments of long objects) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 340)	Long flowing-water places	<i>jiāng</i> 江 ('river'), <i>hé</i> 河 ('river'), etc.

Chinese classifiers are an essential basis for studying how Chinese speakers categorise and conceptualise the world around them, including geographical features. Nouns that share the same classifier often exhibit similar characteristics, such as size, shape, or function. For example, the classifier *zuò* 座 is used for relatively large and fixed objects (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1829) and is commonly applied to elevated places, such as *shān* 山 ('mountain') and *shānqiū* 山丘 ('hill'), as well as large structures, such as *dàlóu* 大楼 ('skyscraper'). In this study, the classifiers commonly paired with landscape terms are explored to uncover the characteristics

they signify in the meanings of landscape terms, as well as the way MSC categorises the physical world.

Among the classifiers listed in the table, *piàn* 片 stands out as a unique classifier often employed to describe extensive geographical features or vast natural landscapes without precise quantification. For example, the phrase *yīpiàn qiūlíng* 一片丘陵 (a vast expanse of hills) refers to a large, continuous area covered by hills. When used to indicate a large area, *piàn* 片 does not accommodate numerals greater than ‘one’ as a quantifier. Even when ‘one’ is used, it functions more as a determiner of entirety rather than a precise quantitative marker. Thus, instead of providing specific measurements, *yīpiàn* 一片 primarily serves to emphasise the broad and continuous nature of certain geographical features within a visible range.

Table 3-2 shows that several landscape concepts, such as *tiányuán* 田园 (‘countryside,’ literally ‘field and garden’) and *qiūlíng* 丘陵 (‘hill range’), are exclusively paired with the numeral *yī* 一 (one) and the classifier *piàn* 片. This pairing signifies that the entire area within the observer's visual range is encompassed by the referenced landform. Expressions like *yīpiàn* 一片 (‘a stretch of...’) are predominantly used to emphasise the vastness and continuity of a single, distinct geographical feature visible in the landscape.

Among the classifiers mentioned above, three are particularly noteworthy for their relevance and utility in the semantic analysis of Chinese landscape terms: *zuò* 座, *tiáo* 条, and *piàn* 片. These classifiers highlight the most significant features of the landforms they modify.

Drawing on their dictionary definitions and landscape terms commonly paired with these classifiers, I propose tentative explications for the structure ‘numeral + classifier + landscape term (X)’ for each of the three classifiers discussed below.

[A] *yīzuò*-X 一座 X (one-zuò-X)

- a. when someone wants to say something about a place,
they can say the words ‘*yīzuò*’ if it is like this/if they think like this:
- b. ‘this place is very big
- c. the *dǐngbù* [m] (top [m]) of this place can be very far above
the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of this place
- d. I cannot move in this place as I want,
I cannot move in this place as I move in other places’

[B] *yītiáo*-X 一条 X (one-tiáo-X)

- a. when someone wants to say something about a place,
they can say the words ‘*yītiáo*’ if they think about this place like this:
- b. ‘this place is like something long [m]’

[C] *yīpiàn*-X 一片 X (one-piàn-X)

- a. when someone wants to say something about a place,
they can say the words ‘*yīpiàn*’ if it is like this/if they think like this:
- b. ‘this place is very very big,
there are many things/places of one kind in this place
one place in this very big place can be very far away from another place in this big place’

In the semantic analysis conducted in this study, I will consistently draw on the classifiers associated with specific landscape terms to uncover the most salient characteristics of landforms as perceived by MSC speakers.

3.4.2 Phraseology

Phraseology also serves as a vital tool for uncovering the nuanced meanings of terms within the NSM framework (see Bromhead, 2018, pp. 18–19; Goddard, 2011, pp. 27–28). As Firth (1935) highlights, the degree to which a word contributes to the formation of new terms, phrases, idioms, and compounds often reflects its cultural significance. Chinese word formation, especially in fixed four-character expressions, frequently incorporates landscape terms. Analysing such phrases and expressions enables a deeper understanding of how cultural values and ideas shape the way Chinese people perceive the physical world.

For example, four-character fixed expressions involving *shān* 山 (‘mountain’) and *shuǐ* 水 (‘water places’) in MSC often carry positive connotations, such as *shānqīng shuǐxiù* 山清水秀 (beautiful mountains and clear waters) and *húguāng shānsè* 湖光山色 (beautiful scenery of lakes and mountains) (see detailed discussion in Chapter 4; see also Chen, 2017; Law, 2011), reflecting the cultural and aesthetic reverence for these natural features in Chinese thought. Another example is four-character fixed expressions that include terms for elevated places to convey the idea of enduring effort, such as *fānshān yuèlǐng* 翻山越岭 (‘cross over mountains and ridges’). These expressions offer insight into how people perceive their experiences navigating elevated terrains (see Chapter 5.3).

In addition to four-character fixed expressions, there are culturally significant compound terms that incorporate landscape terms to convey related meanings with cultural connotations. For instance, in Chapter 4, I analyse three compound terms formed with common landscape terms: *shānshuǐ* 山水 (‘landscape’), *héshān* 河山 (‘territory,’ lit. ‘river¹ mountain’), and *jiāngshān* 江山 (‘state power/landscape,’ lit. ‘river² mountain’). While these terms contain landscape elements,

their meanings mainly reflect Chinese landscape aesthetics (see Chapter 4.2) and national identity (see Chapter 4.3).

3.4.3 Collocations and Collocational Possibility

In conceptual analysis, collocation and the study of collocational possibilities serve as valuable tools for uncovering the inherent characteristics of landscape terms. Adjectives frequently used as modifiers for these terms provide insights into the intrinsic qualities associated with specific landforms. Notably, size-related adjectives such as *dà* 大 (big) and *xiǎo* 小 (small) are often employed to describe the dimensions of various geographical features. For example, corpus data in the analysis of river-related terms reveals that the term *jiāng* 江 ('river') is predominantly paired with *dà*, highlighting the inherent association with large size in its meaning (see Chapter 6). Conversely, the term *hé* 河 ('river') can be modified by both *dà* and *xiǎo*, reflecting its broader applicability to long flowing-water places of varying sizes. This differentiation in collocational patterns underscores the nuanced difference in size between *jiāng* and *hé*. The exact semantic differences between *jiāng* and *hé* will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Another important type of collocational evidence involves the verbs used to describe human interactions and movement through different landforms. For instance, the verb *pá* 爬 (climb) is frequently associated with *shān* 山 ('mountain'), emphasising the physical effort required to navigate such terrain. This highlights the steep and challenging nature of mountainous landscapes. Similarly, in Chapter 6, the verb *dù* 渡 (cross by ferry) is commonly linked with *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'), reflecting the significant size of *jiāng* and the necessity of specialised

means to traverse it. In contrast, *hé* 河 ('river-1') is not typically associated with *dù*, suggesting a smaller scale and a different type of human engagement. This type of collocation sheds light on how language reflects both the physical attributes, and the experiential qualities associated with different landforms.

Material is another key component that can be identified through collocational analysis. For instance, in Chapter 5 on elevated places, I have demonstrated that the term *shān* 山 ('mountain') is often associated with materials such as earth, stones or rocks. In contrast, *shānqǐū* 山丘 ('hill'), which refers to smaller elevations, is typically linked to earth alone. This collocational pattern suggests that in Chinese, smaller elevations like *shānqǐū* are generally conceptualised as being primarily composed of earth, even though they may also include stones or rocks. It is worth noting, however, that the material component found in water places is not typically analysed through collocational data in the corpus. In Chinese conceptualisation, water is considered an invariant element in the conceptualisation of water places, in contrast to the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara concept of *karu*, which suggests the intermittent presence of water (Bromhead, 2018, pp. 49–54).

Collocational possibility is also crucial for testing components within the explications of specific landscape concepts. As Weinreich (1966) stated, 'a native speaker may not be able to formulate a definition quickly or elegantly, but he can with assurance reject proposed definitions which are incorrect, and thus zero in on the correct definition' (as cited in Wierzbicka, 1985, p. 84). For instance, in the case of *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'), the absence of collocations involving animals crossing a *jiāng* in the corpus suggests that, generally, *jiāng* is perceived as larger than *hé* 河 ('river-1') and as a geographical feature that cannot be easily crossed by animals. As another illustration,

the compound term *xiǎoxī* 小溪 (lit. small creek/stream) is widely used as a synonym for *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream') in Chinese and *xī* is rarely modified by the adjective *dà* 大 (big) in common usage. This suggests that the concept of *xiǎo* 小 (small) is inherent within the semantic core of *xī* (see Chapter 6), which shapes how it is perceived and used in the context. As such, *xiǎo* (small) is an integral component in the meaning of *xī* (see Chapter 6.4).

In the semantic analysis presented in the following chapters, I will systematically identify collocations associated with the landscape terms under examination, using the corpus outlined in Chapter 3.3. Additionally, I will explore potential collocation patterns, including testing alternative and antonymous pairings, to gain deeper insights into the semantic properties of these terms. This approach will strengthen the semantic analysis in this study by uncovering the underlying linguistic patterns and conceptual associations of specific landscape concepts.

3.4.4 Other Techniques for Semantic Analysis

Beyond the previously analysed corpus data and linguistic evidence, this study also integrates insights from other sources, such as translation practices, to enhance conceptual understanding. For example, in translation practice in MSC, the term *hé* 河 ('river-1') is used to represent nearly all foreign rivers in Chinese, irrespective of their size. This indicates that *hé* is a more universally applicable and scientifically oriented term for river-related concepts in Chinese. In contrast, *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') appears to hold a more culturally specific connection, being predominantly used for some large rivers within China (see Chapter 6.3).

In conclusion, this study adopts a corpus-supported approach to conceptual analysis. The semantic analysis integrates the NSM framework with corpus data and other forms of linguistic evidence to facilitate a humanistic and empirically grounded investigation (see Bromhead, 2018; Goddard, 2011).

3.5 'Place' or 'Thing': A Human-centred Perspective and the 'Folk Picture' of the World

The question of whether a 'mountain' is a 'thing' or a 'place' illustrates an inherent ambiguity in geographical concepts (see Burenhult & Levinson, 2008). From a distant perspective, landforms like mountains are often perceived as 'things', focusing on their physical structure and attributes. Conversely, when considering personal or cultural experiences associated with a location, landforms transform into 'places' imbued with meaning, emotions, and memories. This dichotomy demonstrates the role of context and perspective in shaping the understanding of geographical features.

From a conceptual analysis perspective, understanding how people conceptualise landforms requires more than merely explicating them as 'things' and focusing on their physical characteristics alone. A comprehensive inquiry requires integrating humanistic dimensions, including experiential, emotional, and cultural perspectives. Integrating tangible features with humanistic perspectives enables a more comprehensive understanding of how people conceptualise different landforms, considering not only the physical attributes that hold significance for humans but also the related experiences and perceptions. As Taylor (2009) asserts, 'landscape is not merely what we see, but rather a way of seeing' (p. 8, see also Cosgrove, 1984, p.1).

Therefore, this study adopts the ‘human-centred perspective’ discussed by Bromhead (2018) (see also the ‘experiential perspective’ proposed by Tuan [2001]). Bromhead (2018) views the referents of landscape terms as places where people ‘can be and do things’ (p. 9; see also Enfield, 2015; Fillmore, 1982; Wierzbicka, 1989). Tuan (2001) further refines this human-centred perspective by specifying that human experience of the landscape involves both feeling and thought, which he describes as ‘two ends of an experiential continuum, both serving as ways of knowing’ (p. 10).

Furthermore, this study focuses on folk understandings of landscape concepts, which entails more than a mere scientific or non-humanistic representation of the meanings of landscape terms. As Wierzbicka (1996) states, the folk perspective is inherently language-specific and reflects the experiences and worldview of lay people in a particular culture.

Science is, or tries to be, universal and to reflect the knowledge accumulated by mankind as a whole (and, more specifically, by the professional experts in different fields of knowledge); languages are not universal, and each of them reflects the experience of a particular part of mankind, united by a common culture and a common existential framework (and not the experience of any local experts but that of the ‘people-in the street’). (Wierzbicka, 1996, p. 338)

Unlike scientific perspectives, the folk perspective inherently incorporates anthropocentric bias and shared cultural ideas (Wierzbicka, 1997; see also Apresjan, 2000; Bromhead, 2018). To adequately analyse these folk concepts, it is essential to faithfully capture these biases

and cultural tendencies (see, e.g., Wierzbicka, 1985, 1997). This can be accomplished by examining language as a medium through which cultural worldviews are conveyed.

The 'folk picture,' thus, is not a static construct but a dynamic and culturally rich lens through which the physical world is perceived, interpreted, and experienced. This nuanced understanding ensures that the semantic analysis in the study faithfully represents the authentic lived experiences and conceptualisations specific to the Chinese culture and MSC speakers.

3.6 Language Treated in This Study

The language treated in this study is Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), which is 'rooted in Northern Mandarin with the Beijing Dialect as its standard pronunciation' (Chen, 1999, p. 24). As the nation's official language and the language of unified Chinese textbooks for students (see Chapter 3.3), MSC boasts a rich linguistic repertoire of landscapes and integrates elements from ancient Chinese, varieties of Chinese languages, and translated terms of landscape terms. Analysing the meanings of 27 landscape terms in MSC can shed light on shared aspects of the conceptualisation of the landscape among Chinese speakers.

Furthermore, the written form of MSC, Modern Written Chinese (MWC), is 'widely accepted and intelligible across all Chinese-speaking regions, including mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, with certain variations' (Chen, 1999, p. 83). MSC's role as the common linguistic variety makes it an effective medium for this study's conceptual analysis of landscape terms.

3.7 A Note on Chinese Terrains

As mentioned in Section 3.1, 27 terms have been selected for analysis in this study. These 27 terms (see Table 3.3 below) represent the diverse terrains in China. A sketch of the terrain of China's geography is necessary here before we proceed to conduct detailed conceptual analyses of each term.

The landform of China has been described as 'resembling a chequerboard' by the Chinese-born American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2008, p. 15) and can be summarised as consisting of 'three steps', characterised by a 'high in the west, low in the east' topography (Institute for Planets [IP], 2019, p. 514). China's immense territory is home to a remarkable range of different landforms, from towering mountain ranges and expansive plateaus to fertile plains and vast deserts.

The majority of the Chinese population is distributed in the second and third steps of China, where most plateaus can be found. The population density in China decreases from the plains to the surrounding areas, with the steppes to the north, the deserts and the Roof of the World to the west, the rainforests to the south, and the oceans to the east (IP, 2019). As of 2021, the Han ethnic group accounts for 91.11% of China's total population (Office of the Leading Group of the State Council for the Seventh National Population Census, 2021a). While Han Chinese constitute the majority, China is also home to diverse ethnic minorities, each with distinct living environments, lifestyles, languages, and cultures.

Table 3.3 below presents all 27 landscape terms examined in the present study, beginning with culturally significant terms that represent the landscape or the land as a whole. These

are followed by terms denoting elevated places, river-places and enclosed-water places, and finally, terms describing agricultural and cultural landscapes. Collectively, these terms provide a comprehensive insight into how MSC speakers conceptualise the physical world.

TABLE 3-3

27 Terms Analysed in the Thesis Grouped into Various Categories

Terms denoting the landscape/land with cultural connotations	<i>shānshuǐ</i> 山水 (landscape, lit., mountains and waters) <i>héshān</i> 河山 (territory, lit. river-1 mountain) <i>jiāngshān</i> 江山 (state power/landscape, lit. river-2 mountain)
Elevated places	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain') <i>líng</i> 岭 ('mountain ridge') <i>fēng</i> 峰 ('peak') <i>shānmài</i> 山脉 ('mountain range') <i>shānlǜan</i> 山峦 ('a stretch of mountains') <i>shānqiū</i> 山丘 ('hill') <i>shāndì</i> 山地 ('mountains') <i>qiūlíng</i> 丘陵 ('hills')
River-places	<i>hé</i> 河 ('river-1') <i>jiāng</i> 江 ('river-2') <i>xī</i> 溪 ('creek/stream')
Enclosed-water places	<i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake') <i>diàn</i> 淀 ('shallow lake') <i>chí</i> 池 ('pool') <i>táng</i> 塘 ('pond/pool') <i>tán</i> 潭 ('deep pool')

	<i>yuān</i> 渊 ('very deep water place') <i>quán</i> 泉 ('spring')
Agricultural and cultural landscape	<i>tián</i> 田 ('field') <i>qiānmò</i> 阡陌 ('footpaths of field') <i>yuán</i> 园 ('garden') <i>cǎoyuán</i> 草原 ('grassland') <i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden') <i>tiányuán</i> 田园 ('fields and gardens')

Chapter 4 MSC Terms for ‘Landscape’ and ‘Land’

The Chinese language is rich in landscape terms, many of which carry additional connotations or meanings that go far beyond their literal meanings. Some of these terms often function as metonyms, representing not just specific features of the physical world but also broader cultural, emotional, or symbolic associations tied to the natural world.

According to Jakobson (2014), metonymy is a figure of speech that involves a relationship of contiguity or proximity. Metonymy plays a vital role in cognitive semantics as ‘it is not merely a referential device but also serves the function of providing understanding...Which parts we pick out determines which aspects of the whole we are focusing on’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 36).

In Chinese, landscape concepts serve as a rich source of metonymy, reflecting the cultural, linguistic, and geographical ties embedded in the language. Analysing the meanings of these concepts can offer insight into the nature of human awareness and the complexity, ambiguity, and ambivalence of human experience, as discussed by Tuan (2001). Building on this, the following sections of this chapter will first explore the meaning of the term *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit. mountains and water places), focusing on two key aspects: (a) the significance of landscape aesthetics in shaping Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape; and (b) the prominence of elevated places and water places as the two primary categories in Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape. Then, in Section 4.3, I will examine the terms *shānhé* 山河 (the land of one particular country, lit. mountains and rivers¹) and *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power, lit. rivers² and mountains) to demonstrate how the Chinese perception of the physical world is deeply connected to their sense of national identity and state power.

Overall, this chapter serves as an introduction and foundation for the subsequent chapters, emphasising the crucial role of geographical cognition in shaping the Chinese worldview and self-perception. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of studying the meanings of landscape terms as an essential component of broader research on Chinese landscapes and Chinese culture.

4.1 Chinese Landscape Culture: *Shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit. mountains and water places)

Since this thesis primarily explores landscape terms in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), this chapter begins by examining the Chinese equivalents of the English concept of ‘landscape’. Several Chinese terms can be used to refer to a part of the earth’s surface that is visually distinct. One of the most common translation equivalents of the English term ‘landscape’ in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) is *jǐngguān* 景观 (landscape, lit. scenery observe), a modern term that only emerged in the early twentieth century (Chen, 2017). The Chinese character *jǐng* 景 (scenery) refers to the tangible, material elements of the environment perceived as an ‘object’, while *guān* 观 (observe) represents the perceptual and cognitive processes of the ‘subject’ engaging with the scenery (Chen, 2017). Together, *jǐngguān* means ‘某地或某种类型的自然景色 (The natural scenery of a particular place or a specific type of natural landscape)’ (ILCASS, 2015, p. 723) and reflects the interaction between the external physical world and the internal human experience of observation and interpretation (Chen, 2017).

Another term in MSC for a visually appealing piece of land is *fēngjǐng* 风景 (scenery, lit. wind scenery). This term emphasises the aesthetic appeal of a location, capturing its picturesque and visually pleasing attributes. Unlike *jǐngguān*, which encompasses both the material and perceptual dimensions of a landscape, *fēngjǐng* focuses more on the visual objects of a specific setting. Its definition in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* is as such: 一定地域内由山水、花草、树木、建筑物以及某些自然现象形成的可供人观赏的景象 (A visually pleasing scene within a defined area, composed of elements such as mountains, rivers, flowers, trees, buildings, and certain natural phenomena, intended for human appreciation) (ILCASS, 2015, p. 407). Due to its focus on the picturesque features of a place, *fēngjǐng* is more frequently translated as ‘scenery’ in English. This term is frequently used in contexts that emphasise the aesthetic appreciation of a place, such as in art, poetry, or tourism materials.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit., mountains and waters) describes both 山水画 (landscape painting) and 有山有水的风景 (scenery composed of mountains and waters) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1186). Compared to the other two terms mentioned above, *shānshuǐ* refers to elevated places and water places as the subjects of landscape aesthetics. *Shānshuǐ* is the most traditional expression and a carrier of Chinese culture among the three terms described above. This chapter will mainly study the internal semantic details of this term.

The appreciation of nature’s aesthetics in Chinese culture dates back over 3,000 years ago, as evidenced in classical works such as the *Shī Jīng* 诗经 (*Book of Poetry*, ca. eleventh century to sixth century BCE) and the *Zhuangzi* (ca. fourth century to third century BCE) (Chen, 2017).

Although predating the term *shānshuǐ*, these ancient Chinese texts frequently describe mountains and rivers in poetic form, reflecting their importance in early Chinese thought and aesthetic traditions. The term began to be used as a fixed expression and took on increased cultural and artistic importance in the centuries that followed, especially during the Six Dynasties period (220–589 CE), when it became a key concept in Chinese painting and poetry.

The term *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit. mountains and water places) directly reference *shān* (mountains) and *shuǐ* (water places), highlighting the significance of these two landforms in Chinese culture. As Law (2011) observes, ‘*shān* and *shuǐ* have long been considered prototypes of nature that captivated ancient Chinese philosophers’ (p. 371). This interest is deeply embedded in the classical works of both Confucianism and Taoism. For instance, in the *Analects*, Confucius states, ‘The wise find joy in mountains; the benevolent find joy in water 智者乐山，仁者乐水’ (Confucius, 551–479 BCE/1979, p. 53). Likewise, Laozi, a central figure in Taoism, extolled the virtues of water, comparing it to the highest good (上善若水) (Laozi, ca. 475 BCE–221 BCE/1999, Line 8; see also Chen, 2017; Law, 2011).

Influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, the concept of *shānshuǐ* 山水 implies not only visual appreciation but, more importantly, spiritual contemplation (Law, 2011). As Sullivan (1962) notes, for Chinese poets, painters, and philosophers, wandering through the mountains is an act of meditation and reverence. The concept of *shānshuǐ* holds a fundamental place in Chinese literature and art, capturing not only the beauty of natural landscapes but also their deeper spiritual and philosophical significance. For ancient literati, often constrained by political or societal pressures, *shānshuǐ* provided both a symbolic and physical refuge—a path

to inner peace. Its recurring depiction in such contexts firmly rooted it in the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature and the philosophical ideal of *chūshì* 出世 (withdrawing from the world) embraced by traditional scholars.

This idea of *yǐnjū shānshuǐ jiān* 隐居山水间 (living in seclusion among mountains and waters) is vividly expressed in classical poetry and prose, such as Tao Yuanming's 陶渊明 (ca. 365–427 CE) *Táohuā Yuán Jì* 桃花源记 (*An Account of the Peach Blossom Spring*), which describes an idyllic retreat from the outside world, and Wang Wei's (701–761 CE/1992) *Shānjū Qiūmíng* 山居秋暝 (*Autumn Nightfall at my Place in the Hills*), which portrays a quiet and peaceful life in nature. These texts, included in Chinese school textbooks, play a key role in transmitting the ideal of seclusion in harmony with nature—a core aspect of the concept of *shānshuǐ*—to Chinese students, shaping their understanding of traditional values and aesthetics.

Having explored the cultural contexts of the term *shānshuǐ*, I will now shift focus to its usage in contemporary settings. Although the idea of *chūshì* 出世 (withdrawing from the world) has become less prominent in its modern usage, the aesthetic dimension and the notion of temporally stepping back from daily stress to find inner peace in oneself continue to play a central role in how *shānshuǐ* is understood today. One of the most common collocations of *shānshuǐ* found in the BCC Corpus is *jìqíng shānshuǐ* 寄情山水 (immersing oneself in the mountains and water places). The following examples, extracted from the BCC Corpus, represent the most common contexts in which *jìqíng shānshuǐ* is used in modern Chinese:

1. 比如长假期间，人们喜欢出门旅游，寄情山水之间。(For example, during long holidays, people enjoy travelling and **[jìqíng shānshuǐ]** immersing themselves in the beauty of mountains and waters.³)

(BCC Corpus)

2. 寄情于山水，怡然自得的乡间生活。(【jìqíng yú shānshuǐ】Immersing oneself in the beauty of mountains and waters, enjoying a serene and contented rural life.)

(BCC Corpus)

In the corpus, *shānshuǐ* is often found being modified by *zìrán* 自然 (natural), whereas combinations with *rénzào* 人造 (man-made) are rarely found. This pattern indicates that although the term *shānshuǐ* is culturally loaded, it specifically refers to natural landscapes, emphasising the beauty of nature rather than man-made or human-intervened environments. Moreover, as demonstrated in Examples 3, 4, 5, and 6 below, *shānshuǐ* frequently appears with positive modifiers such as *xiùlì* 秀丽 (elegant and beautiful) and *měilì* 美丽 (beautiful). In contrast, negative modifiers are seldom used with *shānshuǐ*, if at all. When negative portrayals do occur, they are typically limited to specific contexts, such as critiques of urbanisation or the adverse effects of tourism, as illustrated in Example 7.

³ Unless otherwise specified, most of the corpus data presented in this study have been translated into English by the author.

3. 秀丽的山水不仅有益于身体健康，更有益于心灵的净化。(Beautiful [*shānshuǐ*] **landscape** not only benefits physical health but also contributes to the purification of the mind.)
(BCC Corpus)
4. 让你在秀丽的西湖山水中赏昆曲，品美食！(Enjoy Kunqu opera and savour delicious food amidst the beautiful [*shānshuǐ*] **landscapes** of West Lake!)
(BCC Corpus)
5. 小船行至巴雾峡，这里的山水更加秀丽，景色也更加迷人。(The small boat reaches the Baowu Gorge, where the scenery is even more enchanting, with the [*shānshuǐ*] **landscape** appearing more graceful.)
(BCC Corpus)
6. 家乡美丽的山水和优美的民歌，滋润着他的心灵。(The beautiful [*shānshuǐ*] **landscape** of his hometown, along with the graceful folk songs, nourishes his soul.)
(BCC Corpus)
7. 现在有些城市在建设中追求欧陆风，有些无意义的模仿事实上是对山水环境的破坏。(Nowadays, some cities pursue a European style in their development, and certain meaningless imitations are, in fact, damaging to the [*shānshuǐ*] **landscape**.)
(BCC Corpus)

This tendency to combine with positive modifiers and the inability to pair with negative adjectives suggests that a positive evaluation of the physical environment is inherent in the meaning of *shānshuǐ*. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Examples 3 and 6 above, *shānshuǐ* goes beyond merely signifying visual attractiveness. It also encompasses a sense of mindful

enjoyment, where the appreciation of nature is not just about its appearance, but also about a deeper, more conscious engagement with the environment.

My explication of *shānshuǐ* 山水 is as follows:

[A] *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit. mountains and water places)

- a. places of one kind
- b. when people think about a place of this kind, they often can say like this:
 - ‘there are *shān* [m] (mountain [m]) in this place
 - there is water [m] places in this place
 - I can see very good places in this place’
- c. when people think about places of this kind, they often think like this:
 - ‘places of this kind are far away from where people often live
 - because of this, I can’t see many people in places of this kind’
- d. when people are in a place of this kind, they often think like this:
 - ‘I feel something very good here
 - this place is a very good place
 - I cannot think about other places’
- e. because people think like this, they want to be in places of this kind some times

Component (b) states that both *shān* 山 (mountains) and *shuǐ* 水 (water places) are present in people's conceptualisation of *shānshuǐ*. Component (c) deals with the geographical aspect, highlighting that the places referred to as *shānshuǐ* are often located in remote areas, far from human settlements. Component (d) reflects the emotional or cultural value that Chinese people attach to these places, as well as their experience of detaching from the outside world through the phrase ‘I cannot think about other places’. Component (e) accommodates the desire to visit these places.

Beyond its previously discussed meaning, *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit. mountains and waters) also encompasses a significant artistic and literary dimension. It is often used to refer to both a traditional painting style, *shānshuǐ huà* 山水画 (landscape paintings), and a genre of classical Chinese poetry, *shānshuǐ shī* 山水诗 (landscape poetry). These forms of artistic expression serve as external manifestations of Chinese people's conceptualisation and appreciation of the landscape. As this meaning of *shānshuǐ* falls outside the scope of this study, I will not explore it further here. However, this dual meaning highlights the inseparable connection between the natural world and its artistic representation in Chinese culture. Moreover, it emphasises the reciprocal relationship between the conceptualisation of the landscape and Chinese culture.

In this section, I have demonstrated that aesthetic appreciation plays a central role in the Chinese perception of the concept of *shānshuǐ* and the physical world it stands for. The concept of *shānshuǐ* inherently embodies two levels of aesthetic value: sensory aesthetics, which appeal to visual and experiential appreciation, and, as previously discussed, spiritual satisfaction, which reflects a deeper emotional and cultural connection to nature. This dual-layered aesthetic understanding is not exclusive to *shānshuǐ* but also extends to other Chinese landscape concepts, such as *tiányuán* 田园 (countryside, lit. fields and gardens), which will be explored further in Chapter 8.5. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that elevated places and water places are the most significant topographical features that are recognised and named in MSC. Terms referring to these two features are often combined into compound terms, such as in *shānshuǐ* (discussed in this section), as well as *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power/landscape, lit. river-2 mountain) and *héshān* 河山 (territory, lit. river-1

mountain), which are explored in the following section. These compounds symbolize and represent the physical world as a whole from different perspectives.

4.2 *Héshān* 河山 (the land of one particular country, lit. rivers¹ and mountains) and *Jiāngshān* 江山 (state power, lit. rivers² and mountains)

As Goddard (2020) claims, it would be impossible to generate ‘discourses of nationalism, patriotism, immigration, international affairs, land rights, anti-colonialism and postcolonialism’ without words like ‘country’, ‘land’ and ‘nation’ (p. 8). In Chinese, several terms are employed in such discourses, with their selection varying according to context and communicative intent.

The Chinese term *guójiā* 国家 (country, lit. country home) is the closest equivalent to the English word ‘country’. It is widely used across both formal and informal documents, appearing in legal documents, academic articles, songs and literary texts. At the same time, Chinese features a rich variety of terms that fulfill different functions, especially in the context of patriotism. Examples include *zǔguó* 祖国 (motherland), *héshān* 河山 (territory, lit. river-1 mountain) and *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power/landscape, lit. river-2 mountain).

Among these terms, the terms *héshān* 河山 (territory, lit. river-1 mountain) and *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power/landscape, lit. river-2 mountain) stand out for their metaphorical use of landscape terms. While they convey meanings such as ‘country’, ‘state power’, and ‘land’, they also evoke a sense of admiration and reverence for the nation, often emphasising the beauty and grandeur of China's natural landscapes. This section will conduct an in-depth

semantic analysis of *héshān*, with a briefly exploration of *jiāngshān*, examining their meanings, connotations, and the specific roles they play in Chinese discourse, particularly in contexts where landscape imagery is employed to represent concepts of nationhood, territory, and power.

According to the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, *jiāngshān* and *héshān* complement each other like two pieces of a puzzle. *Héshān* specifically refers to the territory of the country, while *jiāngshān* signifies the country's state power (ILCASS, 2005). In the corpus, *héshān* is often modified by *zǔguó* 祖国 (motherland), occurring together in 179 out of a total of 1069 entries of *héshān*. This pairing is especially common in contexts that highlight and celebrate an individual's love for their country. Below are some representative examples of *héshān* extracted from the BCC Corpus.

8. 林思翔的散文，充满着对闽东乡土的热爱，对祖国壮丽河山的热爱。(Lin

Sixiang's prose is filled with a deep love for the rural lands of eastern Fujian and the majestic [*héshān*] mountains and rivers of his motherland.)

(BCC Corpus)

9. 画家们说，他们以万里长江为题材，运用浪漫主义手法，描绘祖国大江南北的壮丽河山、富饶的产物和勤劳的人民，以表现中华民族热爱生活，憧憬与追求美好未来的愿望。(The painters state that they used the Yangtze River as their subject, employing romantic techniques to depict the majestic [*héshān*] mountains and rivers, abundant resources, and hard-working people of the motherland from north to south. Through their work, they aim to express the Chinese nation's love for

life and its aspirations and pursuit of a brighter future.)

(BCC Corpus)

10. 各地的自然风光、文物古迹、名胜景点能够激起人们对祖国壮丽河山和悠久历史文化的热爱之情，要注意发挥这方面优势，寓爱国主义教育于游览观光之中。(The natural scenery, cultural relics, historical sites and famous attractions across the country can inspire people's love for **the magnificent [héshān] mountains and rivers of their motherland** and its rich history and cultural heritage. It is important to make good use of these advantages and incorporate patriotic education into tourism and sightseeing activities.)

(BCC Corpus)

Common modifiers for *héshān* found in the BCC Corpus include *zhuànglì* 壮丽 (magnificent), *xiùměi* 秀美 (graceful), and *jǐnxiù* 锦绣 (splendid), highlighting the profound admiration and affection that Chinese people have for their homeland, which is inherent in the meaning of *héshān*. Additionally, commonly used phrases such as ‘*duì zǔguó héshān de rèài* 对祖国河山的热爱 (love for the mountains and rivers of one’s motherland) and *duì zǔguó héshān de zànměi* 对祖国河山的赞美 (praise for the mountains and rivers of one’s motherland) further demonstrate the widespread positive sentiments people hold toward their nation, expressed through the term *héshān*. In fact, among the total 1069 entries of *héshān* in the BCC Corpus, only one negative modifier has been identified as in *pòsuì héshān* 破碎河山 (a shattered land, lit. broken rivers and mountains). This phrase is used to convey a sense of deep sorrow and lament for a country that has been ravaged, typically by war, invasion or political turmoil,

and it is also closely tied to one's love for their country. The above discussion illustrates that a deep sense of patriotism is inherently woven into the meaning of *héshān*.

The meaning of *héshān* 河山 (the land of one particular country, lit. rivers¹ and mountains) is explicated as follows:

[B] *héshān* 河山 (the land of one particular country, lit. rivers² and mountains)

- a. all places in a *guójiā* [m] ('country' [m])
- b. people live in many places of these places
- c. people can think like this:
 - 'these places are one
 - there are many very good places here
 - people live in these places are the same kind
 - I am one of these people'
- d. because of this, people often feel something very good towards these places
because of this, people often say something very good about these places

Component (a) defines *héshān* as referring to all places within a country. Component (b) specifies that people reside in certain parts of the country, emphasising the close connection between individuals and their homeland. The first line of component (c) illustrates that *héshān* is not a neutral landscape term, but one imbued with human perspectives. The second and third lines— 'these places are one, there are many very good places here'— reflect how people perceive these places as belonging to their country and often focus on their positive aspects. The last two lines of component (c) convey a sense of affiliation and belonging. Lastly, component (d) establishes that the term *héshān* is often used to convey an expression of love for one's country.

The other similar term that will be discussed in this chapter is *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power, lit. rivers¹ and mountains), a polysemous term that carries two distinct meanings. The first meaning of *jiāngshān*¹ refers to the physical landscape, particularly in expressions that highlight the scenic beauty of the land, much like *héshān* discussed above. Common expressions that reflect this meaning of *jiāngshān*¹ include *jiāngshān rúhuà* 江山如画 (the land is picturesque, lit. rivers and mountains are picturesque), *zhuàngměi jiāngshān* 壮美江山 (magnificent rivers and mountains) and *jiāngshān duōjiāo* 江山多娇 (a land so rich in beauty). In these expressions, *jiāngshān*¹ represents the natural grandeur of the country.

The key distinction between *jiāngshān*¹ and *héshān* is that *jiāngshān*¹ often conveys more than just the land's physical beauty; it also evokes the notion of political authority and governance, frequently employed by rulers to denote the territory under their administration. Thus, while both terms celebrate the scenic landscape, *jiāngshān*¹ in these expressions carries a more political and poetic tone, typically associated with national pride and the authority of the ruling power.

The second meaning of *jiāngshān*² shifts toward a more abstract concept, referring to 'state power' or 'sovereignty'. Usually, it is used to refer to the ancient emperors' rule over the nation and reflects the dominion of the ancient emperors and their control over the nation. Expressions that illustrate this meaning of *jiāngshān*² include *zuòwěn jiāngshān*² 坐稳江山 (secure the regime, lit. sit tight rivers¹ and mountains), *bànbì jiāngshān*² 半壁江山 (half of the country, typically denotes the part of a country that remains untouched during an invasion, lit. half wall rivers¹ and mountains) and *bùài jiāngshān ài měirén* 不爱江山爱美人

(choosing power over the throne, lit. don't love rivers¹ and mountains, love beautiful women). A more formal usage of this term in its second meaning of 'state power' would be *jiāngshān² shèjì* 江山社稷 (lit. rivers¹, mountains and the state), which refers to the regime of a country.

These two meanings of *jiāngshān* represent different aspects of the term: one connected to the natural landscape and national beauty, and the other linked to the concept of political power and control. The first meaning, although still relevant in contemporary expressions, remains largely confined to certain fixed expressions in modern Chinese, while the second meaning, associated with imperial rule, is largely restricted to historical and literary contexts. As the discussion of this term is mainly intended to illustrate the connection between the Chinese people's understanding of the landscape and other aspects of their worldview, and since the meaning of *jiāngshān* is not the focus of the present study, no explication will be provided for its two meanings in this chapter.

In this section, I have illustrated how Chinese people deeply associate the natural landscape with their sense of national identity. The notions initially tied to specific landforms, namely rivers and mountains, have been extended metaphorically to represent the physical territory of the country, convey emotional attachment to the homeland, and imply state authority. The meanings and utility of the concepts discussed in this section reveal the profound cultural significance that the landscape holds in Chinese thought and expression. In particular, certain landscape terms embody an intrinsic sense of unity among the people, their homeland, and the governing authority, transforming the natural environment into a potent symbol of national identity and cohesion.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how the Chinese conceptualisation of the physical world is deeply intertwined with their cultural values and national identity by examining three landscape terms that extend far beyond their literal meanings to function as powerful metonyms.

The first term, *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit. mountains and water places), reflects the deep connection between Chinese perceptions of the physical world and Chinese aesthetics and ideas on landscape. The concept of *shānshuǐ* inherently encompasses two levels of aesthetic value: sensory aesthetics and spiritual satisfaction, which reflects a deeper emotional and philosophical connection to nature. In this section, I have also shown that elevated places and water places occupy a significant role in the Chinese perception of the landscape, highlighting their cultural and symbolic significance.

The second and the third terms, *héshān* 河山 (the land of one particular country, lit. rivers¹ and mountains) and *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power, lit. rivers¹ and mountains), highlight the connection between Chinese perception of the physical world and their sense of national identity. *Héshān* extends beyond its literal meaning of rivers and mountains to symbolise the homeland and the deep emotional bond people feel toward their land. *Jiāngshān* takes this symbolism a step further, representing the power and authority of the state. Together, these terms emphasise the central role of the physical world in shaping the Chinese people's understanding of national identity and emotional connection to the nation.

Collectively, these three terms demonstrate how the Chinese conceptualisation of the physical world extends beyond geographical features to encompass profound cultural meanings, offering insight into the Chinese people's worldview and values. The centrality of landscape in Chinese culture highlights the profound reverence that the Chinese people have for land and nature. Their understanding of the physical world permeates various aspects of their culture, from aesthetics to national identity.

In the following chapters, I will delve further into the meanings and cultural connotations of common landscape terms in Chinese, with particular focus on those related to elevated places and water places. These chapters will offer a more detailed analysis of how the landscape is conceptualised within Chinese culture and language. Where appropriate, comparisons will be made with equivalent terms in other languages, highlighting both shared and culturally specific ways in which landscapes are understood across different cultures. This cross-cultural perspective will help illustrate how landscapes both shape and reflect human experience.

Chapter 5 Elevated Places

5.1 Introduction

One of the most obvious topographic features on the Earth's surface for humans is elevated places, such as mountains and hills. Elevated places are particularly significant because they are 'visually prominent and affect people's movement in the environment' (Smith & Mark, 2003, pp. 419–420). Many have claimed that concepts for elevation features, such as 'mountain' in English, are 'brute fact' (Searle, 1995). The English term 'mountain' is included in the Swadesh list, which contains 100 terms that were selected based on the criteria that 'they are items of high frequency that we would expect to find in every language' (Millar & Trask, 2015, pp. 21, 371).

However, previous studies have demonstrated that the perception of elevated places, such as mountains and hills, vary significantly across languages and cultures (e.g., Bromhead, 2018; Burenhult & Levison, 2008). These variations arise because elevated places differ in observable attributes such as size, shape, material composition, and prominence within the landscape. Cultures assign different priorities to these dimensions, leading to unique classifications and interpretations of elevated features in the physical world (Bromhead, 2018).

Some languages have been discovered to classify elevated areas primarily based on size. For instance, in English, the terms 'mountain' and 'hill' distinguish elevated places based on their size, with 'mountain' referring to larger and more imposing features and 'hill' to smaller

ones (Bromhead, 2018). Similarly, in Chinese, *shān* 山 ('mountain') and *qiū* 丘 ('hill') also denote differences in size (see detailed semantic analysis below).

In contrast, some languages classify elevated places based on shape or material rather than size. For instance, in Yélî Dnye, spoken on Rossel Island, the term *mbu* refers to conical elevations of any size (Levinson, 2008). Since this classification is based on shape rather than size, it is unaffected by human interaction or activity—for example, one might step over a small pile of crabs but not a mountain—and is independent of specific cultural constructs. A similar approach is found in Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, where the term *puli* refers to 'rocky outcrops' regardless of their gradient (Bromhead, 2018). Here, the material composition of the elevation becomes the defining characteristic. In summary, previous research suggests that most, if not all, languages include terms for classifying elevated places; however, the criteria for classification—whether size, shape, or material—and the number of categories vary across cultures (Bromhead, 2018; Burenhult & Levison, 2008).

Linguists have documented terms for elevated places across various languages, analysing their semantic and syntactic properties (see, e.g., Bromhead, 2018; Burenhult, 2008).

However, the semantics of Chinese terms for elevated places remain relatively understudied.

In this chapter, I focus on exploring the meanings of landscape terms for elevated places in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) and the ways in which Chinese speakers categorise these landscape features.

5.2 Lexicographical Tradition of Elevated Places

Chinese is a language rich in terms for elevated places and has a long lexicographical tradition describing these landscape features. Chinese people's perception of *shān* 山 ('mountain') dates back to the pre-Qin period (before 221 BCE). The earliest systematic record of elevated places in China can be traced back to *Shānhǎi Jīng* 山海经 (*Of Ancient Mountains and Seas*) (see also Chapter 3.1). Among the 18 volumes of *Shānhǎi Jīng*, five are dedicated to elevated places and creatures living in these places. In *Shānhǎi Jīng*, the descriptions of mountain directions are primarily based on the four cardinal directions: north, south, east, and west (*Shānhǎi Jīng*, n.d.). Distances between mountains are measured in 'lǐ' 里 ("mile"), a traditional Chinese unit of distance. In addition to directional guidance and precise measurements of the distances between mountains, the *Shānhǎi Jīng* also offers rich descriptions of the geographical features of elevated places, as well as the distinctive or mythical creatures associated with them.

As many of the mountains and creatures recorded in *Shānhǎi Jīng* 山海经 (*Of Ancient Mountains and Seas*) cannot be verified by modern standards, it is often regarded as a work of mythology, folklore or even bestiary (Strassberg, 2003). Despite its unverifiable contents, *Shānhǎi Jīng* remains a valuable resource for understanding Chinese concepts of elevated places. In *Shānhǎi Jīng*, the text provides detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna inhabiting the mountains, reflecting ancient observations of ecosystems and an early understanding of biodiversity. Additionally, mountains are often viewed as sacred spaces and abodes of deities in the *Shānhǎi Jīng*, which frequently links them to mythological narratives and religious beliefs. The stories in the *Shānhǎi Jīng* highlight the profound respect ancient Chinese people held for the forces of nature and their spiritual connection to their physical surroundings (*Shānhǎi Jīng*, n.d., see also Fracasso, 1993).

Elevated places were also recorded in *Ěryǎ* 尔雅, the earliest known Chinese thesaurus (see Chapter 3.1). In *Ěryǎ*, elevated places are categorised into two types and discussed in two sections: *Shìqiū* 释丘 (lit. explaining hills) and *Shìshān* 释山 (lit. explaining mountains). Further classifications have also been made with 51 terms under the category of *qiū* and 50 terms under the category of *shān*. These classifications are based on various factors, including size, shape, height, location, human involvement (whether artificial or natural), periphery, relation to other elevated places, or presence of water, stones, vegetation, or caves (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, pp. 742–758). However, most of these detailed classifications can no longer be found in MSC.

In MSC, landscape terms for elevated places can be found in dictionaries. *Shān* 山 ('mountain') and *qiū* 丘 ('hill') remain the primary landscape terms used to represent elevated places. Additionally, there are other terms used to refer to elevated places from various perspectives. The table below outlines the most common landscape terms for elevated places in MSC, along with their definitions from the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (see Chapter 3.1) and the classification parameters mentioned in these definitions:

TABLE 5-1

Chinese Landscape Terms for Elevated Places

Landscape terms for elevated places	Definition in the <i>Contemporary Chinese Dictionary</i>	Parameters					
		Size	Material	Shape	Height	Location	Description of a mountainous /hilly area

<i>shān</i> 山 (‘mountain’)	地面上由土、石形成的高耸的部分 (The elevated part of the earth that is formed by soil and stone) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1185)	√	√	√	√		
<i>qiū</i> 丘 (‘hill’)	小土山 (lit. small earth mountain) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1120)	√	√	√	√		
<i>shānmài</i> 山脉 (‘mountain range’)	成行列的群山，山势起伏，向一定方向延展，好像脉络似的，所以叫山脉 (mountain range, undulating, extending to certain directions, like veins, thus called <i>Shānmài</i> , lit. mountain vessel) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1186)	√		√			
<i>lǐng</i> 岭 (‘mountain ridge’)	高大的山脉 (lit. high and big <i>Shānmài</i> 山脉) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 869)	√			√		
<i>shānlǜán</i> 山峦 (‘a stretch of mountains’)	山，多指连绵的 (mountain, often refers to a continuous stretch of mountains) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1186)			√			√
<i>qiūlíng</i> 丘陵 (‘hills’)	连绵成片的小山 (a continuous stretch of small mountains) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1120)			√			√
<i>shāndì</i> 山地 (‘mountainous region’)	多山的地带 (mountainous region) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1185)						√
<i>gāng</i> 冈/岗 (‘ridge’)	较低而平的山脊 (low and flat mountain ridge) (ILCASS, 2005, pp. 446, 448)			√	√	√	
<i>yá</i> 崖 (‘cliff’)	山石或高地的陡立的侧面 (the steep side of a mountain, a stone, or a highland) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1559)			√	√	√	
<i>fēng</i> 峰 (‘peak’)	山的突出的尖顶 (the prominent pointed top of a mountain) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 412)			√	√	√	

As indicated in the above table, in MSC, elevated places are generally categorised into *shān* 山 (‘mountain’) and *qiū* 丘 (‘hill’) based on their size and height. Landscape terms such as *shānmài* 山脉 (‘mountain range’), *qiūlíng* 丘陵 (‘hill’) and *shānlǜán* 山峦 (‘a stretch of mountains’) are commonly used to describe mountainous or hilly regions, reflecting the fact that mountains and hills typically do not exist as isolated entities but rather in groupings. While material composition is embedded in the meanings of *shān* and *qiū*, it is not considered a crucial criterion for categorising elevated places in MSC. Typically, *shān* is thought to be composed of earth and/or stone, whereas *qiū* is primarily associated with

earth. When it is necessary to specify the material of an elevated feature, the material term often precedes the landscape term to form a compound noun. Examples of such compound nouns include *kuàngshān* 矿山 (mine, lit. mine mountain), *tǔqiū* 土丘 (lit. earth hill) and *shítou shān* 石头山 (lit. stone mountain).

Moreover, in MSC, there are concepts for elevated places with distinctive features, such as shape, height, shape, and location. For example, *lǐng* 岭 ('ridge') refers to large and towering mountain ranges. Additionally, some landscape terms describe different parts of *shān*, such as *gāng* 冈/岗 ('ridge'), which denotes a mountain ridge, *yá* 崖 ('cliff') which describes the steep sides of mountains or elevated areas, and *fēng* 峰 ('peak'), which refers to the pointed summit of a mountain. The variety of landscape terms to describe elevated landforms in Chinese is likely due to the prominence and abundance of such landscape features and the deep connection that Chinese people have had with these landforms throughout history.

In this section, I have highlighted that the Chinese language is rich in landscape terms for elevated places and boasts a long-standing lexicographical tradition dedicated to such landforms. In addition, MSC employs a diverse range of factors in categorising elevated places, even though the number of such factors has decreased compared to those found in ancient Chinese texts. In the following sections, I will conduct a semantic analysis of Chinese landscape terms for elevated places to explore the Chinese way of conceptualising elevated places and uncover the cultural significance Chinese people attach to elevated places by examining the cultural connotations embedded in the meanings of these terms.

5.3 *Shān* 山 ('mountain'), *Lǐng* 岭 ('mountain ridge') and *Fēng* 峰 ('peak')

In the first volume of the Chinese primary school Chinese textbook, the concept of *shān* 山 ('mountain') is introduced to Chinese pupils for the first time through the following picture, along with the Chinese character:



(MEPRC, 2016, p. 11)

Another notable textbook introduction of the concept of *shān* is the traditional Chinese fable *yúgōng yíshān* 愚公移山 (The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains), included in the Year 8 Chinese textbook (Lie, ca. 450–375 BCE/2017). This story recounts the tale of a 90-year-old man frustrated by the mountains blocking his home. Determined to remove them, he set to work using hoes and baskets. When others questioned the feasibility of such an immense task, the Foolish Old Man responded that, although he might not complete it in his lifetime, the continuous efforts of his children, grandchildren, and future generations would eventually achieve the goal. Inspired by his determination and perseverance, the gods in Heaven intervened and commanded the mountains to be moved (see Lie, ca. 450–375 BCE/2017, pp. 140–141)

From the above-mentioned early engagements with the concept of *shān*, it can be seen that the initial Chinese understanding of this term centres on two main aspects: the visual perception of its shape and size, and the physical obstacle that *shān* presents to human movement.

It is commonly understood that *shān* consists of three parts: a narrow or pointed top, referred to by the Chinese term *shāndǐng* 山顶 (lit. mountain top); sloping sides, described by the term *shānpō* 山坡 (lit. mountain slope) or *shānyāo* 山腰 (lit. mountain waist); and the base, known as *shānjiǎo* 山脚 (lit. mountain feet).

The size of *shān* is immense, making it possible for villages to be established at its base as reflected in the phrase '*shānjiǎoxià de cūnzhuāng* 山脚下的村庄 (village at the foot of the mountain)'. The full view of *shān* can only be appreciated from a great distance, as reflected in the common collocation *yuǎnshān* 远山 (distant mountain), which appears 2414 times in the BCC Corpus, whereas *jìnshān* 近山 (lit. near mountain) is much less common, with only 256 occurrences in the same corpus. This vastness is also reflected in four-character fixed expressions that highlight the magnitude or significance of something described using the term *shān*. Examples include *duījī rúshān* 堆积如山 (lit. piled up like a mountain), which signifies an overwhelming quantity, and *hàolìng rúshān* 号令如山 (lit. a command is like a mountain), which demonstrates the absolute and unchangeable nature of a military order by likening it to *shān*.

Multiple elevated areas referred to as *shān* are often connected to form a continuous stretch of high terrain, known as *shānmài* 山脉 ('mountain range') in MSC. This continuity, along with the size and immense physical characteristics of mountains, presents significant challenges for people's travel. Consequently, when describing people's movement on the slopes of *shān*, most commonly used verbs include *pá* 爬 (climb), *dēng* 登 (ascend), *shàng* 上 (climb, lit. up) and *fān* 翻 (cross/tramp over). As shown by the examples below, four-character fixed expressions like *fānshān yuèlǐng* 翻山越岭 (lit. cross over mountains and ridges) and *báshān shèshuǐ* 跋山涉水 (lit. to trek over mountains and ford rivers) use mountain climbing to describe hard work or the long distance of a journey.

1. 我们就这样走在人生的道路上，不断前行，翻山越岭。(We walk along the path of life, constantly moving forward, **[fānshān yuèlǐng] crossing mountains and ridges.**)

(BCC Corpus)

2. 快乐降临给那些朝着一个远大的目标跋山涉水不畏艰苦的行者，惟有他们，才有真正的伟大的前途。(Happiness comes to those who **[báshān shèshuǐ] trek over mountains and ford rivers** to achieve a lofty goal without fear of hardship, and only they have a truly great future.)

(BCC Corpus)

The composition of *shān* is generally perceived as consisting of both *nítǔ* 泥土 (soil) and *shítou* 石头 (stone). In the BCC Corpus, both *tǔshān* 土山 (lit. earthen mountain) and *shíshān* 石山 (lit. stone mountain) are commonly found. Specifically, there are 507 entries

for *tǔshān* and 2,062 entries for *shíshān*, indicating that *shíshān* are referenced more frequently than *tǔshān*. At the same time, *shānshí* 山石 (lit. mountain stone) appears 1877 times in the BCC Corpus and is frequently used in contexts that highlight either the natural beauty of mountainous landscapes or the potential danger of falling stones:

3. 太平山，山石嶙峋，起伏蜿蜒。(Taiping Mountain is characterised by rugged **[shānshí] mountain rocks** and a winding, undulating landscape.)

(BCC Corpus)

4. 沿途民居被滚落的山石严重破坏，被滚石压成麻花状的车辆残骸一路不断。

(The houses along the way were severely damaged by falling **[shānshí] mountain rocks**, and the wreckage of vehicles crushed into twisted shapes by the boulders was scattered throughout the route.)

(BCC Corpus)

Shān has served as a vital site for essential activities among Chinese people, including gathering medicinal herbs, collecting firewood, and hunting animals. Historical records often mention the presence of birds and animals inhabiting the mountains. For example, in *Xunzi* (475–221 BCE), there is a saying that ‘*shānlín zhě, niǎoshòu zhījū yě* 山林者鸟兽之居也 (mountains and forests are the home for birds and animals)’ (*Xunzi*, ca. 475–221 BCE, volume 9). The notion of living things has long been an integral part of Chinese people’s perception of *shān* 山. Such expressions can also be found in MSC:

5. 艺术还诸天地，犹如动物终归山林。(Art returns to nature, just as animals ultimately return to the **[shān] mountains** and forests.)

In addition, *shān* are generally not regarded as ideal places for human habitation. This perception is reflected in the term *shānlǐ rén* 山里人 ('mountain people'), which often carries connotations of poverty, remoteness, and harsh living conditions. As illustrated in the following examples, *shānlǐ rén* often implies a marginalised lifestyle associated with limited resources and isolation from urban or developed areas.

6. 一位乘客见他穿得土里土气，吃的粗茶淡饭，以为他是山里人。(A passenger saw that he was dressed in rustic clothes and eating plain food, and assumed he was a **[shān lǐ rén] mountain people**.)

(BCC Corpus)

7. 他岩石般坚实的身上裹着朴素的衣服，一看就象个山里人。(His rock-solid body was wrapped in simple clothing — he looked just like a **[shān lǐ rén] mountain people** at first glance.)

(BCC Corpus)

8. 直到 80 年代末，独轮车还是山里人主要的交通工具。(Up until the late 1980s, the wheelbarrow was still the main means of transportation for **[shān lǐ rén] mountain people**.)

(BCC Corpus)

On the other hand, *shān* are deemed as sacred places hallowed by a tradition that goes back centuries before the Buddhists and Taoists built their first temples on the hillsides in Chinese culture (Sullivan, 1962, p. 1). Those who voluntarily decide to live in the mountains are

perceived differently from others and are often held in high esteem. As noted by Bill Porter (1993), the American journalist and translator of classical Chinese texts, in *Road to Heaven – Encounters with Chinese Hermits*:

Throughout Chinese history, there have always been people who preferred to spend their lives in the mountains, getting by on less, sleeping under thatch, wearing old clothes, working the higher slopes, not talking much, writing even less, maybe a few poems, a recipe or two. Out of touch with the times but not with the seasons, they cultivate roots of the spirit, trading flatland dust for mountain mist. Distant and insignificant, they were the most respected men and women in the world's oldest society. (Porter, 1993, p. 1)

The above discussion reveals a dual perspective in Chinese views on living in the *shān* (mountains). On one hand, mountains are often regarded as unsuitable for human habitation due to the difficulties they pose for movement and accessibility. On the other hand, shaped by traditional Chinese cultural values, those who voluntarily choose a life of seclusion in the mountains—hermits—are typically seen as noble individuals, and the act of retreating into nature is considered an honourable and virtuous pursuit.

Based on the above discussion, I propose the following explication for *shān* 山 ('mountain'):

[A] *shān* 山 (mountain)

- a. places of one kind
- b. places of this kind are very big places
- c. there are a lot of *nítǔ* [m] (soil [m]) in places of this kind

there are a lot of *shítou* [m] (stone [m]) in places of this kind

- d. when people are very far from a place of this kind, they can see this place:

the *dǐngbù* [m] (top [m]) of this place is very far above the places on all sides of this place

at the *dǐngbù* of this place, the places on one side of this place are very near the

places on all other sides of this place

at the *dǐngbù* of this place, the places on one side of this place can be very far from
the places on another side of this place.

- e. the *dǐngbù* of a place of this kind is not like all the other places

- f. often, when someone is at the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of a place of this kind

if this someone wants to be at the *dǐngbù* of a place of this kind

this someone does something for a long time

not like people do in many other places

because of this, this someone can move in this place as this someone wants
during this time, this someone can feel something bad in his body because of this

- g. when someone is on one side of a place of this kind

this someone cannot be on the other side in a short time

- h. living things of many kinds live in a place of this kind

there are many *dòngwù* [e] (animals [e]) in places of this kind

there are many *niǎo* [e] (birds [e]) in places of this kind

there are many *huācǎo shùmù* [e] (flower, grass, trees and bush [e]) in places of this kind

- i. not many people live in places of this kind

some people want to live in a place of this kind

these people are not like other people

many people think like this about these people: it is good if people want to live like this

As discussed in Chapter 2, component (a)—places of one kind—has been used for all countable landscape concepts in this thesis. Component (b) accounts for the large volume or size of *shān*. Component (c), ‘there are a lot of *nítǔ* [m] (soil [m]) in places of this kind, there are a lot of *shítou* [m] (stone [m]) in places of this kind’, covers the material composition of *shān*. Similar components are used in explications of water places with ‘water’ as a semantic molecule (see Chapters 6 and 7). Material concepts can be significant in the

conceptualisation of landscape concepts as they are the key features based on which Chinese people distinguish different landforms. Therefore, I propose that material concepts, such as earth, stone, and water, can serve as the building blocks of landscape concepts and thus act as semantic molecules in the explications of landscape concepts.

Component (d) tries to depict both the height and the shape of *shān*. The first two lines, ‘the top [m] of a place of this kind is very far above the places on all sides of this place’ portray the height of *shān*. The shape of *shān* is conveyed in the last two lines of component (d). A mountain is not a plateau that rises vertically, but rather a slope that ascends on all sides, eventually reaching its highest point. This shape makes it possible for human beings to climb and reach the peak after some effort. Component (d) highlights the significance of the peak in people’s perception of *shān*. Subsequently, component (e) further specifies that the top of a *shān* is treated differently from all other places within a *shān*.

In component (f), I use the word ‘often’ to suggest that climbing a mountain is a common activity for Chinese people. The following lines aim to capture the various actions involved in mountain climbing, which may include walking along slopes, climbing stairs, or even crawling. This component does not attempt to list all the possible methods used for climbing a mountain but rather provides a general summary that movement on a mountain is more challenging and distinct from movement in other locations. Subsequently, component (g) deals with the hindrance that *shān* pose to people by stating that ‘when someone is on one side of a place of this kind, this someone cannot be on the other side in a short time’.

In component (h), I aim to demonstrate that Chinese people perceive mountains as comprehensive biological systems, rather than isolated singular entities. This distinction reflects the Chinese perspective on mountains as multifaceted ecosystems, where living things of many kinds can be found.

Finally, component (i) captures the subjective evaluation of *shān* held by Chinese people. The majority of Chinese cities are situated in plains and basins, and mountainous areas are often viewed as less desirable for habitation. This is evident in the term '*shānchéng* 山城' (lit. mountain city), which specifically refers to cities built in mountainous regions in China, with Chongqing being the most famous example. These cities earned the name due to their unique locations in mountainous terrain, along with their distinctive geographical layouts, transportation systems, and residential characteristics. Therefore, the stereotypical perception of *shān* held by Chinese people is that they are remote from urban centres and sparsely populated. On the other hand, influenced by religious, philosophical, and cultural ideas, *shān* is often seen as a retreat for religious practitioners or hermits, and those who choose a secluded life in such places are generally viewed positively.

The next two terms I will discuss in this section are *lǐng* 岭 ('mountain ridge') and *fēng* 峰 ('peak'). Under different circumstances, *lǐng* and *fēng* can be used to refer to the top part of the same *shān* 山 ('mountain'), depending on the angle of observation. As expressed in the following lines of a poem written by Su Shi in 1084 CE, which is included in the textbooks for the subject of Chinese, whether a place is considered as *lǐng* or *fēng* depends on the perspective from which it is viewed:

9. 横看成岭侧成峰。(It's a [*lǐng*] range viewed in face and [*fēng*] peaks viewed from the side.⁴)

(Su, 1084/2023, p. 441)

The core meaning of *lǐng* is an elongated mountain that stretches in a specific direction.

Fānshān yuèlǐng 翻山越岭 (climbing mountains and crossing ridges) is commonly used to describe how people navigate through mountainous terrain. It implies that *lǐng* serves as an obstacle to human movement. Due to its hindrance to human movement, *lǐng* (mountain ridge) is often used in place names that are known for their military significance, such as *shànggān lǐng* 上甘岭, famous for the Battle of Triangle Hill, and *bādá lǐng* 八达岭, the renowned Badaling section of the Great Wall of China. Drawing on the above discussion, the meaning of *lǐng* 岭 ('mountain ridge') is explicated as follows:

[B] *lǐng* 岭 ('mountain ridge')

- a. often, when people see a *shān* [m] (mountain [m]) from one side
- b. they can think like this:
 'this place is like something very very long [m]'
- c. when someone is on one side of a place of this kind
 if this someone wants to be on the other side
 this someone cannot be on the other side after a short time

⁴ For texts with existing published translations, this study takes advantage of these existing translations with appropriate attribute to the translators. Since the primary aim of this study is to explore how Chinese people conceptualise landscape terms based on corpus data — not on translation strategies — translations are selected for their accuracy in conveying the origin text and preserving key concepts.

Component (a) makes it clear that *líng* is a concept rooted in people's perspective, specifically visual perception. Component (b) accounts for the physical nature of *líng*, describing it as an elongated formation. Component (c) addresses the hindrance *líng* pose to people's movement.

As discussed in the semantic analysis of *shān*, *fēng* 峰 ('peak') is often considered as the destination of human movement in *shān* 山 ('mountain'). For this reason, among all concepts related to elevated places, *fēng* is treated differently by being the part of *shān* that often has a name, such as *qiágōglǐ fēng* 乔戈里峰 (Chhogori or K2) and *zhūmùlǎngmǎ fēng* 珠穆朗玛峰 (Mount Everest). At the same time, *fēng* is closely associated with the material concept of *shí* 石 (rock). In the BCC Corpus, the search for '*fēng* 峰 + *shí* 石 (rock)' appears 438 times, over four times more frequently than '*fēng* 峰 + *tǔ* 土 (earth)'. Furthermore, *shí* referred to in the context of *fēng* are typically large enough to be visible from a distance, rather than small stones that can be stepped on. For instance, as described below, a single large rock atop a *shān* can itself constitute a *fēng*.

10. 华山一石铸一峰，千峰铸万石。(On Mount Hua, one rock forms one **[fēng]** peak, and thousands of **[fēng]** peaks are formed by thousands of rocks.)

(BCC Corpus)

The collocations '*shífēng* 石峰 (lit. rock peak)' and '*fēngshí* 峰石 (lit. peak rock)' further indicate that the stereotype of *fēng* is closely associated with the concept of *shí* 石 (rock). This is likely because rocky mountain tops often protrude and appear pointed. However, it is

important to note that not all mountain tops are referred to as *fēng* 峰 in Chinese, as the term *fēng* typically denotes a sharp, prominent peak rather than any mountain top in general. From the above discussion, it can be seen that there are two distinct features about *fēng*: convex shape and rocky texture. Thus, the meaning of *fēng* is explicated as such:

[C] *fēng* 峰 ('peak')

- a. places of one kind
- b. often, when someone is on one side of a *shān* [m] (mountain [m])
this someone can see a place of this kind at the *dǐngbù* [m] (top [m]) of a *shān*
- c. the *dǐngbù* of a place of this kind is very far above the places on all sides of this place
at the *dǐngbù* of this place, the places on one side of this place are very near the places on all other sides of this place
at the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of this place, the places on one side of this place can be far from the places on another side of this place.
- d. often, there are big *shítou* [m] (rock [m]) in a place of this kind
- e. often, when someone is at the *dǐbù* of a *shān*
if this someone can want to be at a place of this kind
this someone does something for a long time
not like people do in many other places
because of this, this someone can move in the *shān* as this someone wants
during this time, this someone can feel something bad in his body because of this

Component (b) suggests that the concept of *fēng* is also shaped by human perception, and it highlights the typical location of a *fēng*—at the upper part of a *shān*. Component (c) addresses the distinctive shape of *fēng*. Component (d) highlights that large *shítou* 石头 ('rocks') are commonly found in *fēng*. In certain instances, *fēng* may even be seen as made up of a single rock. Component (e) stresses that *fēng* is typically the sought-after destination

of a *shān* 山 ('mountain'), necessitating effort to attain. This point is also discussed in the explication of *shān*.

5.4 *Shānmài* 山脉 ('mountain range') and *Shānlúan* 山峦 ('a stretch of mountains')

The next term I will discuss in this chapter is *shānmài* 山脉 ('mountain range'). In reality, individual *shān* 山 ('mountain') rarely exist in isolation. Instead, they tend to form groups or chains that span large areas. This natural grouping of mountains is common across the globe, and many languages have specific terms to describe chains of mountains, such as 'mountain range' in English and 'cordillera' in Spanish (Bromhead, 2018). In MSC, this concept is captured by the term *shānmài* 山脉 ('mountain range').

The term *shānmài* reflects the perception of mountains as interconnected entities, much like veins in a biological system, emphasising their continuity and coherence. The second Chinese character *mài* 脉 ('veins') denotes the network of blood vessels in the human body. According to the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, the definition of *shānmài* 山脉 is '成行列的群山，山势起伏，向一定方向延展，好像脉络似的 (chains of mountains, undulating and stretching in certain directions, resembling the pattern of arteries and veins)' (ILCASS, 2008, p. 913).

The BCC Corpus reveals that the adjectives most frequently used to describe *shānmài* 山脉 ('mountain range') emphasise its immense scale and unbroken continuity. These include but are not limited to *gāodà* 高大 (high and large), *gāosǒng* 高耸 (towering), *wānyán* 蜿蜒

(winding), and *liánmián bùjué* 连绵不绝 (endlessly sprawling). These terms reflect the grandeur and uninterrupted extension typically associated with *shānmài*.

In terms of classifiers, *shānmài* is commonly paired with *tiáo* 条—used for long, narrow objects or stretches of land—and *duàn* 段, which refers to a section or portion of a longer whole (see Chapter 3.4.1). These classifiers further reinforce the conceptualisation of *shānmài* as a lengthy and segmented geographical feature.

The verb most frequently associated with *shānmài* is *yuèguò* 越过 ('to cross over'), suggesting a sense of distance or detachment in perspective. Unlike individual mountains that invite personal interaction, such as climbing or hiking, *shānmài* is typically seen as too vast and formidable for such engagement. It is not approached as a space for everyday activity but rather perceived as a large, continuous entity that one observes from afar, often imagined from a panoramic or bird's-eye viewpoint.

Drawing on the preceding discussion, I propose the following explication of *shānmài* 山脉 ('mountain range'):

[D] *shānmài* 山脉 ('Mountain range')

- a. places of one kind
- b. there are many big *shān* [m] in a place of this kind
some of these *shān* are very near others of these *shān*
- c. when people see a place of this kind
they can think like this:
 'this place is like something very very long [m]'
- d. often, there are many places of this kind in one big place

Component (b) conveys the concept that *shānmài* is an area with numerous mountains, which are often interconnected, forming a continuous network of *shān*. This idea is further elaborated in Component (c), which highlights the elongated shape of *shānmài*. Component (d) emphasises that multiple chains of *shānmài* can exist within a single region, creating a pattern that resembles veins. It is worth noting that while the appearance of *shānmài* is often compared to veins, their role in the Chinese terrain is frequently likened to the skeleton of the landscape, as illustrated in the example below:

11. ‘山脉构成中国地形的骨架，常常是不同地形区的分界。([*Shānmài*] Mountain ranges form the backbone of China's terrain and often serve as boundaries between different topographic regions.)’

(The State Council of The People's Republic of China, 2005)

In MSC, another term that is used to describe a mountainous area is *shānlúan* 山峦 (‘a stretch of mountains’). According to the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, *shānlúan* describes the undulating, often layered or stacked appearance of mountains (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1186). *Luán* is rarely used by itself but in the form of compound word *shānlúan* or four-character fixed expressions like *chóngluán diézhàng* 重峦叠嶂 (mountain peaks rising one after another, lit. many *luán* overlapping peaks) and *shānlúan qǐfú* 山峦起伏 (mountain ranges rise and fall, lit. mountain *luán* rise and fall).

Shānlúan is often used in descriptive texts and is often accompanied by modifiers that emphasise visual perception, particularly the continuous nature of mountain landscapes. In

the BCC Corpus, common modifiers that are used to describe *shānlúan* include *liánmián de* 连绵的 (continuous), *mángmáng de* 茫茫的 (boundless), and *céngcéng diédié* 层层叠叠 (undulating). These expressions highlight the vastness of *shānlúan*, conveying that the mountainous area is so expansive that its boundaries are often beyond human sight.

Shānlúan is so vast that it must be observed from a considerable distance. This is reflected in the verbs typically used to describe observing it, such as *tiàowàng* 眺望 (look into the distance from a high place) and *jímù wàngqù* 极目望去 (looking as far as the eye can see). As demonstrated in Example 8, people often observe *shānlúan* from such a great distance that it appears on the horizon.

12. 远处的山峦和地平线相互交织，在阳光的照射下，美丽而朦胧。(In the distance, the undulating [*shānlúan*] mountains and the horizon intertwine, appearing beautiful and hazy under the sunlight.)

(BCC Corpus)

Additionally, *shānlúan* is often compared to ocean waves due to the similar way their formations rise and fall. And it is often described as *qǐfú* 起伏 (undulating, lit. rise and fall), as shown in the example below:

13. 厚重的云幕低垂，与波浪般起伏的山峦浑然成了一色。(The heavy curtain of clouds hung low, merging seamlessly with the undulating waves of [*shānlúan*] a stretch of mountains.)

(BCC Corpus)

The features of *shānluán* 山峦 (a stretch of mountains) are captured in the following explication:

[E] *shānluán* 山峦 ('a stretch of mountains')

- a. there are many *shān* [m] (mountain [m]) in a place
- b. some *shān* are very near other *shān*
- c. when someone is very far away from this place
this someone can see many *dǐngbù* [m] (top [m]) of these *shān*

Unlike other countable landscape terms, *shānluán* is uncountable and primarily used in literary descriptions. To reflect this grammatical feature, I use this phrase 'there are many *shān* [m] in a place' in component (a), emphasising that *shānluán* is not a topographic concept but rather a descriptive term for mountainous areas.

Component (b) highlights the characteristics of the described area, namely that it contains numerous mountains that rise and fall. As a result, when people observe this area from a great distance, they perceive the undulating peaks of these mountains. Component (c) serves as the central part of the explanation, detailing the visual experience of this vast landscape, which lies at the core of the concept. When viewed from afar, such as from a mountaintop, people can see the peaks of mountains rising and falling in a wave-like pattern.

5.5 *Shānqiū* 山丘 ('hill')

Now I will move to landscape terms for smaller elevated places, known as *shānqiū* 山丘 (hill, lit. mountain hill). Similar to the English term ‘hill’, *shānqiū* represents elevated places that are smaller and lower in height compared to *shān* 山 (‘mountain’). Out of the 3226 entries of *shānqiū* in the BCC Corpus, 550 are modified by the modifier *xiǎo* 小 (small) or *ǎixiǎo* 矮小 (short and small). This distinction in size and height makes *shānqiū* more accessible to people.

One of the defining features of *shānqiū* is the gentle slopes on all sides, which are much less steep than those of *shān*. As shown in Example 14 below, *dīqiū* 低丘 (low hills) and *huǎnpō* 缓坡 (gentle slope) are often used together in MSC to describe a landscape with relatively small elevations and gradual inclines. Due to the lower height and gentle slope of the sides of *shānqiū*, it is easier for people to move on *shānqiū* in contrast to *shān*. As a result, getting to the top of a *shānqiū* requires far less effort compared to ascending a mountain. This accessibility makes *shānqiū* more approachable for casual exploration, allowing people to easily reach the summit without the physical challenge often associated with *shān*.

14. 在我省滨海沙地、平原台地、低丘缓坡、村边路旁，都有桉树的绿荫。(In our province, eucalyptus trees provide green shade in coastal sandy areas, plain terraces, **[dīqiū] low hills** and **[huǎnpō] gentle slopes**, as well as along village roadsides.)

(BCC Corpus)

Shānqiū is often perceived as being composed of earth rather than stone. This is evidence from the frequent occurrence of *tǔqiū* 土丘 (lit. earth hill) in the BCC Corpus, with 518

entries, compared to *shíqiū* 石丘 (lit. stone hill), which appears only seven times and is not a common collocation in MSC.

Drawing from the discussion above, *shānqiū* can be understood as a smaller, less elevated landform that is not only easier to access but also more hospitable, making it an integral part of human settlement and activity in the landscape. The meaning of *shānqiū* 山丘 ('hill', lit. mountain hill) is explicated as such:

[F] *shānqiū* 山丘 ('hill', lit. mountain hill)

- a. places of one kind
- b. places of this kind are big places
- c. often, there is a lot of *nítǔ* [m] (soil) in places of this kind
- d. the *dǐngbù* [m] (top [m]) of a place of this kind is far above the places on all sides of this place
- e. often, when someone is at the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom) of a place of this kind
 - this someone can want to be at the *dǐngbù* of a place of this kind
 - because of this, this someone does something for some time
 - like people do in many other places
 - because of this, this someone can move in this place as this someone want

Similar to the explication of 'hill' in English (see Bromhead, 2018, p. 65), component (b) and component (d) in the above explication of *shānqiū* are scaled-down versions of the corresponding components in the explication of *shān*. In component (b), I use 'big places' in comparison to 'very big places' to indicate that *shānqiū* is smaller in scale compared to *shān*. Component (c) retains the association with earth but removes the reference to stone, highlighting that *nítǔ* [m] (soil [m]) is the primary material understood to form *shānqiū*. Finally, component (e) illustrates that reaching the top of *shānqiū* does not require as much physical effort as climbing a *shān*.

5.6 *Shāndì* 山地 ('mountains') and *Qǐulíng* 丘陵 ('hills')

Elevated places, such as *shān* 山 ('mountain') and *shānqǐū* 山丘 ('hill'), are often found next to one another in particularly elevated, high-altitude regions (see Bromhead, 2018, p. 69; Wierzbicka, 1988, pp. 538–539). According to the official data provided by the Chinese government (The State Council of The People's Republic of China, 2005), mountainous areas, including *shāndì* 山地 ('mountains'), *qǐulíng* 丘陵 ('hills'), and *gāoyuán* 高原 ('highland'), comprise roughly two-thirds of the national area. As noted by Bromhead (2018) and Wierzbicka (1988), English terms for elevated places tend to occur in the plural, reflecting the distributed nature of these landforms across the natural world—a pattern also evident in China. However, Chinese differs from English in that there is no grammatical plural form for landscape terms. Instead, Chinese employs specific compound words to describe these varied elevated regions: *shāndì* and *qǐulíng*. In this section, I will conduct an in-depth semantic analysis of these two compound terms.

Due to the obstacles caused by the mountains to people's passage, human activities around *shāndì* are usually confined to localised pockets within the broader landscape of mountains. When discussing people's activities in the mountains, especially agricultural activities, *yíkuài* 一块 (a piece) is often used to indicate that these activities occur within a specific part of a large mountainous region. As illustrated in Example 15, *yíkuài shāndì* 一块山地 (a piece of mountain land) refers to a specific location situated on *shān* or *shāndì*. However, when *shāndì* is used independently, it does not refer to a single, concrete entity. Rather, it denotes

a broad geographical feature spanning a wide region, implying the existence of multiple *shān* in that area.

15. 透过淡淡的江雾，见一座低矮的山，顶部是一块平整的**山地**。(Through the light mist over the river, a low mountain could be seen, with a flat piece of [***shāndì***] **mountain land** at its top.)

(BCC Corpus)

According to data provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China, *shāndì* constitutes approximately 33.33% of the country's total land area (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2005). In official government reports, regions with a high proportion of *shāndì*—such as specific cities or provinces—are often identified as facing unique challenges, particularly with respect to transportation infrastructure. As demonstrated in Examples 16 and 17, the mountainous terrain is frequently cited as a key factor contributing to inconvenient or underdeveloped transportation networks, which in turn impact regional connectivity and economic growth:

16. 浙江省面积为 10.18 万平方公里，**山地**多平原少，公路交通的自然条件较差，加上全省经济发展不平衡，城乡收入有较大的差距。(Zhejiang province covers an area of 101,800 square kilometres, with more [***shāndì***] **mountainous areas** and fewer plains. The natural conditions for road transportation are relatively poor. Additionally, the province's economic development is uneven, leading to significant income disparities between urban and rural areas.)

(BCC Corpus)

17. 改革开放以来，我们在山地开发上坚持“谁开发、谁所有、谁受益”的政策，规定集体和个人开发山地种果种茶，在未收益之前，免交土地使用费。(Since the reform and opening up, we have adhered to the policy of ‘whoever develops, owns and benefits’ in **[shāndì] mountain** development. It is stipulated that collectives and individuals developing mountain land for planting fruits or tea are exempt from paying land use fees until they start generating income.)

(BCC Corpus)

In the BCC Corpus, out of the total 8346 entries of *shāndì*, 1084 entries occur alongside the term *kāifā* 开发 (development). The frequent occurrence of *kāifā* in contexts related to *shāndì* suggests that *shāndì* is often seen as having sparse populations and relatively limited development. The challenging topography and natural conditions of such regions often hinder large-scale human settlement and infrastructure construction, resulting in lower population densities compared to plains or urbanised areas in China.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study explicates *shāndì* 山地 (‘mountains’) as follows:

[G] *shāndì* 山地 (‘mountains’)

- a. a place of one kind
this place is very very big
- b. there can be many *shān* [m] (mountain [m]) in this place
there can be many *shānqīū* [m] (hill [m]) in this place
- c. there are many places in this very very big place

- d. at many times, when someone is in one of these places
 - if this someone wants to be in another part of this place
 - this someone cannot be in this other place after a short time
- e. not many people live in this place

Unlike landscape terms that typically refer to specific, individual geographical entities, terms such as *shāndì* 山地 ('mountains') and *qiūlíng* 丘陵 ('hills') are employed to describe the overarching geographical characteristics of a large region. Thus, I incorporate the phrase 'a place of one kind' in component (a) to reflect that this concept is typically applied to describe the terrain of a specific region that exhibits the features outlined in the subsequent components.

In component (b), I specify that there can be both *shān* 山 ('mountain') and *shānqū* 山丘 ('hill') in *shāndì*. Component (c) clarifies that *shāndì* is viewed as a type of terrain rather than a single landform, comprising multiple elevated landforms. Within this expansive area, there can also be numerous places inhabited by people. Component (d) addresses the limited human movement within this vast place, while component (e) covers the settlement patterns of Chinese people, noting that *shāndì* is not typically preferred as a dwelling place.

Another landscape term in Chinese that is used to describe a type of elevated terrain is *qiūlíng* 丘陵 ('hills'), referring to a type of terrain characterised by gentle slopes and moderate elevation, typically lower than *shāndì* but higher than flat plains. These regions are marked by rolling landforms with less steep and more gradual inclines, making them more accessible and suitable for various human activities, such as agriculture and settlement:

18. 东部丘陵地区为我国柞蚕丝和水果的著名产地。(The eastern [*qiūlíng*] hilly region is a famous production area in China for tussah silk and fruits.)

(BCC Corpus)

In addition, when compared to *shāndì* 山地 ('mountains'), *qiūlíng* appears to be perceived by Chinese people from a more external and detached perspective. *Qiūlíng* is more commonly used to describe a geographical feature that is hilly in a general sense, rather than lending itself to describing specific human activities within a particular part of the region. This distinction is reflected in usage patterns within the BCC Corpus: *shāndì* often appears alongside the Chinese area unit *mǔ* 亩 and the numeral-classifier structure *yíkuài shāndì* 一块山地 (a piece of mountain land), and often appears in contexts involving human activities. In contrast, *qiūlíng* is seldom quantified in this manner.

Additionally, *qiūlíng* is often used in political contexts to refer to a particular region, with a focus on the general ways of life and living conditions in the area. When used in this way, *qiūlíng* is often paired with the term *shānqū* 山区 (mountainous regions), a twin term of *shāndì* that places great emphasis on the living conditions within these areas. As illustrated in the following examples, both *qiūlíng* and *shānqū* evoke associations that extend beyond physical geography, encompassing dimensions of regional life such as local lifestyles, economic activities, education, and production methods.

19. 烟草在我国分布较广，南方大多在丘陵山区，北方在偏干旱地区种植较多。
(Tobacco is widely distributed in China, with most of it being grown in [*qiūlíng*

shānqū] hilly and mountainous regions in the south, and relatively arid areas in the north.)

(BCC Corpus)

20. 盱眙县水冲港乡位于丘陵山区，自然条件恶劣，是全省著名的贫困乡。(Xuyi County's Shuichonggang Township is in a **[qiūlíng shānqū]** hilly and mountainous region, with harsh natural conditions, and is one of the most impoverished townships in the province.

(BCC Corpus)

21. 西部道路建设未形成网络，尤其在丘陵及山区，出行难的现象仍很严重，这些都严重制约了西部经济的发展。(The road network in the western region has not been established, especially in the **[qiūlíng shānqū]** hilly and mountainous region, where travel difficulties remain a serious issue. These factors have significantly hindered the development of the western economy.)

(BCC Corpus)

This association with the lifestyles of people in different geographical regions is not intrinsic to the core meanings of these landscape terms themselves. Nevertheless, it plays an important role in understanding regional life in China and presents a valuable avenue for further research.

The meaning of *qiūlíng* 丘陵 ('hills') is explicated as follows:

[H] *qiūlíng* 丘陵 ('hills')

- a. a place of one kind

this place is very very big

- b. there are many *shānqīū* [m] (hills [m]) in this place
- c. there are many places in this very very big place

Component (a) in the above explication is the same as that in the explication of *shāndì*, indicating that *qīūlíng* is a geographical term used to describe the terrain of a vast region. Component (b) asserts that *qīūlíng* refers to hilly areas. Component (c) highlights the vast expanse of *qīūlíng* and the descriptive nature of this term.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined eight landscape terms for elevated places in MSC, which can be grouped into three categories: landscape terms denoting certain landforms, terms that broadly describe the terrain of a region, and descriptive terms such as *shānluǎn* 山峦, which focus on the visual appearance of mountains rather than denoting a specific referent. Notably, terrain terms are often tied to local ways of life and political narratives, highlighting the cultural and social dimensions embedded in the meanings of these terms.

The analysis shows that MSC primarily categorise elevated places based on their size, with material composition serving as an implicit aspect of perception. This approach shares both similarities and differences with classifications in other languages, such as English and the Australian Aboriginal language Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, as discussed by Bromhead (2018). Like English, MSC relies heavily on size to distinguish between elevated landforms. In contrast, Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara places greater emphasis on the material composition of landforms (Bromhead, 2018). While MSC speakers do incorporate material into their

conceptualisation of elevated places, it does not function as a defining criterion for categorisation, as semantic analyses in this chapter have demonstrated.

Shape is likely one of the primary aspects through which Chinese people initially perceive elevated places. The distinctive forms of mountains, hills, and other elevated terrains are often the most immediately noticeable, shaping how these landforms are identified and labelled in MSC. The use of different terms for the same landform depending on the viewpoint suggests that visual perception plays a central role in the conceptualisation of elevated places. Notably, two distinct aspects of elevated landforms—vertical forms (such as conical shapes) and horizontal forms (such as elongated ridges)—have received particular attention and are explicitly labelled in MSC landscape terms. These forms reflect two contrasting perspectives in visual perception and correspond to two different ways in which the terrain poses challenges to human movement.

Another distinctive feature in the Chinese perception of elevated places lies in the ecological and cultural knowledge embedded in the meaning of *shān*. In MSC, *shān* are not merely seen as isolated physical entities, but as biological homes for a variety of plants and animals, although not typically for humans. However, as revealed in the semantic analysis, a cultural contradiction exists: while *shān* are generally regarded as inhospitable for human settlement, traditional Chinese thought also romanticises life in the mountains, often associating it with reclusion. This dual perception reflects the complex and layered ways in which Chinese people conceptualise elevated places, shaped by both ecological awareness and cultural ideas.

Chapter 6 River-places

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will cover the significance of the concept of *shuǐ* 水 ('water' or 'river-places') to Chinese people's worldview and perception of water places in general in Section 6.1.1.

Shuǐ, as an integral part of Chinese culture and philosophy, not only embodies a physical presence but also has a profound connection with Chinese culture. By delving into the cultural connotations of *shuǐ*, this section serves as an introduction section for both Chapter 6 River-places and Chapter 7 Enclosed-water places, illustrating how the way Chinese people perceive *shuǐ* influences the way they conceptualise water places.

Section 6.1.2 provides an overview of historical accounts and recordings of river-places in China. This section examines how various terms have been employed to describe similar concepts for river-places in Chinese, reflecting the evolving linguistic and cultural expressions of river-places. Despite these changes in terminology, the semantic core of these concepts has remained consistent, preserving their fundamental meanings and connotations.

6.1.1 *Shuǐ* 水 (water) as the Centre of the Chinese People's Worldview

As Bromhead (2018) notes, one thing that all people have in common is a need for water—especially fresh water. This is especially true for an agricultural country like China. In Chinese cultural understanding, the concept of *shuǐ* 水 (water or water places) typically does not

evoke vast bodies of water such as the sea or ocean located to the east of China. Instead, for most Chinese people, even today, *shuǐ* refers to more familiar and accessible forms of water: ‘rivers, lakes, irrigation ditches, pools of rain, and even mist on mountaintops’ (Ball, 2017, p. 71).

Water features are a vital natural element that Chinese people consider when selecting a place to live. According to China's documented and archaeologically verified history, the Shang dynasty (ca. 1500–1100 BCE) saw the emergence of Chinese culture in the lower Yellow River basin, in what is now Henan province. In Chinese culture, an ideal place to build a city can neither be too close nor too far from a body of water. On one hand, Chinese people follow the principles of *fēngshuǐ* 风水 and tend to live close to *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscapes, lit. mountains and water places) to achieve the ‘everlasting and eternal pursuit of Chinese traditional culture: living with nature artistically’ (Han, 2014, p. 157). On the other hand, Chinese people inhabit ‘an essentially continental nation and are inclined to take water places as a symbolically alternative world to their more familiar and conventional earth-bound one’ (Lu, 2022, p.14).

This is directly reflected in the Chinese way of building cities. Take Hangzhou for example, the location of the city was carefully selected to be situated in natural settings so that the city ‘could be interweaved with nature to form an organic whole’ and ‘never isolated from the natural surroundings’ (Han, 2014, p. 150). On the other hand, until the early nineteenth century, the West Lake was separated from the city of Hangzhou by the city walls and was considered a distinct and remote area far from the city (Duan, 2020).

Water features have played a pivotal role not only in influencing where Chinese people choose to settle, but also in shaping the cultural identity of different regions across China. In China, many areas that developed around specific water features have, over time, evolved into culturally distinct regions. A prominent example is the *Jiāngnán* 江南 (lit. Yangtze River South) region, which encompasses the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, the Qiantang River, and the Taihu Lake basin situated between them (IP, 2019). *Jiāngnán* is often described as ‘the feast of rivers, lakes and seas’ and praised as ‘heaven on earth’ for its favourable climate, picturesque landscapes, and profound cultural heritage (IP, 2019, pp. 487–511).

As the old Chinese saying goes, ‘*shuǐ kě zàizhōu, yìkě fùzhōu* 水可载舟，亦可覆舟 (While water can carry a boat, it can also overturn it). Settling in the areas that are adjacent to water features can be both beneficial and disastrous. The Yangtze River and the Yellow River, along with other waterways, have not only made water more accessible for Chinese farmers but they have also brought the deadliest form of natural disaster to the country: floods. Among all the rivers in China, the Yellow River is the most troublesome one and is given the name ‘China's sorrow’ due to a series of tragedies caused by its flooding (Ball, 2017, p. 19). The practice of recording floods can be traced back to the pre-Qin period (before 221 BCE), such as the following record found in *Mencius* (Mencius, 391–308 BCE/2009, 3B: 9): ‘当尧之时，水逆行，泛滥于中国。蛇龙居之，民无所定 (In the time of Yao, the waters overflowed their channels, inundating the Middle kingdom; snakes and dragons dwelled in it, depriving the people of a settled life)’.

Floods and droughts are the two main natural disasters faced by the Chinese people throughout history. Thus, water management and control have consistently been a key concern for Chinese rulers (Ball, 2017) — a priority clearly reflected in Chinese mythology. Many rivers, lakes, pools and springs in China are connected to myths or deities. For instance, the four largest rivers in China—the *Cháng Jiāng* 长江 (Yangtze River, lit. long river), *Huáng Hé* 黄河 (Yellow River), *Hēilóng Jiāng* 黑龙江 (Amur River, lit. black dragon river) and *Zhū Jiāng* 珠江 (Pearl River)—are, according to legend, ‘four dragons appointed by the Jade Emperor to watch over the people and bring rain to water the crops’ (Ball, 2017, p. 53). As historian Mark Edward Lewis (2006b) notes, all elements of Chinese flood myths ultimately converge in reflections on the nature of rulership and the legitimacy of sovereign authority. Many ancient rulers of China, including the Jade Emperor, the Yellow Emperor, and Yu the Great, are legendary water deities who have the power to govern water, known as *zhēnlóng tiānzǐ* 真龙天子 (king, lit. the true dragon, the Son of Heaven).

As Blumenberg (1985) notes, myths that are preserved and retold are those that resonate most deeply with people, helping them make sense of their world. In the Chinese context, flood myths centred on figures like Yu the Great 大禹 and *Nǚwā* 女娲, both of whom are credited with saving the people by controlling floods, offer a comprehensive framework through which early Chinese thinkers articulated a sense of ordered space (Lewis, 2006a). Chapter 4 of the present thesis has also demonstrated that prominent physical features—particularly water bodies and elevated terrains—serve as key lenses through which Chinese people perceive and conceptualise not only the physical environment but also broader aspects of their worldview.

In conclusion, water features play an important role in many facets of Chinese people's worldview. By overcoming the semantic barrier and facilitating cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies, the semantic analysis of landscape terms for water places can serve as a basis for further studies on various topics pertaining to Chinese people's interpretation of water features.

6.1.2 Lexicographical Tradition of Water Places

As water management was so important for governing the country in ancient China, Chinese people began to explore and record water places from an early period. The first record of the categorisation of river-places can be traced back to *Ěryǎ* 尔雅 (second or third century BCE), the earliest classificatory dictionary in China (Xue & Ye, 2022, p. 642). The Twelfth Section of *Ěryǎ* is *Shìshuǐ* 释水 (lit. explaining water), which deals exclusively with water features terms (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022). *Shìshuǐ* explains 71 terms related to water features, grouping them into four categories: *shuǐquán* 水泉 (lit. water spring), *shuǐzhōng* 水中 (lit. water middle), *héqū* 河曲 (lit. meander), and *jiǔhé* 九河 (lit. nine rivers) (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, pp. 747–765). Most of the entries in *Shìshuǐ* are landscape terms used to classify water-related features based on different factors, commonly by size and water source. Apart from these landscape terms, three entries in *Shìshuǐ*, namely, 12.017, 12.018 and 12.022, are devoted to human activities in the water, and two entries, 12.019 and 12.020, deal with the material and vehicles used by people to cross water bodies. In addition, entries 12.011, 12.014 and 12.027 list 22 river names. The last entry in *Shìshuǐ* makes it evident that Yu the Great was the source of all the terms or names explained in this section (*Ěryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, p. 794). Rather than providing a comprehensive classification of water features, it would be more accurate to state that this

section of *Ēryǎ* aims to clarify the landscape terms for water features coined by Yu the Great (see, e.g., Coblin, 1993).

It is noteworthy that, among the aforementioned sections of the *Ēryǎ*, there is no detailed documentation of enclosed-water places, with the exception of *quán* 泉 ('spring'), which is further categorised based on factors such as the consistency of water presence and the direction of water flow. Although *quán* does not refer to long flowing-water places like *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'), it shares a key characteristic with them—flowing water—as opposed to standing water typically associated with enclosed-water places discussed in Chapter 7. *Ēryǎ*'s emphasis on flowing water places highlights the ancient Chinese focus on flowing water, while also suggesting that most enclosed-water bodies were also viewed as standing-water places, with *quán* being the notable exception (see Chapter 7).

The first systematic record of place names for water features in China is *The Water Classic* 水经 (Sang, ca. 25–220 CE) and the subsequent *Commentary on the Water Classic* 水经注 (Li, 368–534 CE/2022) (see also Chapter 3.1). The majority of the water features documented in *The Water Classic* (Sang, ca. 25–220 CE/266–420 CE) and the *Commentary on the Water Classic* (Li, 368–534 CE/2022) were large flowing-water places, which are typically referred to as 'rivers' in English. While other water courses were included in *The Water Classic*, the main reason they were documented was because they were located along the path that the author Li Yuandao travelled, and he recorded the peculiarities of the terrain.

In *The Water Classic* and the *Commentary on The Water Classic*, the Chinese character *shuǐ* 水 ('water' or 'river-places') is not only used as a landscape term in river names, but also

describes the substance of river-places, that is, water. In contrast, *chuān* 川 ('river') is solely employed as a landscape term for river-places. Additionally, in *Ěryǎ*, river-places were given different names based on different factors, such as the direction of water flow and the water source. *Hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') used to be the river names for the Yangtze River and Yellow River respectively, as in *jiāngshuǐ* 江水 (the Yangtze River, lit. *jiāng* water) and *héshuǐ* 河水 (the Yellow River, lit. *hé* water).

In Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), the terms *jiāng* and *hé*, which are used to name the Yangtze River and the Yellow River respectively, have become common landscape terms for large river-places. There are some subtle differences between these two terms, which are discussed in Section 6.4. Moreover, a distinction in size persists in the classification of extended water bodies in MSC, with small extended water bodies being referred to as *xī* 溪 (creek/stream).

Zhōngguó Hé Hú Dàdiǎn 中国河湖大典 (*Encyclopaedia of Rivers and Lakes in China*) is an encyclopaedia on China's water bodies. It was compiled by the Ministry of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China (MWRPRC) and published by the China Water and Power Press over the four-year period from 2010 to 2014. Excluding some transliterated names that come from minority languages in China, the names of the river-places listed in these volumes can be divided into the following categories: *hé* 河 ('river-1'), *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'), *xī* 溪 (creek), and *qū* 曲 (meander) (MWRPRC, 2010–2014). The last term *qū* is often used in the compound term *héqū* 河曲 (meander) to refer to the curving part of a *jiāng* or *hé*. As

such, *qū* designates certain sections with curved shapes in various long flowing-water places that are typically referred to as *jiāng* or *hé*.

6.1.3 Summary

Throughout history, *shuǐ* 水 ('water' or 'river-places') has been one of the most potent mediums for Chinese thought and had a decisive influence on Chinese civilisation (Ball, 2017, p. 3). An in-depth semantic analysis of landscape terms related to water places helps unpack the Chinese worldview, which is inspired by people's daily contact with these places. It also demonstrates how Chinese people's interaction with these places shapes their categorisation of river-places. Fine-grained semantic analysis of river-places and enclosed-water places—the primary water sources for the Chinese people—will be conducted in the remainder of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 respectively.

In Section 6.3 of the present chapter, I will look at the two Chinese words for big river-places, *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') and explore the shared components and distinctions in their meanings. In Section 6.4, I will provide a semantic analysis of the Chinese term for small river-places, *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream'). The final section of this chapter will summarise how Chinese speakers categorise river-places and draw comparisons with classifications found in other languages and cultures, as outlined in Bromhead (2018). I will also briefly touch on the concept of 'flood' in the concluding section of the present chapter.

6.2 Semantic Molecules: '*shuǐ* 水 (water)' and '*cháng* 长 (long)'

In the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) research program, *shuǐ* 水 (water) is considered a universal or near-universal semantic molecule (Goddard, 2021). Furthermore, it is thought to be a productive building block that is involved in the formation of various concepts, particularly those of water places (Bromhead, 2017, 2018; Goddard, 2010). There are two level-one molecules, ‘mouth [m]’ and ‘hand [m]’, implicated in the explication of ‘water’. Therefore, ‘water’ is a level-two molecule (Goddard, 2010, p. 141). The following is the explication of ‘water’:

[A] water

- a. something of one kind
- b. there is a lot (=much) of something of this kind in some places, not because people did anything in these places
- c. at many times people want to do something of this kind with the month [m],
because they want something of this kind to be inside their bodies
- d. at many times people want to do some other things with something of this kind with the hands [m]
- e. people know that when someone wants to do something with something of this kind, it can move not like this someone wants
- f. because of this, at many times people want something of this kind to be inside something else

(reproduced from Goddard, 2010, p. 141)

As noted by Wierzbicka (1996), water is regarded as ‘something we can put into one’s body, through the month’ (i.e., drink it), and which one can ‘see in various places not because people did something in those places (rivers, creeks, lakes, seas, and so on)’ (p. 230). This observation accords with the ancient Chinese use of *shuǐ* to refer to both the substance

‘water’ and ‘water places’ (see Chapter 4). However, the use of *shuǐ* as a semantic molecule does not mean the full meaning of *shuǐ* is embedded in the concepts of water places. It would be more accurate to state that people’s conceptualisation of water places depends on their comprehension of the concept of *shuǐ*.

In addition to *shuǐ*, ‘long’ is the other important semantic molecule implicated in the concept of river-places. For the meaning of the concept ‘long’, I will draw on Goddard’s (2024, p. 257) explication of ‘long-0’:

[B] This thing (or: something of this kind) is ‘long-0’, e.g., about spears, people’s legs

- a. this thing is like this:
- b. when people see (look at) this thing for some time, they can think about it like this:
 - ‘there are many places here
 - two of these places are not like all the others
 - because one of these two places is very far from the other’

(reproduced from Goddard, 2024, p. 257)

As the above explication makes clear, ‘long-0’ is designated to describe the shape of items that can be perceived through sight as well as by holding and measuring with one’s hands. However, when it is used to describe places, the concept of ‘long’ encompasses both shape and distance, which are mostly perceived through sight and direct physical interaction with the place. As Bromhead (2018) notes, the term ‘long’, when used to describe places, implies that there is travel between the two ends of such a place. To fully capture the meaning of ‘long place’ in the context of river-places, I will incorporate two components in my

explications: the meaning extension component, ‘people can think about such a place like this: “it is like something long-0”’ (Goddard, 2024, p. 257), and the human movement component, ‘at many times, when someone is on one side of a place of this kind; if this someone wants to be on the other side, this someone can’t be on the other side after a short time’ (Bromhead, 2018).

6.3 Hé 河 (‘river-1’) and Jiāng 江 (‘river-2’)

As previously discussed in this chapter, there are two words in MSC which are equivalent to the English term ‘river’: *hé* 河 (‘river-1’) and *jiāng* 江 (‘river-2’). Fundamentally, both *hé* and *jiāng* can be used to translate the English term ‘river’, and they both refer to river-places in Chinese. However, there are some subtle differences between these two concepts.

Generally speaking, the concepts of *jiāng* and *hé* both incorporate the sense of ‘long flowing-water places’, whose size are as such that they restrict or impedes human movement. The primary differences between these two concepts are: (a) *jiāng* is often used in contexts associated with the country of the speaker, namely, China; (b) *jiāng* implies human activities on the banks; and (c) *jiāng* is often thought of as extremely large, whereas *hé* can be either *dà* 大 (big) or *xiǎo* 小 (small). The similarities and differences between *jiāng* and *hé* will be explored and tested against corpus data in the next two sections.

6.3.1 Shared Components between Hé 河 (‘river-1’) and Jiāng 江 (‘river-2’)

The most salient component shared by *hé* 河 (‘river-1’) and *jiāng* 江 (‘river-2’) is that they are both long in shape and distance. As mentioned in Chapter 5, noun phrases in Chinese are

normally composed of three elements: a numeral, a classifier, and the noun itself. Describing an object's salient feature, which is frequently used for classification, is one of the classifier's most essential roles. Hence, Chinese classifiers are a vital foundation for research into how Chinese people classify the concrete world. *Tiáo* 条 is the most widely used classifier for both *jiāng* and *hé*, as in *yītiáo hé* 一条河 (lit. one *tiáo* river-1) or *yītiáo jiāng* 一条江 (lit. one *tiáo* river-2). In Chinese, ‘*tiáo*’ can be used as the classifier for both ‘something long’ and ‘long place’, as shown in the following examples:

1. *yītiáo xiāngyān* 一条香烟 (one *tiáo* cigarette)
2. *yītiáo dàjiē* 一条大街 (one *tiáo* street)
3. *yītiáo xiǎohé* 一条小河 (one *tiáo* small river-1)
4. *yītiáo dàjiāng* 一条大江 (one *tiáo* big river-2)

In addition, *cháng* 长 (long) is one of the most common modifiers for both *jiāng* and *hé*. As shown in Examples 3 and 4, the lengths of *jiāng* and *hé* are typically discussed and measured in kilometres. ‘Kilometre’ is a large distance unit, and people must use transportation to cover the entire distance.

5. 长江下游到入海口的 200 公里的江面上，曾经出现 10 万捕鳗船。(On the 200-kilometre stretch of the [***Cháng Jiāng***] Yangtze River from its lower reaches to its estuary, there were once 100,000 eel-fishing boats.)

(BCC Corpus)

6. 这里南临苏州河，有 4.1 公里长的河岸线，堪称上海的黄金宝地。(This place is located to the south of [*Sūzhōu Hé*] Suzhou River, with a 4.1-kilometre-long waterfront, making it one of the prime locations in Shanghai.)

(BCC Corpus)

The next component shared by *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') is the constant presence of water and water movement. As Wierzbicka (1996) observed, 'water' is something that is constantly present in some places in significant amounts. *Jiāng* and *hé* are among those places. Although linguistic evidence like '*héshuǐ gānhé* 河水干涸 (river drying up)' can be found in the corpus, an inconstant presence of water often signifies a drought or dry season rather than normal variation. This is also true for the English concepts of 'river' and 'stream' (see Bromhead, 2018). When the situation of 'there is no water in this place' happens, it often implies that a natural disaster has occurred. Furthermore, dried-up rivers are referred to as *héchuáng* 河床 (riverbed). *Héchuáng* 河床 (riverbed) is regarded as only one part of *jiāng* and *hé*, with flowing water being the other part. Thus, the constant presence of water is considered to be invariant in these two concepts.

For *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'), the water is always moving, sometimes very quickly. The most famous observation of flowing water in a river is probably that given by Confucius: '逝者如斯夫，不舍昼夜 (Look at how it flows on like this, never stopping day or night!)' (Confucius, 551–479 BCE/2003, 9.17). This Confucian proverb illustrates the swift passage of time by likening it to the continuous flow of a river. It reflects the Chinese people's deep observation and understanding that river water moves ceaselessly, just as time never stands still. In MSC contexts, the current in a *jiāng* or *hé* is often described as *tuānjí* 湍

急 (rushing). *Hé* is often used as a metaphor for fast-moving liquid, as in *xuèliú chéng hé* 血流成河 (blood flowing like a river). Therefore, I have included the notion of ‘the water [m] in this place is always moving’ in my explications of these two concepts below.

As China is high in the west and low in the east, most rivers flow east, and the estuaries of the big rivers are on China's east coast. On account of China's enormous size, the water of some rivers flowing towards the east coast may end up in a lake or other larger rivers. When talking about rivers in China, people have the knowledge that the water travels eastward and will eventually flow into the sea. However, in contrast to French in which '*fleuve*' concerns 'places whose water, most often, flows into the sea' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 195), Chinese does not categorise large river-places based on the destination of water nor the orientation of the water flow. Information about the water flow of major rivers in China reflects a culturally held stereotype associated with *jiāng* and *hé*, yet it is not regarded as an invariant element in the conceptualisation of these places by Chinese speakers.

The next shared component is the hindrance to people's movement. The Chinese naming system is the first place where this component becomes evident. Due to the inconvenience caused by rivers to people's travel, places located on different parts of a river often have different languages and cultures and are often given different place names. For instance, the region in China known as *jiāngnán* 江南 (lit. river south) refers to areas directly south of the Yangtze River's lower reaches. The region includes a number of southern Chinese cities, such as Shanghai and a few cities in Jiangsu province and Zhejiang province. This word is culturally loaded, and it symbolises the culture shared by people living in this region. This area is named according to its location relative to the Yangtze River. The provinces *Hénán* 河南

(Henan province, lit. *hé* south), *Héběi* 河北 (Hebei province, lit. *hé* north), and *Jiāngxī* 江西 (Jiangxi province, lit. *jiāng* west) are also named in terms of their location relative to the Yellow River and Yangtze River. Each of these provinces has its own ethnic identity, culture, and dialect.

Furthermore, the width and depth of *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') is often measured in metres. As illustrated by Examples 5 and 6, these dimensions are among the most critical factors in determining suitable locations for bridge construction or river crossings.

7. 有位年近七旬的老大妈李秀英，在 80 余米宽的河上，利用农闲时间，义务摆渡已有十载。(There is a nearly seventy-year-old elderly woman, Li Xiuying, who has been volunteering as a ferrywoman on the 80-meter-wide [*hé*] river during her farming off-season for over ten years.)

(BCC Corpus)

8. 目前，柳江正值汛期，河水深达 4 米多，河水湍急，汽车翻入河中，立即沉入河底。(Currently, during the flood season in Liujiang River, the [*hé*] river is over 4 meters deep, with strong currents. When a car falls into the river, it immediately sinks to the bottom.)

(BCC Corpus)

6.3.2 Differences between *Hé* 河 ('river-1') and *Jiāng* 江 ('river-2')

Now, I will turn to the differences between *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'). The first difference between these two concepts is the close connection between the concept of *jiāng* and the nation of *zhōngguó* 中国 ('China'), primarily due to the symbolic representation of the Yangtze River as a defining feature of China. As many writers and artists have attested, the Yangtze River symbolises the Chinese people and their civilisation:

长江，中华民族的母亲河，从世界屋脊发源，穿高山峡谷，汇百川入海，滋养了源远流长的中华文明，哺育着勤劳勇敢的中华儿女。(The Yangtze River, the mother river of the Chinese nation, originates from the roof of the world, flows through high mountains and deep gorges, gathers hundreds of tributaries, and eventually reaches the sea. It has nourished the long-lasting Chinese civilisation and nurtured the industrious and courageous Chinese people.)

(Xinhua News Agency, 2023)

Situated in the heart of China, the Yangtze River, along with the Yellow River, is revered as the cradle of Chinese civilisation and a pivotal figure shaping Chinese perspectives of their nation. China is divided into two regions, one to the north of the Yangtze River and the other to the south. This division is symbolised by the four-character expression *dàjiāng nánběi* 大江南北, meaning 'all across the country' or literally 'the big river south and north', as demonstrated in the following examples:

9. 这首歌火遍大江南北。(This song has been popular [*dàjiāng nánběi*] all cross the country[.])

(BCC Corpus)

10. 他的足迹遍布大江南北。(His footsteps can be found [*dàjiāng nánběi*] all cross the country[.])

(BCC Corpus)

The *Xiāng Jiāng* 湘江 (Xiang River), one of the main tributaries of the Yangtze River, is a significant centre of Chinese culture. Its strategically important location has made it the backdrop for numerous historical events. One notable example is the story of QU Yuan (ca. 342–278 BCE), a Chinese poet during the Warring States period (ca. 475/403 BCE–221 BCE). Revered for his unwavering patriotism, Qu Yuan chose to end his life by drowning in the Xiang River after the fall of his beloved State of Chu—a powerful act of protest that has since become deeply embedded in Chinese cultural memory.

Given the enduring importance of classical literature in Chinese culture, narratives set in the Xiang River basin have shaped how later generations conceptualise and emotionally respond to this landscape. This influence is evident in the symbolic use of the character *xiāng* in literary works. For instance, in the eighteenth-century novel *Dream of The Red Chamber*—often described as ‘a comprehensive view of the entire civilisation of Imperial China’ (Plaks, 1976, p. 11)—author CAO Xueqin uses the characters *xiāoxiāng* 潇湘 as the name for LIN Daiyu's residence in the *Dà Guān Yuán* 大观园 (the Grandview Garden). This literary choice evokes the refined, melancholic, and intellectually elevated nature of Daiyu's character, who embodies the Buddho-Daoist ideal (see, e.g., Bisetto, 2023).

As *jiāng* has been used to name many culturally significant rivers in China, the character itself has come to symbolise more than just a physical waterway. Over time, *jiāng* has accrued cultural and national connotations, become a marker of identity and belonging. This close connection is directly reflected in the naming system of river-places in China. In practice, *jiāng* is typically used to name river-places within China, although there are occasional exceptions for certain river-places in neighbouring countries, such as the *Hàn Jiāng* 汉江 (Han River) in North Korea. When a long river flows through China and extends into another country, the segment within China is typically named using *jiāng*, while the portion outside Chinese territory is usually referred to as *hé* on a map of China. For instance, the downstream section of *Yǎlǔzàngbù Jiāng* 雅鲁藏布江 (Yarlung Tsangpo River) in India is named as *Bùlāmǎpǔdélā Hé* 布拉马普特拉河 (Brahmaputra River), and the downstream part of *Láncāng Jiāng* 澜沧江 (Lancang River) that lies beyond the Chinese territory is labelled as *Méigōng Hé* 湄公河 (Mekong River).

In translation practice, terms referring to large river-places in other languages—such as *river* in English or *fleuve* and *rivière* in French—are consistently rendered as *hé* 河 in Chinese, rather than *jiāng* 江. For example, in the Chinese translation of *A Child's Geography of the World* (Hillyer, 1929/2017), the English word river is invariably translated as *hé*. This pattern suggests that *jiāng* is conceptually and culturally anchored to China, distinguishing it from more universally applied terms like *hé*.

From the discussion above, it is evident that the concept of *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') is closely associated with the nation of 'zhōngguó 中国 ("China")'. Thus, I propose to include *zhōngguó*

(China) as a semantic molecule in the explication of *jiāng*. The semantic molecule of *zhōngguó* (China) demands its own explication. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to pursue that task. Key components for the concept of *zhōngguó* (China) may include (see also Goddard's discussion on 'country' in Goddard, 2020) but are not limited to:

1. 'A very very big place, people call this place *zhōngguó*', indicating that *zhōngguó* is a name that refers to a large geographical and political entity. The expression 'very very big place' captures its vast territory, which encompasses diverse regions, climates, and landscapes.
2. 'There are many places of many kinds in this place', showing that there are numerous distinct geographic (e.g., mountains, rivers, and deserts) and cultural regions in China.
3. 'Many people of one kind live in this place', reflecting the dominant cultural and historical narrative of Han Chinese identity. Even though China is a multi-ethnic nation with 56 officially-recognised ethnic groups, its main cultural stream is closely associated with the Han Chinese majority.
4. 'These people do things in one way for a very very long time' emphasising the shared customs, traditions, and practices that unify the people of *zhōngguó* for a long historical period.
5. 'These people think about things in one way', showing that the concept of *zhōngguó* embodies a shared worldview or philosophical approach, often influenced by Confucian, Daoist, and other traditional Chinese philosophies. This common way of thinking impacts how people perceive the concrete world, as well as social, moral, and philosophical issues.
6. 'These people say things in one language, these people write in one language, people call this language *zhōngwén* 中文 ("spoken and written Chinese")', stating that

Chinese people express their thoughts in one particular language, which is *zhōngwén*.

At the same time, their way of thinking is also shaped and constrained by this language.

Jiāng 江 ('river-2') is often used to name significant rivers that have historical, cultural, and economic importance in China. The way that *zhōngguó* is embedded in the concept of *jiāng* shows how river-places are valued by Chinese people, and they are more than just physical entities, but are also integral to the identity and functioning of the nation, such as the settlement patterns and cultural practices among Chinese people. A fine-grained semantic analysis is needed to evidence this preliminary outline of *jiāng*.

The second difference between *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') is that the meaning of *jiāng* encompasses human activities on the banks. Of the four biggest rivers in China, only the Yellow River is named *hé*. The other three rivers are named *jiāng*, namely, *Cháng Jiāng* 长江 (Yangtze River, lit. long river), *Hēilóng Jiāng* 黑龙江 (Amur River, lit. black dragon river), and *Zhū Jiāng* 珠江 (Pearl River). Thanks to their transportation capabilities, the mouths of the *Cháng Jiāng* 长江 (Yangtze River) and the *Zhū Jiāng* 珠江 (Pearl River) are two of China's three major economic centres. On the other hand, the Yellow River is known as the most troublesome river. The Yellow River has dramatically changed its course ten times in China's history, often moving from the north to the south of the Shandong Peninsula. Disasters and casualties caused by flooding of the Yellow River can be found in the records of every historical period. It is with good reason that the Yellow River has been called 'China's sorrow'. While the Yellow River is unsuitable for transport, the Yangtze River has been called 'China's main street' on account of its utility as a major transportation route.

A naturally formed *hé* is not automatically associated with transportation. When a *hé* is used for transportation, it is often called *yùnhé* 运河 (man-made canal, lit. transport river). On the other hand, *jiāng* is associated with transportation. When talking about *jiāng*, it seems that there are always some human engagements, such as living on the riverbank, undertaking business activities, and transporting people and goods. Lending support to this view, *jiāng* and *gǎng* 港 (harbour) are more frequently combined (995 entries in BCC Corpus) than *hé* and *gǎng* 港 (468 entries in BCC Corpus). In addition, as shown in Table 6-3, the verb *dù* 渡 (cross a river on a water vehicle) is used more often in conjunction with *jiāng* than *hé*. This indicates that people usually need some kind of transportation to cross a *jiāng*, while *hé*, particularly small ones, can sometimes be crossed by wading through the water on foot. Furthermore, because *jiāng* serves as a means of transportation, the idea of *jiāng* often suggests human activities on the banks.

TABLE 6-1

Verb Collocation for hé 河 ('river-1') and jiāng 江 ('river-2')

Verb	<i>Hé</i> 河 ('river-1')	<i>Jiāng</i> 江 ('river-2')
<i>guò</i> 过 (cross)	2847	2288
<i>dù</i> 渡 (cross a river on a water vehicle)	909	1784

(BCC Corpus)

The final difference between *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') is their size. The definition of *jiāng* given in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* is 'dàhé 大河 (lit. big river)' (ILCASS, 2005, p. 674). Basically, both *jiāng* and *hé* are considered big water places. They are so big and long that people can only see a segment or a small part of *jiāng* or *hé*, as indicated in the expression *yīduàn héliú* 一段河流 (a section of river). However, there is a subtle distinction between these two concepts. Linguistic evidence suggests that the size of *hé* can vary, whereas *jiāng* is always considered to be very big. Although *hé* is typically thought of as big place in Chinese, it can be modified by both *dà* 大 (big) and *xiǎo* 小 (small). The size difference between *jiāng* and *hé* is also reflected in the verbs that collocate with *jiāng* and *hé*. As Table 6-1 illustrates, *guò* 过 (cross) can be used for both *jiāng* and *hé*, whereas *dù* 渡 (cross a river on a water vehicle) appears more frequently with *jiāng*, with 1784 entries in the BBC corpus, almost twice its frequency with *hé*. This demonstrates that *jiāng* poses more challenges for people's movement and involves more activities requiring water vehicles.

Stories of little animals wading into the water and crossing the *hé* 河 ('river-1') are common in children's books. One such tale is *Xiǎomǎ Guòhé* 小马过河 (The Little Horse Crosses the River) (MEPRC, 2017, p. 63) found in the second-grade Chinese textbook for primary school students. Conversely, instances of animals crossing a *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') are rarely seen in the corpus. A notable exception is the movie title *měnglóng guòjiāng* 猛龙过江 (The Way of the Dragon, lit. a fierce dragon crosses the *jiāng*), where *jiāng* is used in conjunction with the mythical figure of a dragon to evoke a sense of grandeur and epic effect. The use of *jiāng* contributes to the dramatic intensity and symbolic power of the phrase. If *jiāng* was replaced with *hé* and *guò* 过 (cross) replaced with *dù* 渡 (to cross a river by a water vehicle), the

elevated tone would be notably diminished, as the vivid imagery of the dragon's might would lose much of its rhetorical impact. The above discussion shows that, even though *jiāng* and *hé* are both considered big places, there are size distinctions between them that must be addressed in their respective explications.

6.3.3 Explications and Discussion

Drawing on the evidence presented above, the meanings of *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') are explicated as follows.

[A] *hé* 河 ('river-1')

- a. places of one kind
- b. people can think a place of this kind like this:
 - 'it is like something very long [m]'
- c. there is a lot of water [m] in places of this kind
the water in places of this kind is always moving
- d. places of this kind have two sides
- e. places of this kind are big places
- f. at many times, when someone is on one side of a place of this kind
if this someone wants to be on the other side
this someone can't be on the other side after a very short time
- g. when someone is somewhere on one side of a place of this kind
this someone can think like this
 - 'some time before this, the water was in a place far from this place here
 - some time after this,
 - the water will be in another place far from this place here'

Component (b) establishes that *hé* is characterised by length, both in terms of its physical dimensions and its linear shape. This interpretation is further reinforced in component (d),

where its elongated form is shown to divide the surrounding landscape into two distinct parts, each situated on opposite sides. Component (c) states the fact that there is a lot of water in *hé* and the movement of water is constant. The size of *hé* is given in component (e). Then, component (f) covers the width of *hé* in terms of the hindrance to people's movement brought about by this feature of *hé* (see Bromhead, 2018, pp. 33–34). Component (g) addresses people's perceptions of water movement. While it also relates to the elongated nature of *hé*, it extends this understanding by highlighting a common awareness that the flowing water will eventually reach a distant destination.

[B] *jiāng* 江 ('river-2')

- a. places of one kind
- b. people think like this about places of this kind:
 'places of this kind are in *zhōngguó* 中国 [m] (China [m])'
- c. people can think a place of this kind like this:
 'it is like something very very long [m]'
- d. there is a lot of water [m] in places of this kind
 the water [m] is always moving
- e. places of this kind have two sides
- f. places of this kind are very very big places
- g. at many times, when someone is on one side of a place of this kind
 if this someone wants to be on the other side
 this someone can't be on the other side after a short time
- h. when someone is somewhere on one side of a place of this kind
 this someone can think like this:
 'some time before this, the water [m] was in a place far from this place here
 some time after this,
 the water [m] will be in another place far from this place here'
- i. people live on both sides of a place of this kind
 people do things of many kinds here

Component (b) states that *jiāng* is typically used to name river-places in China. The next six components are similar to those of *hé*, except that component (c) and component (f) are revised versions of component (b) and component (e) from the explication of *hé*; these capture the size difference between *jiāng* and *hé*. In component (i), I attempt to convey that people engage with *jiāng* to a greater extent and that human activities on the banks of *jiāng* is part of Chinese people's understanding of this concept.

It is clear from the discussion and explications above that *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') differ from each other not only in terms of geographic features of the physical world, but also from a human-centred perspective. One of the key points of distinction lies in the notion of size, which, although seemingly a purely physical attribute, also reflects human perception. As previously noted, the boundary between *hé* and *jiāng* in terms of size is not clearly defined, further revealing the role of human interpretation in conceptualising these terms.

The geographical distribution of *Huáng Hé* 黄河 (Yellow River) and *Cháng Jiāng* 长江 (Yangtze River), along with certain unknown historical factors, has contributed to a pattern in which river-places in southern China are more frequently named *jiāng* than those in the north. In northern China—particularly in the Northeast—only a small number of exceptionally large rivers bear the name *jiāng*, and these are typically larger than nearby river-places referred to as *hé*. Furthermore, the south of China hosts the country's major commercial centres, where prominent rivers meet the sea, reinforcing the association between *jiāng* and intense human activity along riverbanks. Together, these geographical

and linguistic factors play a crucial role in shaping the contemporary Chinese conceptualisation of large river-places.

6.4 *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream')

I will now turn to discuss the Chinese term for small flowing-water places: *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream'). In *Ėryǎ*, the first definition of *xī* is: '山无所通，溪 (watercourses in the mountains that are not connected to the outside world are called *xī*)' (*Ėryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, 11.020). This definition of *xī* recorded in *Ėryǎ* states that *xī* is located in the mountains. Its definition given by the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* is '原指山里的小河沟，现在泛指小河沟 (Originally used to describe small rivers in the mountains, it is now used to refer to small rivers in general)' (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1456). When used in this sense, *xī* is usually not used by itself but in compound nouns such as *xiǎoxī* 小溪 (lit. small creek/stream), *xīshuǐ* 溪水 (lit. stream/creek water), and *xīliú* 溪流 (lit. stream/creek flow).

The second definition given by *Ėryǎ* is: '水注川曰溪 (the water that flows into a river is called *xī*)' (*Ėryǎ*, second or third century BCE/2022, 12.021). This definition of *xī* is mainly reflected in the naming system of large river branches (i.e., small rivers), especially those in the Yangtze River Basin. For example, *Xiāng Xī* 香溪 (Xiangxi River, lit. fragrant stream), one of the biggest branches of the Yangtze River, is a small river at the northern bank of Xiling Gorge's west mouth. When not used in the naming system for large river branches, *xī* refers to river-places that are smaller than *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') or *hé* 河 ('river-1') and typically referred to as 'stream' or 'creek' in English.

Generally speaking, *xī* is a smaller version of *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'). The size distinction is evident across multiple dimensions, such as length, width, and water flow. Consequently, the components related to the shape and size of *xī* in its explication are scaled-down versions of those found in the explications of *jiāng* and *hé*, reflecting its comparatively smaller physical characteristics.

The water flow of *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream') is constant and the sound of the water is a prominent component of this concept. Literary depictions often employ terms such as *tuānjí* 湍急 (rapid) and *juānjuān* 涓涓 (trickling sluggishly) to describe the speed of water flow in *xī*, while *huānkuài* 欢快 (cheerful and joyful) and *chánchán* 潺潺 (murmur) are often used to describe the sound of the flowing water. Because *xī* is often depicted in descriptive texts of rural areas and mountainous landscapes, people frequently notice the sound of the flowing water, which contrasts with the peaceful surroundings. This is one of the main differences between *xī* and *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'): the water flow of *jiāng* and *hé* is mainly perceived visually and through physical interaction. The following are two examples of such descriptions of *xī*:

11. 他听到附近有山溪哗哗的流水声，于是走过去喝了个够。(He heard the sound of a [*shānxī*] mountain stream flowing nearby, so he walked over and drank the water.)
(BCC Corpus)

12. 看不到听得到的哗哗溪水声带给我们一些凉意，循着溪声而上，林越来越密，山道与溪水交汇处，终于看到了水，山泉清清的，喝着甜甜的。(The sound of

the **[xīshuǐ] gurgling stream**, though unseen, brings us some coolness. Following the sound of the stream uphill, the forest becomes denser. At the point where the mountain path meets the stream, we finally see the water, the mountain spring is clear and refreshing, and drinking it tastes sweet.)

(BCC Corpus)

Compared to *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'), *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream') is significantly narrower due to its reduced size, making it much easier for people to walk alongside the water and drink from it. When people are engaged in outdoor activities like hiking or mountain climbing, they frequently consider *xīshuǐ* 溪水 (lit. creek water) to be one of the best sources of drinking water. In addition, people can usually see the bottom of a *xī* since the water is shallow and often relatively clear. In the BCC Corpus, the adjectives *qīngchè* 清澈 ('clear'), *gānjìng* 干净 ('clean'), and *qīngchún* 清纯 ('pure and clean') frequently appear in descriptions of the water in *xī* 溪 (stream).

Examples 11 and 12 extracted from the BCC corpus depict stones protruding from the water, suggesting that the water in *xī* is rather shallow and that people can see the bottom. The clarity of the water and the visibility of rocks or pebbles at the bottom of a *xī* 溪 (stream) indicate that its stereotypical image contrasts with that of a *shuǐgōu* 水沟 (ditch), which is typically associated with muddiness and sediment.

13. 溪中奇石琳琅满目，光怪陆离，变化万千。(The **[xī] stream** is filled with an array of unique rocks, dazzling and fantastical, with endless variations.)

(BCC Corpus)

14. 水清，那一米多深的溪底卵石，大大小小圆圆扁扁可点数。(The water is so clear that the pebbles at the bottom of the over-one-meter-deep [**xī**] **stream**, varying in size and shape—round and flat—can be counted one by one.)

(BCC Corpus)

Furthermore, as Example 13 shows, the drying up of the water in *xī* signifies a drought or dry season and is not a regular occurrence. However, this sense of *xī* is slightly different from that of *jiāng* or *hé*. As the water flow in *xī* is relatively small, the water of a *xī* drying up is not necessarily associated with a disastrous event.

15. 因地势西高东低，加上溪流短浅，一下雨雨水就很快流入大海，雨后不久又溪干地裂，是全省闻名的旱区。(Due to the terrain being higher in the west and lower in the east and the [**xīliú**, *lit. stream flow*] **stream** being short and shallow, as soon as it rains, the rainwater quickly flows into the sea. Soon after the rain, the [**xī**] **stream** dries up and the ground cracks, making it one of the most well-known drought areas in the province.)

(BCC Corpus)

Due to the easy access to water, *xī* are often regarded as a primary water source for people in rural areas. In the BCC corpus, *xī* often found appearing together with the term *cūn* 村 (village), with a total of 1097 occurrences. On the other hand, it is rarely used with *chéngshì*

城市 (city). Example 14 illustrates how farmers frequently choose to live and farm on land adjacent to *xī*:

16. 河两侧无数溪流对称着汇入河，就像桑叶的经脉。村庄散落在溪水旁，活动着的人如同蝼蚁般蠕动。(On both sides of the river, countless [*xīliú*, *lit. stream flow*] streams symmetrically flow into the small river, resembling the veins of a mulberry leaf. Villages are scattered along the [*xīshuǐ*, *lit. stream water*] streams, and the people moving about seem to crawl like ants.)

(BCC Corpus)

The corpus also contains many instances of the combination ‘*shān* 山 (mountain)’ and *xī*, suggesting that mountains are still regarded as one of the primary locations where *xī* can be found. Owing to the small size and typical surroundings of *xī*, namely mountains and rural areas, *xī* is frequently observed to blend into its natural environment. Therefore, the ecological environment is also part of people’s inherent impression of *xī*.

In light of the above discussion, the meaning of *xī* 溪 (‘creek/stream’) is explicated as follows:

[C] *xī* 溪 (‘creek/stream’)

- a. places of one kind
- b. people can think a place of this kind like this:
 ‘it is like something long [m]’
- c. there is water [m] in places of this kind
 the water is always moving

- d. when people are somewhere near a place of this kind
they can hear the water moving
because of this, people know there is a place like this
- e. often, places of this kind are in *shān* [m] (mountains [m])
- f. places of this kind have two sides
one side of a place of this kind is near the other side
huācǎo shùmù 花草树木 (flower, grass, trees and bush) [m] grow [m] on both sides of this place
- g. places of this kind are small places
- h. at many times, the water in a place of this kind is very good
because of this, people can see the bottom [m] of this place
often, people want to do many things with the water
often, people want a little of the water in their bodies
often, many people live in places near a place of this kind
these people often do things of many kinds on both sides of this place
after some time, many things grow in this place as these people want

Component (b) states that *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream') is a long place. In component (c), the water volume is distinguished from that of *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') and, suggesting that although *xī* is a watercourse, its volume is significantly smaller than that of *jiāng* or *hé*. Then, in component (d), I attempt to convey that the sound of rushing water is one important way that Chinese people perceive *xī*. In literary descriptions, the sound of *xī* often comes before the sight. Component (e) deals with the location of *xī*. In component (f), I try to capture that *huācǎo shùmù* 花草树木 (lit. flower, grass, trees and bush) are frequently found growing on both sides of *xī* because of its integration with the surrounding environment. Component (g) makes it clear that *xī* are small places that can be easily navigated by people making specific body actions, such as leaping and treading on stones. In component (h), I portray the water's clarity and that the water in *xī* is frequently considered as drinking water. *Xī* serves as the primary water source for irrigation in numerous parts of

rural China. Thus, component (i) illustrates that the places adjacent to *xī* are ideal for habitation, especially for people who make a living as farmers.

In contrast to *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2'), the concept of *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream') incorporates more human-centred perspectives in rural regions. First, the sound of running water is a more salient part of the concept of *xī* due to people's physical interactions with *xī* in mountains and agricultural setting. In such environments, where natural surroundings tend to be quieter and less noisy, the gentle sound of flowing water stands out, making it a defining sensory feature that deeply influences how *xī* is perceived and experienced. Second, the water quality in *xī* is often perceived to be very good for drinking. Third, a strong association with rural areas and rural life is another defining feature of the concept of *xī*. There is no linguistic evidence to suggest that *xī* is linked to urban settings or city life. On the contrary, corpus data consistently shows that people tend to build villages near *xī*, likely due to the practical need for convenient access to water.

6.5 Conclusion

As shown in the preceding semantic analysis, MSC primarily categorises long flowing-water places based on size, using *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') for larger river-places, and *xī* 溪 ('creek/stream') for smaller ones. However, this size-based categorisation only captures part of the picture. Underlying this categorisation are various human-centred and culturally embedded notions that significantly influence how river-places are perceived and understood in Chinese. For example, although both *jiāng* and *hé* refer to large flowing-water places, my analysis reveals further distinctions between them in terms of size, location, and associated human activities. Additionally, in the section on *xī*, I argued that the sound of

flowing water plays a key role in how people perceive these smaller waterways—largely due to their quiet, often rural locations—an element that is not reflected in the meanings of *jiāng* and *hé*.

The destination of water, an essential factor in the French classification of long flowing-water places (Bromhead, 2018), is also an important notion in Chinese perception of river-places. This is closely tied to China’s geographic characteristics: the terrain is higher in the west and lower in the east, causing most rivers to flow eastward and ultimately join larger rivers, lakes, or the sea. As a result, the sea is often conceptually associated with the east in Chinese culture, particularly since China’s western regions are landlocked while its eastern regions are coastal. This eastward orientation may also influence the conceptual meaning of *hǎi* 海 (‘sea’), which potentially incorporates the idea of the ‘sun’ as a semantic molecule—reflecting the everyday experience of seeing the sun rise over the sea. Nonetheless, the meanings of *jiāng* and *hé* in MSC are not inherently tied to the concept of *hǎi* or the directional term *dōng* 东 (‘east’). Such associations remain part of regional or cultural knowledge, rather than core, invariant components of these river-place concepts.

Furthermore, the earlier semantic analysis in this chapter demonstrates that all three MSC terms for river-places inherently imply a continuous presence of water. However, previous research has shown that this feature is not universally encoded in landscape terms for water bodies across languages. For instance, Bromhead (2018) found that in the Australian Aboriginal language Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, variable water levels play a central role in how river-places are categorised. Moreover, her comparison between the Australian English term *creek* and the Anglo English term *stream* (Bromhead, 2018, pp. 34–39) further

illustrates that the consistent presence of water is not a universally inherent meaning in landscape terms for long flowing-water places across different languages.

The distinction between water bodies and the substance ‘water’ also varies between languages and cultures. For instance, in Yindjibarndi, temporary water bodies are not given a water body term but are instead referred to using the general term for water as a substance (Mark & Turk, 2003, p. 34). As discussed in Section 6.2, the general Chinese term for water, *shuǐ* 水, is polysemous—it can refer both to the substance itself and to water-related places in general. This polysemy reflects that Chinese people have long recognised a conceptual distinction between water bodies and the substance ‘water’, while also recognising the close relationship between how these two types of concepts are perceived.

In addition to pinpointing the human-centred components in the meanings of the three river-place concepts in MSC, the semantic analysis presented in this chapter has also revealed various types of basic concepts that can function as semantic molecules in the explications of Chinese landscape terms for river-places. The fundamental concepts used as molecules in my explications for river-places include concepts of natural materials (e.g., *shuǐ* 水 [water]), physical attributes (e.g., long, side, bottom), sensory perception (e.g., hear), as well as biological concepts (e.g., grow), and culture-specific concepts (e.g., *huācǎo shù mù* 花草树木 [lit. flower, grass, trees and bush], *zhōngguó* 中国 [China]).

At the beginning of the chapter, I gave a brief overview of Chinese myths and legends about floods. In China, the concept of flood is closely connected to *hé* 河 (‘river-1’). Chinese people’s perception of water-related disasters is different from that of other cultures.

Semantic analysis on the Chinese terms for water-related disasters, such as *hóngshuǐ* 洪水 (flood) and *nèilào* 内涝 (water logging), may help to facilitate communication about natural disasters between Chinese and other languages.

The semantic analysis of concepts for natural disasters is not within the scope of this thesis. However, based on the above discussion, I propose that the concept of *hé* may act as a semantic molecule in the explication of *hóngshuǐ* as rivers are the primary source of flooding in China. One reason why understanding language-specific and culture-specific notions of floods and natural disasters is important is that it is of ‘both intellectual interest and social urgency’ (Bromhead, 2021, p. 1). For example, the English term ‘flood’ as used by Insurance companies in Australia can mean either flash floods or riverine floods. Without a clear and detailed definition, this ambiguity may lead to misunderstandings among policyholders and has become a matter of public concern (Bromhead, 2021). It can also cause confusion among Chinese-background residents in Australia, as the Chinese term *hóngshuǐ* primarily refers to riverine floods. A different Chinese term, *nèilào* 内涝 (water logging), is used for flash floods or storm floods, which are the types often covered by Australian insurance policies.

According to the 2021 Census Data on cultural diversity (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Mandarin speakers account for 2.7% of the total Australian population and Mandarin is the second most spoken language in Australia after English. If ambiguous insurance terms like ‘flood’ are not explicated with simple and cross-translatable concepts, it could easily lead to migrants from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds misunderstanding the terms and conditions of Australian

insurance policy. From a Chinese perspective, further semantic study of the relationships between the concepts of *hé* 河 ('river-1'), *shuǐ* 水 (water), *yǔ* 雨 (rain), and *hóngshuǐ* 洪水 (flood) and *nèilào* 内涝 (water logging), along with a comparison of their meanings to those of their counterparts in English, would facilitate better communication about floods and precautionary measures among Chinese migrants in Australia.

In conclusion, the semantic analysis of the three Chinese landscape terms for river-places in this chapter reflects the unique Chinese conceptualisation of river-places. The comparative discussion reveals both parallels and divergences between how river-places are conceptualised in Chinese and in other languages, which are shaped by a combination of factors, including the geographical environment—whether it is water-scarce or water-rich—the dynamic interactions between humans and nature, and the influence of the language utility and Chinese culture. The semantic analysis in this chapter also proves that some complex concepts serve as building blocks in the meanings of terms for river-places in Chinese and some of them reflect a culture-specific perspective. Finally, the chapter emphasises the significance of the semantic study of landscape terms for river-places for discussions on other related cross-cultural studies, such as natural disasters.

Chapter 7 Enclosed-water Places

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6, I discussed the significance of *shuǐ* 水 (‘water’ or ‘water places’) in shaping Chinese people’s worldview, with a particular focus on the conceptualisation of river-places. In this chapter, the focus shifts to another major category of water bodies: enclosed-water places. The discussion in this chapter will complement the exploration of river-places covered in Chapter 6, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how water places are conceptualised in Chinese culture.

As Bromhead (2017) demonstrates, landscape terms for enclosed-water places often differ across languages, reflecting the different ways in which languages prioritise particular features when categorising landforms. For instance, in Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, a deep rock hole is labelled with the term *warku*, whereas English and French lack an equivalent term to describe such a feature in the physical world (Bromhead, 2017, pp. 198–200). Similarly, as Mark (1993) observes, French categorises standing-water bodies based on ‘water quality and a lack of a surface outlet’ (as cited in Mark & Turk, 2003, p. 35), whereas English prioritises size as the primary criterion for classification.

MSC is rich in landscape terms for enclosed-water places, which are categorised based on various factors, such as water quality, size and depth. The table below outlines common landscape terms for enclosed-water places in MSC, along with their definitions in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*.

TABLE 7-1*Chinese Landscape Terms for Enclosed-water Places*

Landscape terms for enclosed-water places	Definition in the <i>Contemporary Chinese Dictionary</i>
<i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 576)	被陆地围着的大片积水 (a large body of water surrounded by land) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 576)
<i>diàn</i> 淀 ('shallow lake') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 311)	浅的湖泊 (a shallow lake) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 311)
<i>chí</i> 池 ('pool/pond') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 182)	蓄水的坑，一般不太大，比较浅 (a pit that stores water, generally not very large and relatively shallow) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 182)
<i>táng</i> 塘 ('pond') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1328)	水塘 (pond) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1328)
<i>tán</i> 潭 ('deep pond') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1323)	深的水池 (a deep pool) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1323)
<i>yuān</i> 渊 ('deep pool') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1672)	深水 (deep water places) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1672)
<i>quán</i> 泉 ('spring') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1132)	流出泉水的小洞或裂缝 (a small hole or crack from which spring water flows) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1132)
<i>zhǎozé</i> 沼泽 ('marsh') (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1722)	水草茂密的泥泞地带 (a muddy area with dense aquatic plants) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1722)

According to the definitions from the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, size and depth are the main parameters for the MSC categorisation of enclosed-water places. This study argues that apart from these two physical factors, there are also cultural connotations embedded in the meanings of MSC landscape terms for enclosed-water places.

This chapter seeks to illuminate the Chinese conceptualisation of enclosed-water places through a detailed semantic analysis of six key landscape terms in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC). Section 7.2 focuses on *hú* 湖 ('lake') and *diàn* 淀 ('shallow lake'), which refer to large enclosed-water bodies. Section 7.3 examines *chí* 池 ('pool') and *táng* 塘 ('pond/pool'), terms associated with smaller enclosed-water places. Section 7.4 addresses *tán* 潭 ('deep pool'),

representing deep enclosed-water features, while Section 7.5 explores the meaning of *quán* 泉 ('spring').

7.2 *Hú* 湖 ('lake') and *Diàn* 淀 ('shallow lake')

Hú 湖 ('lake') refers to large enclosed-water bodies in MSC. Due to their vast size and the physical barriers they pose to human movement, the term *hú* can be found in place names, particularly in regions where they hold significant geographical and cultural importance.

Notable examples include *Húnán* 湖南 (lit. lake south) and *Húběi* 湖北 (lit. lake north), two Chinese provinces named in relation to Dongting Lake—one of the largest freshwater lakes in China. Such place names not only reflect the influence of *hú* on the settlement patterns of Chinese people but also highlight the importance of lakes as reference points for human activity, navigation, and administrative divisions.

In measuring the area of a lake, standard units such as square kilometres, acres, or hectares are typically employed. When it comes to counting lakes, different classifiers are used depending on the contextual focus. The general classifier *gè* 个 is commonly applied for simple enumeration. The classifier *piàn* 片 is used to highlight the lake's broad or expansive surface, while *zuò* 座 is typically reserved for lakes of notable size or cultural significance, conveying a sense of grandeur or distinction (see Section 3.4.1).

A distinctive feature of *hú* is its expansive and mirror-like surface. The sense of vastness is reflected in the adjectives frequently used to describe the surface of *hú*, such as *kuānkuò* 宽

阔 (wide or expansive) and *liáokuò* 辽阔 (vast or extensive), as illustrated in examples 1 and 2:

1. 北郊燕子湖，湖面宽阔，周围绿树成荫，湖水清可见底。(The Swallow Lake has an **[*húmiàn kuānkuò*] expansive surface** in the northern suburbs is surrounded by trees, with water so clear that the lake bottom is visible.

(BCC Corpus)

2. 湖面辽阔无垠，宛如接着大海。(The **[*húmiàn liáokuò wúyín*] surface of the lake is vast and boundless**, as if it is an extension of the sea.)

(BCC Corpus)

People's perception of *hú* is first through sight. When standing on the shore of *hú*, the first thing people typically observe is *húmiàn* 湖面 (lake surface, lit. lake face). This aligns with the concept of 'a lake' in English, as noted by Wierzbicka (1989, p. 54; see also Bromhead, 2017), who stated that the surface of lakes 'constitutes a large part of the 'landscape' (i.e., of the part of the surface of the Earth which once can see from one place)'.

In examples 3 and 4, the surface of *hú* is compared to a mirror, which is a common simile in MSC. This comparison reveals the defining characteristics of *hú*: standing water, a distinct feature shared by enclosed-water places apart from *quán* 泉 ('spring') (see Chapter 7.6). Additionally, Example 5 further explores the interaction between the lake's surface and light,

demonstrating how external elements such as moonlight or sunlight create shimmering or reflective effects on the water.

3. 湖面像镜子一样。(The **[húmiàn] surface of the lake** is like a mirror.)

(BCC Corpus)

4. 平静的湖面像一块巨大的镜子，不时可以望见清澈见底的湖泊底部。(The calm **[húmiàn] surface of the lake** is like a huge mirror, with the bottom of the lake visible from time to time.)

(BCC Corpus)

5. 他们正站立在一个湖泊的岸边，湖面在月光下闪烁着。(They are standing on the shore of a lake, where **[húmiàn] the surface of the lake** shimmers under the moonlight.)

(BCC Corpus)

People's perception of *hú* is primarily shaped by visual observation, with a focus on the water's surface and the space directly above it. Example 6 illustrates the responsiveness of the lake's surface to external stimuli, such as the ripples created by a passing breeze. Example 7 further demonstrates that when people are at *hú*, their attention is naturally drawn to the visible areas—the surface of the water and the space above it—since these are not only the most observable features but also the primary zones for human interaction with the environment and various activities.

6. 一阵一阵的微风吹来，在湖面上荡起层层涟漪。(A breeze blew, rippling on **[húmiàn] the surface of the lake.**)

(BCC Corpus)

7. 清晨，湖面上雾气腾腾，在树上形成雾凇。(In the early morning, mist rises above **[húmiàn] the surface of the lake**, forming frost on the trees.)

(BCC Corpus)

When people engage in activities in a water place like *hú*, their options are largely limited by the presence of water. Unlike solid ground, which allows for unrestricted movement, a lake requires individuals to either remain on the shore or use a boat to access different parts of the water body. For instance, leisure activities such as picnicking and sightseeing are commonly enjoyed along the shoreline, where people can interact with the lake while keeping their footing on dry land. Conversely, activities like rowing, sailing, and fishing in deeper waters necessitate the use of boats or other floating devices to navigate the lake's surface.

As demonstrated in Example 8, people must rely on tools, such as boats, to extend their presence onto the water. Example 9 further demonstrates that the boundary between water and land is a significant factor in how *hú* is conceptualised.

8. 小舟在湖面上轻轻荡漾。(The boat swung gently **on the [húmiàn] lake.**)

(BCC Corpus)

9. 每当夜幕降临，湖上岸边，人流如潮，霓虹闪烁。岸边，各种风情的酒吧鳞次栉比；湖上，河灯点点，二胡、琵琶悠扬之声不绝于耳。(As night falls, the shore of the lake becomes bustling with crowds, and the neon lights flicker. Along the **[ànbīān] shore**, bars of various styles stand in a row; **[húshàng] on the lake**, lanterns float gently, and the melodious sounds of the *erhu* and *pipa* can be heard nonstop.)

(BCC Corpus)

Apart from the above physical features, Chinese people also perceive *hú* from an ecological perspective. Examples 10 and 11 illustrate that *hú*, along with its surrounding environment, serves as a habitat for a variety of vegetation, fish, and birds. This reflects a broader understanding of *hú*, where it is not merely viewed as a static, isolated body of water. Rather, Chinese people tend to regard *hú* as part of a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem, where the water itself is intertwined with the life forms in its vicinity. In this perception, plants grow along the shores, fish thrive in the waters, and birds nest in the nearby areas. When thinking about *hú*, Chinese people often consider it as a living, organic world, rather than just a geographical feature. It is seen as a space where human activity, nature, and animals exist in harmony, reflecting an integrated approach to the natural environment.

10. 花草树木与湖水相映成趣。(The flowers, grasses and trees are in harmony with the **[hú] lake**.)

(BCC Corpus)

11. 湖内鱼类丰富，湖面水禽聚集。(There are many kinds of fish living in **[hú] the lake** and many kinds of waterfowl gathering on **[húmiàn] the surface of the lake**.)

Furthermore, the perception of landscape terms in MSC is shaped not only by visual characteristics but also by the emotional and sensory responses the landscape term elicits. In the BCC Corpus data for *hú*, negative or derogatory expressions are seldom found, suggesting that the term generally carries neutral or positive connotations. In the corpus, *húshuǐ* 湖水 (lake water) is found being used metaphorically to represent a state of inner peace. It is often accompanied by adjectives such as *níngjìng* 宁静 (tranquil) and *tiánjìng* 恬静 (peaceful), which serve to convey a sense of calm and serenity. Additionally, the compound term *xīnhú* 心湖 (lit. heart lake) commonly appears in figurative contexts to represent a peaceful or contemplative state of mind, as illustrated in Example 12.

12. 他的话像一块石头击中了我本已平静下来的心湖。(His words were like a stone disturbing the stillness of my **[xīnhú] heart lake**, which had already been calm.)

Drawing on the evidence and discussion presented above, I propose the following explication for *hú* 湖 ('lake'):

[A] *hú* 湖 ('lake')

- a. places of one kind
- b. there is a lot of *shuǐ* [m] (water [m]) in places of this kind
when people see a place of this kind, they can think like this:

‘the water in this place does not move much’

c. places of this kind are big places

at many times, when someone is on one side of a place of this kind

this someone can’t see all the other sides of this place

d. there are *dìmiàn* [m] (ground [m]) on all sides of the water

e. the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of a place of this kind is far below the *dìmiàn*
on all sides of this place

f. people do many things with the water in places of this kind

g. when people think about a place of this kind, they often think like this:

‘when I am in this place, it is like this:

I can see many things here, I can’t see these things at the place people often live

I can not-hear things like I often hear at the place people often live

I can not-think about other things now

because of this, I feel something very good

because of this, I want to be in this place some times’

Component (b) deals with the water feature of this kind of places, which is characterised by a large expanse of standing water. Water in *hú* is often described as calm, clear, green, pure, and sometimes gently undulating on the surface. The term ‘ripples’ is commonly used to describe the surface of *hú*, indicating subtle movement in the water. However, the water in *hú* does not flow as river water does. Therefore, in this component, I use the expression ‘the water does not move much’ to indicate this feature of lake water.

Component (c) addresses the size of *hú* by reflecting the most common way people perceive this feature—by observing the expanse of *hú* from the shore or a distance. The sense of vastness arises from people's inability to see its boundaries.

Component (d) aims to capture the relationship between water and land. Then, component (e) describes the depth of the water by comparing the height of the bottom of *hú* and the surrounding land. This is followed by component (f), which states Chinese people's engagement with *hú*.

Component (g) then describe the feelings or thoughts that arise from people's engagement with *hú*—specifically, a sense of tranquillity. This emotional response is shaped by both personal experiences and cultural associations with lakes, reflecting a profound connection to the environment. This component underscores the idea that the relationship between people and *hú*, as well as the landscape in general, goes beyond the physical, embracing deep emotional and culturally specific dimensions.

Another landscape term for large enclosed-water places in Chinese is *diàn* 淀 ('shallow lake'), commonly found in place names of shallow lakes or wetlands, such as *Báiyáng Diàn* 白洋淀. The key feature of *diàn* is its shallow depth, which enables plants to root underwater while their stems and leaves rise above the surface, providing nesting places for birds. This feature of *diàn* is vividly depicted in the following passage from the essay *Héhuā Diàn* 荷花淀 (lit. Lotus Shallow Lake), included in the Year 11 Chinese textbook. The following passage is directly extracted from *Héhuā Diàn* 荷花淀:

13. ……每年芦花飘飞苇叶黄的时候，全淀的芦苇收割，垛起垛来，在白洋淀周围的广场上，就成了一条苇子的长城……往荷花淀里摇！那里水浅，大船过不去……几只野鸭子扑楞楞飞起，尖声惊叫，掠着水面飞走了。 (...Every year,

when the reed flowers drift and the reed leaves turn yellow, the reeds of the entire **[diàn] shallow lake** are harvested and stacked into mounds. Around the open spaces surrounding *Báiyáng Diàn*, they form a long wall of reeds... Row toward **[Héhuā Diàn] Lotus Shallow Lake**! The water there is shallow, and large boats cannot pass through... A few wild ducks suddenly fluttered up, letting out sharp cries as they skimmed over the water and flew away.) (Sun, 2018, p. 14)

In contrast to *hú*, where much of the aquatic life is concealed beneath the water, *diàn* offers a more observable and interactive ecosystem, with plants, birds, and other wildlife thriving in the space above the surface of water. As the above example illustrates, *héhuā* 荷花 (waterlily) and *lúwěi* 芦苇 (reed) are the most salient examples of the aquatic plants people associate with *diàn*.

Likely due to water plants emerging from the surface in *diàn* and people's interactions with these water areas also occurring on the surface, the corpus contains few descriptions of the water's surface or cultural recollections of the emotions evoked by its calm appearance.

Drawing on the above discussion, the meaning of *diàn* 淀 ('shallow lake') is explicated as below:

[B] *diàn* 淀 ('shallow lake')

- a. places of one kind
- b. there is a lot of *shuǐ* [m] (water [m]) in places of this kind
when people see a place of this kind, they can think like this:

- ‘the water in this place does not move much’
- c. places of this kind are big places
at many times, when someone is on one side of a place of this kind
this someone can’t see all the other sides of this place
 - d. there are *dìmiàn* [m] (ground [m]) on all sides of the water
 - e. the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of a place of this kind is not far below the *dìmiàn*
on all sides of this place
 - f. when people think about a place of this kind
they often think like this:
‘there are living things of many kinds in a place of this kind
often, there are many *lúwěi* [e] (reed [e]) growing in the water
often, there are many *hé* [e] (waterlily [e]) growing in the water
niǎo [e] (birds [e]) live in places of this kind
yú [e] (fish [e]) live in places of this kind’
 - g. people do many things with the water in places of this kind

The phrase ‘the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of a place of this kind is not far below the *dìmiàn* [m] (ground [m]) on all sides of this place’ in component (e) of the above explication highlights the relevant shallow nature of *diàn* compared to *hú*. Component (f) deals with the ecological feature of *hú*, indicating that *diàn* is closely associated with *lúwěi* (reed), *hé* [e] (waterlily [e]), *niǎo* [e] (birds [e]) and *yú* [e] (fish [e]). This association with living things of many kinds further defines *diàn* as a habitat that is often relatively untouched and wilder in nature. Furthermore, the corpus contains no descriptions of a calm water surface in relation to *diàn*. This indicates that *diàn* is generally not associated with the sense of tranquillity typically attributed to *hú*, as discussed earlier. In summary, the main distinction between *hú* and *diàn* lies in both depth and ecological features. While *hú* is typically deeper and hosts a more varied ecosystem, *diàn* is shallower and is strongly associated with vegetation and birds, embodying a wild and more primitive image in the mind of Chinese people.

7.3 *Chí* 池 ('pool') and *Táng* 塘 ('pond/pool')

Chí 池 ('pool') and *táng* 塘 ('pond/pool') are often used together as a compound word in Chinese, referring to small standing-water bodies. Although the compound term *chítáng* is commonly used as a general reference for small standing-water places, *chí* and *táng* can also appear separately in various compound terms with specific characteristics and functions. For example, they appear in terms such as *yóuyǒng chí* 游泳池 ('swimming pool') and *yútáng* 鱼塘 ('fish pond'), each reflecting the distinctive purpose and features of the water place in question. Therefore, it is important to discuss the meanings of *chí* and *táng* separately, as they are applied in different contexts and carry distinct nuances in their meanings.

When used individually, there are some subtle differences in how these two terms are applied. First, both *chí* and *táng* can refer to natural or artificial water bodies. When they are used to describe manmade water features, they carry subtle differences. *Chí* is often associated with small, enclosed, and purpose-built water structures, such as *yóuyǒng chí* 游泳池 (swimming pool) and *yùchí* 浴池 (bathing pool). It is frequently used in urban settings where water serves a specific functional or aesthetic purpose, as illustrated by Example 14. These water features are typically designed for human use, leisure, or controlled aquatic environments.

14. 小花园的景致逐渐丰富起来，观鱼阁、**鱼池**、小凉亭、石桌、石凳，还有两座汉白玉浮雕。(The landscape of the small garden gradually became more enriched, featuring a fish-viewing pavilion, a **[yúchí, typically designed for landscaping or**

aesthetic purposes] fish pond, a small gazebo, stone tables, stone benches, and two white marble relief sculptures.)

(BCC Corpus)

On the other hand, as shown by Example 15, *táng* is more closely linked to agricultural and natural ecosystems. When referring to manmade water bodies, *táng* usually denotes *yútáng* and *shuǐtáng* 水塘 (‘water reservoirs’) that are primarily used for aquaculture, irrigation, or water conservation. Unlike *chí*, which often stands alone, *táng* tends to exist in clusters, forming part of a larger agricultural or ecological system.

15. 实行土地改革，田地与鱼塘一起回到了农民手中。(The land reform was implemented, and the fields, along with the **[yútáng, typically designed for agricultural purposes] fishponds**, were returned to the hands of the farmers.)

(BCC Corpus)

Due to its strong association with rural environments, *táng* is perceived as more integrated into the natural landscape, often serving as a habitat for aquatic life and contributing to local biodiversity. One of the earliest and most influential encounters Chinese people have with the concept of *táng* is through *Hétáng Yuèsè* 荷塘月色 (Moonlight in the Lotus Pond), a well-known essay by the renowned writer Zhu Ziqing⁵, which is included in middle school Chinese textbooks. In this literary work, *táng* is described as a small body of water full of

⁵ Zhu Ziqing (1898–1948 CE) was a renowned Chinese writer and scholar, best known for his evocative essays. Two of his most famous essays, *Hétáng Yuèsè* 荷塘月色 (Moonlight in the Lotus Pond) and *Bèi Yǐng* 背影 (The Back Figure), are both included in Chinese textbooks for middle school students.

lotus flowers, with trees and flowers on the bank, and fish playing in the water. This image has become a prototype of Chinese people's perception of the concept of *táng*:

16. 荷塘的四面，远远近近，高高低低都是树，而杨柳最多……这时候最热闹的，要数树上的蝉声与水里的蛙声…… (There were trees ranked on all sides of the **[hétáng] lotus pond**, near and far, high and low; most of them were willows. These trees encircled the pond. ... At that moment, the most raucous sound that I could hear was the rasping of frogs in the water and the snapping of cicadas in the foliage.)

(Zhu, 1927/2016)

Second, there is a subtle size difference between *chí* and *táng*. As discussed above, due to the artificial and functional nature of *chí*, it is typically used to describe very small water features. In contrast, *táng* refers to water bodies that are relatively small but still occupy a certain area of the landscape. Furthermore, as shown in Example 17, *táng* is often used to describe fishponds in agricultural contexts, and these are usually found in clusters rather than individually. The measurement unit for a cluster of *táng* is *mǔ* 亩, a traditional Chinese unit of area, which is approximately 666.67 square meters.

17. 还开辟鱼塘 1000 平方米，养鲢鱼 1 万多尾，养鹅 180 只。(An area of 1,000 square metres was also developed into **[yútáng] fishponds**, housing over 10,000 catfish and 180 geese.)

(BCC Corpus)

Third, there is a distinction in water quality between *chí* and *táng*. Generally speaking, water in *chí* can be either clear or muddy, while water in *táng* is often described as muddy or green. The first collocation Chinese primary students learn about the concept of *táng* is *nítáng* 泥塘 (bog, lit. mud pond) in the essay *Qīngwā Mài Nítáng* 青蛙卖泥塘 (The Frog Sells the Mud Pond) included in the second volume of the second-grade Chinese textbook (MEPRC, 2017, p. 92), which suggests a muddy or murky water environment. In contrast, there is limited corpus data available for *níchí* 泥池 (lit. mud pool), with only 16 tokens in the BCC Corpus.

Despite the differences mentioned above, both *chí* and *táng* refer to small standing water bodies in comparison to *hú*. Unlike *hú*, which typically dominates the observer's view, *chí* and *táng* usually occupy only a small portion of the landscape, even when the observer is standing close by. Due to their smaller size, it is more natural to refer to the area surrounding a *chí* or *táng* as *chí/tángbiān* (lit. pool/pond edge) rather than describing them as having a bank or shore. Additionally, *chí* and *táng* are often modified by the adjective *xiǎo* 小 (small). Because of their compact size, these bodies of water allow for more detailed observation, and descriptions of them found in the corpus tend to focus on finer details, such as the fish swimming in the water.

Based on the above discussion, I propose the following explications for *chí* 池 ('pool') and *táng* 塘 ('pond/pool'):

[C] *chí* 池 ('pool')

a. places of one kind

- b. there is *shuǐ* [m] (water [m]) in places of this kind
the water does not move
- c. there is *dimiàn* [m] (ground [m]) on all sides of the water
- d. the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of a place of this kind is not far below the *dimiàn*
on all sides of this place
- e. places of this kind are small places
when someone is on one side of a place of this kind
this someone can see all other sides of this place
- f. often, when people think about a place of this kind, they think like this:
‘some time before, people want a place like this,
because people want to do something in this place
because of this, people *wā* [m] (dig [m]) in this place for some time
some time after, the *dǐbù* of this place is below the *dimiàn* on all sides of this place’

[D] *táng* 塘 (‘pond’)

- a. places of one kind
- b. there is *shuǐ* [m] (water [m]) in places of this kind
there is *nítǔ* [m] (earth [m]) in the water
the water does not move
- c. there is *dimiàn* [m] (ground [m]) on all sides of the water
- d. the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of a place of this kind is not far below the *dimiàn*
on all sides of this place
- e. places of this kind are small places
when someone is on one side of a place of this kind
this someone can see all other sides of this place
- f. when people think about a place of this kind
they often think like this:
‘often, there are living things of many kinds in a place of this kind
often, there are *yú* [e] (fish [e]) in a place of this kind
often, there are many *hé* [e] (waterlily [e]) in a place of this kind
often, there are many *wā* [e] (frogs [e]) in a place of this kind’

In component (b), I use the phrase ‘the water does not move’ to emphasise the still nature of the water in *chí* and *táng*. Additionally, in component (b) in the explication of *táng*, the phrase ‘there is *nítǔ* 泥土 [m] (earth [m]) in the *shuǐ* [m] (water [m])’ is included to highlight the difference in water quality between *chí* and *táng*.

Component (c) describes the enclosed nature of *chí* and *táng*, stating that the water is surrounded by the ground with no inlet or outlet. Furthermore, component (d) conveys depth by comparing the ground level to the bottom of the water. Together, components (d) and (e) address the small size of *chí* and *táng*, noting their depth and how they are fully visible within a person's field of view.

Component (f) in the explication of *chí* covers the artificial or human intervention notion in the meaning of *chí*. The phrase ‘some time before, people want a place like this, because people want to do something in this place’ clarifies that *chí* is often built by people for a specific purpose. The following sentences describe how *chí* is created, by digging into the ground to form a hole, allowing it to be able to hold water.

On the other hand, component (f) in the explication of *táng* treats the ecological notion in Chinese people’s conceptualisation of *táng* and the stereotypical image Chinese people have about *táng* by listing the most salient examples of vegetation and living things people have in mind when talking about *táng*.

7.4 *Tán* 潭 (‘deep pond’) and *Yuān* 淵 (‘abyss’)

There are two landscape terms in Chinese that refer to deep enclosed-water places: *tán* 潭 ('deep pool') and *yuān* 渊 ('very deep water place'). Generally speaking, *tán* refers to small enclosed-water places with a focus on the depth and tranquillity of the water. One of the earliest encounters Chinese people have with this concept is through the essay *Xiǎo Shítán Jì* 小石潭记 (An Account of Little Rock Pond) which is featured in the Chinese textbook for eighth-grade students. In this essay, the author Liu Zongyuan (773–819 CE) described *tán* as a small enclosed-water feature with a big stone on the bottom (MEPRC, 2017, p. 58).

Although *tán* closely aligns with *táng* in terms of natural formation and its strong connection to landscape aesthetics, a key distinction between the two is that *tán* can refer to a pool of water formed by rocks within a larger water body, whereas *táng* is more closely associated with *nítǔ* 泥土 (earth). *Shítán* 石潭 (lit. rock pond) is a common compound term that is used in MSC. Moreover, due to the nature of the rocks, the water in *tán* is often deemed as clear and clean to the human eye, allowing the bottom to be seen despite its depth, as illustrated in Examples 18 and 19.

18. 泉水从石罅中流出，聚成一个磨盘大的潭，潭水清澈见底。(The spring water flows out from the cracks in the rocks, gathering into a **[tán] pond** the size of a grinding wheel, with crystal-clear water where the bottom can be seen.)

(BCC Corpus)

19. 谷口有一深潭，与江陵城外大河相通，潭水清澈，深可见底。(There is a **[shēntán] deep pond** at the mouth of the valley, connected to the large river outside Jiangling City. The water in the pool is crystal clear, and its depth is visible to the bottom.)

On the other hand, the size of *tán* can vary, as it can be described as both *dà* 大 (big) and *xiǎo* 小 (small). As shown in the following examples, *tán* can refer to standing water bodies ranging from a small concave structure beneath a tree that collects water from a creek to a large pool formed beneath a waterfall.

20. 小溪边是一溜桦树，小溪并不宽阔，而是窄小、清澈而湍急，在桦树根边冲出了一个一个小潭。(Beside the small creek stands a row of birch trees. The creek is not wide but rather narrow, clear, and fast-flowing, carving out a series of [*xiǎotán*] **small ponds** at the roots of the birch trees.)

21. 千丈瀑布从山顶直落深潭，发出轰然巨响，激起千万朵水花。(The waterfall, a thousand feet high, cascades directly from the mountaintop into the [*shēntán*] **deep pond** below, producing a thunderous roar and stirring up millions of droplets.)

Beyond the above-mentioned stereotypical image that Chinese people associate with *tán*, the concept also carries connotations of profound depth and dilemma. In the corpus, *tán* is often found described as *shēn* 深 (deep), appearing 1,036 times in BCC Corpus, whereas its association with *qiǎn* 浅 (shallow) is much rarer, with only 22 occurrences.

The water in *tán* is deemed to be still, as illustrated in the expression *yītán sǐshuǐ* 一潭死水 (lit. a deep pool of dead water). This expression utilises the stillness of water in *tán* to symbolise stagnation and a lack of movement, both literally and metaphorically, in various situations, emotions, and aspects of progress, among other things. Below are some examples of how this expression is used in various contexts:

22. 生活就如一潭死水。(Life is like a **[tán]** pond of dead water.)

(BCC Corpus)

23. 说也奇怪，她的内心现在宁静得像一潭死水一样。(Strange as it may seem, her mind is now as calm as a **[tán]** pond of stagnant water.)

(BCC Corpus)

Based on the above discussion, the meaning of *tán* 潭 ('deep pond') is explicated as below:

[E] *tán* 潭 ('deep pond')

- a. places of one kind
- b. there is *shuǐ* [m] (water [m]) in places of this kind
the water cannot move
- c. there is *dìmiàn* [m] (ground [m]) on all sides of the *shuǐ*
often, there are *shítóu* (rocks [m]) in a place of this kind
- d. the *dǐbù* [m] (bottom [m]) of a place of this kind is very far below the *dìmiàn* on all sides of this place

Component (b) states that there is water in *tán* and the movement of the water is restricted with the phrase 'the water cannot move'. Component (c) highlights that *tán* is an enclosed-

water place like *chí* and *táng*, while also emphasising its rocky surroundings by stating that ‘often, there are *shítóu* 石头 (rocks [m]) in a place of this kind’. Component (d) deals with the main difference between *tán* and other enclosed-water places, specifically the profound depth of water.

The other term discussed in this chapter is *yuān*, which refers to extremely deep, enclosed-water places whose bottom is difficult or even impossible to detect. Due to this sense of the concept, *yuān* is often used in the abstract concept of *shēnyuān* 深渊 (abyss), which conveys a sense of unfathomable depth, danger, and mystery. In MSC, it has become increasingly uncommon for natural water bodies to be named or referred to as *yuān*. Instead, its meaning has largely transitioned more towards metaphorical and figurative usage, emphasising its association with inaccessible or ominous depths. Notably, *tán* can also be used in a similar metaphorical way, as seen in the expression *nítán* 泥潭 (mire), which signifies a state of being trapped. This metaphorical use of *shēnyuān* and *nítán* are illustrated in Examples 24 and 25.

24. 正当他的文学事业如日中天之时，一场飞来横祸却将他推入灾难的深渊。

(Just as his literary career was reaching its peak, an unexpected disaster plunged him into the [*shēnyuān*] abyss of misfortune.)

(BCC Corpus)

25. 如此循环往复，他在赌博的泥潭里越陷越深，直至无法自拔。(Caught in a

vicious cycle, he sank deeper and deeper into the [*nítán*] mire of gambling until he could no longer extricate himself.)

These metaphorical applications of Chinese terms for enclosed-water places highlight how physical attributes, specifically depth in this case, are linked to the challenges and dilemmas people face in their minds. Although these associations may not be intrinsic to the meanings of the landscape terms themselves, they highlight the importance of certain physical features that tend to evoke negative or unsettling connotations. Such attributes shape not only linguistic expressions but also the broader cultural and psychological perceptions of these landscape features, reinforcing their symbolic connection to inescapable or overwhelming situations.

7.5 *Quán* 泉 ('spring')

Another important term in Chinese for enclosed-water places is *quán* 泉 ('spring') as in the compound term *quányǎn* 泉眼 (the mouth of a spring, lit. spring eye). *Quán* refers to a small hole or crack where water emerges from underground and flows to the surface (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1132). One of its defining characteristics is the dynamic movement of water and the movement of water in *quán* is believed to be continuous. The Chinese character *yǒng* 涌 (to gush) is commonly used to describe the motion of the water in *quán*. Due to this ever-flowing nature, *quán* is frequently employed metaphorically to represent an abundant or inexhaustible source of intangible elements, such as thoughts, emotions, vitality, and inspiration, as illustrated in the following four-character fixed expressions in MSC.

26. *lèi rú quán yǒng* 泪如泉涌 tears gushing like a **[quán] spring**
27. *xuè rú quán yǒng* 血如泉涌 blood gushing like a **[quán] spring**
28. *yǒng quán xiāng bào* 涌泉相报 repay one's kindness like a gushing **[quán] spring**
29. *cái sī quán yǒng* 才思泉涌 talent and thoughts gushing like a **[quán] spring**
30. *wén sī quán yǒng* 文思泉涌 literary thoughts gushing like a **[quán] spring**

In addition, the concept of *quán* is also associated with the idea of perpetual renewal and boundless energy, which is evident in the following expressions that evoke the idea of maintaining youthfulness:

31. *bù lǎo quán* 不老泉 forever-young **[quán] spring**
32. *qīng chūn zhī quán* 青春之泉 youth **[quán] spring**

Due to the dynamic and ever-flowing nature of the water in *quán*, they often contribute to the formation of other water bodies. Depending on the terrain and water volume, the water may flow into either a long flowing-water place or an enclosed-water place. Many famous *quán* in China, such as the springs in Jinan City—a city in China famous for its numerous natural springs—serve as sources for nearby ponds and streams, creating picturesque landscapes, as illustrated in Example 33.

33. 除了珍珠泉的泉水流到大明湖外，趵突泉、五龙潭和黑虎泉的泉水主要经过西护城河，流到小清河被当做污水排放掉了。(Apart from the water from **[Zhēnzhū Quán]** Pearl Spring flowing into **[Dà míng hú]** Daming Lake, the water from **[Bàotū**

Quán] Baotu Spring, [**Wǔlóng Tán**] Five Dragon Pool, and [**Hēihǔ Quán**] Black Tiger Spring primarily flows through the [**xī hùchéng hé**] Western Moat into [**Xiǎoqīng Hé**] Xiaoqing River, where it is discharged as wastewater.)

(BCC Corpus)

Quán can be understood as an enclosed-water place in the sense that its water originates underground and emerges through a surface opening. Upon reaching the surface, however, this water often transitions into another form of water body—either a long, flowing-water place as discussed in Chapter 6, or an enclosed-water place as previously examined in this chapter. In many cases, *quán* is also associated with a natural or sometimes man-made enclosure around the water. The most common type of enclosure is *chítáng*, which is designed to capture and contain the water emerging from the ground. Among all the water features discussed in Chapter 7 and this chapter, *chí* is the only term that frequently forms a compound with *quán*, as seen in the term *quánchí* in the example below.

34. 泉池不太大，有十丈方圆，中间是泉眼，向上冒出如大锅般的水花。(The

[quánchí] spring pool is not very large, measuring about ten feet in diameter. At its centre is the spring eye, from which water bursts upward in a fountain-like spray, resembling the splashing water of a large cauldron.)

(BCC Corpus)

Water from *quán* is often regarded as a primary and highly valued water source. Spring water is typically considered pure, refreshing, and of superior quality, with many believing it

to have a naturally sweet taste. In the corpus, *gāntián* 甘甜 (pleasantly sweet) is found being used frequently to describe the taste of the water in *quán*. Beyond its practical value, *quán* is often associated with good fortune and prosperity, which is reflected in the names given to many famous springs. These names often carry auspicious meanings, symbolising blessings, happiness, and wealth. For instance, names like *Wúyōu Quán* 无忧泉 (Worry-Free Spring), *Jīnqián Quán* 金钱泉 (Money Spring) and *Yù Quán* 玉泉 (Jade Spring) are chosen to inspire positive associations or attract good fortune to those who visit.

Moreover, *wēnquán* 温泉 (hot spring) is a major category of *quán* and is a very popular destination for relaxation and health treatments. Phrases like *pào wēnquán* 泡温泉 (soak in a hot spring) and *wēnquán yù* 温泉浴 (hot spring bath) demonstrate how people interact with *wēnquán* by immersing their bodies in the warm water to achieve health benefits, relaxation, and stress relief, as shown in the following example:

35. 好舒服啊，工作之余还可以泡温泉放松放松，人也比较舒服。(Ah, it feels so good. After work, I can soak in a [*wēnquán*] hot spring to relax and unwind, which makes me feel much more comfortable.)

(BCC Corpus)

Drawing on the above evidence, I convey the meaning of *quán* 泉 ('spring') in the following explication:

[F] *quán* 泉 ('spring')

- a. places of one kind
- b. there is a lot of *shuǐ* [m] (water [m]) in places of this kind
 some time before, the water is somewhere far below the *dimiàn* [m] (ground [m])
 in a very short time, the water is in a place of this kind
 the water is moving like this all the time
 it is like this all the time
- c. because of this, there is often a water place of other kinds near this place
 often, there is a *chí* [e] ('pool' [e]) near this place
 often, there is a *xī* [e] ('creek' [e]) near this place
- d. places of this kind are small places
- e. at some times, the water in a place of this kind is warm [m]
 because of this, people often want to be in the water for some time
 at many times, people think the water in a place of this kind is very good
 because of this, people often want to *hē* [m] (drink [m]) the water in this place
- f. when people think about a place of this kind, they often think like this:
 'the water in this place is moving like this all the time
 the water can be on the ground in a short time
 after this, the water can be on the ground for a long time
 water doesn't move like this in other places
 the water in this place is very good
 this is a very good place'

Component (b) shows that *quán* 泉 ('spring') refers to enclosed-water places in the sense that water emerges from underground through a rupture or opening in the earth's surface. This component not only emphasises the existence of a contained water source but also highlights the dynamic nature of its movement—water rising with force from beneath the ground to the surface. This continuous upward flow is a defining feature of *quán*, setting it apart from other types of water bodies.

Component (c) further elaborates on the process that occurs once the water reaches the surface. Depending on the surrounding terrain and geological conditions, the spring water may collect and form another type of water body, often a small *chítáng* or *xī*. Subsequently, component (d) characterises *quán* as relatively small-scale places.

Component (e) outlines two of the most prominent ways people interact with water from *quán*, namely *pào wēnquán* 泡温泉 (to soak in a hot spring) and *hē quánshuǐ* 喝泉水 (to drink spring water).

Lastly, component (f) deals with the thoughts people have when they talk about *quán*. The constant flow of water and the high quality of the water found in *quán* contribute significantly to how people feel and think about such places. The continuous, dependable flow of clean water and its perceived high quality significantly shape public perception of these places. *Quán* are often seen as sources of vitality and abundance, with their water commonly regarded as pure and refreshing. These characteristics contribute to a strong cultural association with health, renewal, and well-being. Consequently, Chinese people frequently view *quán* with great respect, valuing them not only for their physical benefits but also for their role in providing spiritual nourishment.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have conducted an in-depth semantic analysis of Chinese landscape terms for enclosed-water places, revealing the key elements that Chinese speakers typically consider when classifying such landforms. Size and depth of water play a primary role in the Chinese categorisation of enclosed-water features. Additional factors reflected in the

meanings of these terms include the material composition of the surrounding environment, the quality and movement of the water, as well as whether the water body is naturally occurring or artificially constructed.

The preceding semantic analysis demonstrates that specific characteristics of certain enclosed-water places can carry either positive or negative cultural connotations. These connotations are often embedded in the meanings of the terms themselves and, in some instances, may even serve as the primary rationale for their use. For instance, in Section 7.4, I have illustrated that physical features *tán* 潭 ('deep pool') and *yuān* 渊 ('very deep water place'), such as great depth and muddiness, can evoke unpleasant feelings and thoughts and establish metaphorical connections between landscape terms and negative experiences people have elsewhere. In Section 7.5, I have also demonstrated that the ever-flowing nature of *quán* 泉 ('spring') is frequently ascribed positive connotations by speakers of MSC. Consequently, the term *quán* is often employed metaphorically to denote an enduring and reliable source of valuable or desirable things or qualities, such as wisdom and inspiration, reflecting the cultural perception of *quán* as a symbol of a sustaining abundance.

Cultural imagery, particularly as conveyed through literary depictions in textbook materials, plays a crucial role in shaping people's conceptualisation of enclosed-water places. As demonstrated in Sections 7.2 and 7.3, terms such as *diàn* 淀 ('shallow lake') and *táng* 塘 ('pond/pool') are not limited to descriptions of physical features; rather, they are embedded in broader cultural narratives that evoke stereotypical associations with water plants like *héhuā* 荷花 (water lily) and *lúwěi* 芦苇 (reed). These culturally reinforced images profoundly

influence the mental visualisation of such places, shaping how they are cognitively represented and understood by MSC speakers.

The preceding semantic analysis also reveals that all landforms designated with landscape terms are of a sufficient size to constitute a notable part of the environment, spaces that people can enter, interact with, and engage in various activities. In MSC, two other terms are used to describe small enclosed-water features on a hard surface, namely *shuǐwā* 洼 ('puddle') and *shuǐkēng* 水坑 ('puddle'). Unlike the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara term *warku* 'hollow in rock, where water collects after rain' (Bromhead, 2017, p. 198) that is regarded as a landscape term, *shuǐwā* and *shuǐkēng* are not conceptualised as landscape features due to their temporary nature and small size. Rather than being perceived as integral parts of the physical world with spatial or ecological significance, they are understood more as transient elements that people navigate around, similar to movable objects like furniture within a room.

Wā can be a muddy puddle on a dirt floor or a puddle on an uneven road surface or a rock. *Kēng* describes a small hollow or depression in the ground that may sometimes collect water, for example, after rainfall. When used on its own, the central meaning of *kēng* emphasises the indentation in the earth rather than the presence of water. In the corpus, the most frequent usage of these two terms is in reference to wet ground during rainy days and the difficulties it creates for pedestrians. However, because these features are temporary in nature, heavily influenced by weather conditions, and occupy only limited areas, they are not

considered landscape features in the strict sense. This distinction sheds light on how Chinese speakers conceptualise 'what' versus 'where' in their understanding of the physical world.

Chapter 8 Agricultural and Cultural Landscape

8.1 Introduction

Chinese people's conceptualisation of nature is deeply intertwined with an aesthetic perspective that reflects a yearning for an idealised countryside life. This appreciation extends not only to untouched natural landscape features as discussed in Chapter 4, but also to human-intervened landscapes. For Chinese people, living near nature and away from authority or the bustling city is something to be sought after and praised (see Chapter 4.2). Despite variation in different aspects, this intimacy with natural simplicity and peaceful life is present in many cultures—examples include the Greek concept of 'Arcadia', and English adjectives like 'pastoral' and 'idyllic', to name a few. This chapter seeks to uncover the distinctive, idealised perception that Chinese people have of countryside life by examining the meanings of selected terms referring to agricultural and cultural landscapes.

As mentioned by Bromhead (2018), man-made agricultural places, or semi-man-made agricultural places exist because of people's intent. For instance, agricultural and pastoral places, such as paddocks and meadows, exist because people want them to be (Bromhead, 2018). This notion in the meanings of these concepts is conveyed by the phrase 'people want this' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 141) in their explications. In the Chinese landscape concepts examined in this chapter, human intent extends beyond merely signifying human modification of nature. It also reflects a desire to dwell in these places and a way of life closely tied to them. Such terms often convey a particular mode of dwelling and a culturally embedded way of life associated with these landscapes.

This chapter aims to reveal the unique Chinese perspective on countryside life, which is often idealised, through an in-depth semantic analysis of a few Chinese terms for agricultural landscapes. In this chapter, I will first look at the meanings of the Chinese terms for agricultural places: *tián* 田 ('field') and *qiānmò* 阡陌 ('crisscross footpaths between fields'). Then, I will look at the meaning of the Chinese word *yuán* 园 ('garden'), which is an artificial place for plantation and other designated purposes. Following this, I will analyse *cháyuan* 茶园 ('tea garden') and the debates concerning its inclusion in the West Lake Cultural Landscape World Heritage designation. I will then explore the meaning of *cǎoyuán* 草原 ('grassland'), a term for grasslands used for animal grazing. Finally, I will discuss the concept of *tiányuán* 田园 ('countryside'), an idealised representation of countryside life. Where applicable and feasible, comparisons will be drawn with similar concepts in other languages.

8.2 *Tián* 田 ('field') and *Qiānmò* 阡陌 ('crisscross footpaths between fields')

In Chinese, *tián* is a general term that denotes land cultivated by humans for growing a variety of crops (种植农作物的土地) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1349). It can be used as a standalone noun, as in *yīkuài tián* 一块田 (a patch of farmland), or as part of compound words that specify different types of cultivated land, such as *tiándì* 田地 (fields or farmland), *màitián* 麦田 (wheat field), and *dàotián* 稻田 (rice paddy).

The term *tián* can refer to both small and large agricultural plots, with different classifiers used to indicate their scale. *Kuài* 块 (piece) is typically applied to smaller sections of land

where boundaries are more noticeable. This classifier is also used for objects with a defined shape and discernible thickness, such as *bǐnggān* 饼干 (cookie), *dàngāo* 蛋糕 (cake), and *zhuān* 砖 (brick). In contrast, *piàn* 片 (stretch) is used for larger expanses of land, highlighting their vastness and seamless integration into the surrounding landscape (see Chapter 3.4.1).

The Chinese concept of *tián* does not inherently imply vertical boundaries constructed by humans. Instead, it often conveys a sense of openness and natural continuity with the surrounding landscape, as reflected in the term *tiányě* 田野 (literally 'fields and wilderness'), which is a compound noun evoking an image of open rural spaces that blend cultivated fields and natural land. This stands in contrast to the British English term *field*, which typically denotes enclosed spaces demarcated by hedges, walls, ditches, fences, or banks—features that characterise modern small fields in England (Bromhead, 2018; Muir & Muir, 1989, pp. 136–144).

Drawing on the above discussion, the meaning of *tián* can be explicated as follows:

[A] *tián* 田 ('field')

- a. places of one kind
- b. there are a lot of *nítǔ* [m] (earth [m]) in a place of this kind
- c. there are places of this kind because people want this
- d. often, there are things of some kinds growing [m] out of the *dìmiàn* [m] (ground [m]) in a place of this kind,
because, sometime before, some people did some things to the *dìmiàn* in this place
- e. after some time, when things growing in these places are big,
people do some things to these things,
because they want to do some other things with these things somewhere else

- f. after this, sometimes people can *chī* [m] (eat [m]) these other things,
sometimes people can *zuò* [m] (make [m]) some other things with these things

Component (b) caters for the material composition of *tián*. Component (c) highlights the human intention in the meaning of *tián* through the phrase ‘because people want this’, a characteristic shared by all the agricultural places examined in this chapter. Components (d) and (e) address the agricultural activities carried out by farmers in the field, both before and during the harvest. Finally, component (f) focuses on the ultimate purpose of these activities: the production of food and other agricultural products.

To make the land more suitable for crop cultivation and livestock grazing, farmers and shepherds continuously modify and shape the land to meet practical needs. One of these modifications takes the form of functional lines, such as fences enclosing pastures, the boundaries of terraced fields, and footpaths within fields. Among these, *tiángěng* 田埂, which can also be called as *qiānmò* 阡陌, plays a crucial role in *tián*.

These practical lines serve distinct purposes; while fences and field boundaries establish clear divisions for land management, *qiānmò* specifically refers to narrow footpaths created by humans to facilitate movement within agricultural fields. Unlike other demarcations that primarily function as barriers, *qiānmò* is recognised as a place rather than merely a boundary because its primary function is to provide walkways within the cultivated land. The very reason for constructing these paths is to ensure that people can navigate the fields freely and efficiently. Thus, *qiānmò* embodies both functionality and spatial significance, allowing

farmers to move through their fields with ease while also contributing to the structured organisation of agricultural landscapes.

According to *Shuōwén Jiězì* 说文解字, an ancient Chinese dictionary compiled during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE), *qiān* 阡 and *mò* 陌 are defined based on their orientation within agricultural fields: ‘*Dōngxī wéi mò, Nánběi wéi qiān* 东西为陌，南北为阡 (East-west footpaths are *mò*, north-south footpaths are *qiān*)’ (*Shuōwén Jiězì*, 100 CE/2011, p. 2434).

Although the original directional distinction of *qiānmò* is no longer strictly followed, the term still conveys the idea of an intersecting network of footpaths that structure agricultural fields. In the BCC Corpus, *qiānmò* frequently appears in the phrase *qiānmò zònghéng* 阡陌纵横, evoking the crisscrossed pattern of cultivated land. Modifiers such as *wǎngzhuàng* 网状 (reticular) and *jiāozhī* 交织 (interwoven) further underscore its spatial complexity. These collocations highlight how *qiānmò* represents not just paths, but an organised agricultural landscape shaped by human intent and interaction with the environment.

The meaning of *qiānmò* 阡陌 (‘footpaths of field’) is explicated as such:

[B] *qiānmò* 阡陌 (‘footpaths of field’)

- a. places of one kind
- b. places of this kind are in *tián* [m] (field [m])
- c. there are places of this kind because people want this
- d. people can think a place of this kind like this:
‘it is like something very long [m]’
- e. there are a lot of *nítǔ* [m] (earth [m]) in a place of this kind

- f. often, there are many places of this kind in *tián*
because of this, people can *zǒu* [m] walk [m] from one place to somewhere else
when they are in *tián*

Component (b) illustrates that *qiānmò* exists by virtue of *tián*; its existence depends on the presence of cultivated fields. In other words, the concept of *qiānmò* is intrinsically dependent on and shaped by the understanding of *tián*. In this sense, *tián* functions as a semantic building block in the explication of *qiānmò*. Component (c) is shared by other concepts explored in this chapter, highlighting that these agricultural spaces exist due to human 'intention' (Bromhead, 2018). Component (d) emphasises that *qiānmò* are long spaces, a characteristic also found in the explications of other long spaces, such as river-places *hé* 河 ('river-1') and *jiāng* 江 ('river-2') (see Chapter 6). In component (e), I point out that *qiānmò* consists of earth, which is also the material composition of *tián*. Finally, component (f) emphasises the functional role of *qiānmò* in facilitating movement across the fields.

8.3 *Yuán* 园 ('garden/park/plantation') and *Cháyuan* 茶园 ('tea garden')

In Chinese, the term *yuán* 园 ('garden') is used to refer to man-made enclosed spaces designed for specific purposes, encompassing what would be expressed in English as *garden*, *park*, or *plantation*, depending on the context. It is used as the root of compound terms such as *huāyuán* 花园 (garden, lit. flower garden), *guǒyuán* 果园 (orchard, lit. fruit plantation) and *gōngyè yuán* 工业园 (industrial park).

When *yuán* appears in compound terms denoting man-made enclosed spaces, it carries varying connotations that reflect the specific purpose or function of each space. For instance, in *huāyuán*, the emphasis is on aesthetic appreciation and ornamental value. Such spaces are often designed for visual appeal, relaxation, and leisure, featuring carefully arranged flowers, plants, and landscaping elements. In contrast, in *guǒyuán*, the focus shifts to agriculture and the productivity of fruits. The primary function of a *guǒyuán* is to cultivate fruit-bearing plants or trees, making it a space driven by farming and harvest rather than aesthetics. These variations demonstrate how *yuán* shifts in meaning within different compound terms, highlighting diverse aspects such as aesthetic qualities, agricultural functions, or other practical uses depending on the context.

The term *yuán* can refer to spaces of vastly different sizes, ranging from expansive imperial gardens to small backyard plots used for agricultural purposes. For example, *Yuánmíng Yuán* 圆明园 (the Old Summer Palace) is a grand imperial garden renowned for its elaborate architecture, vast landscapes, and artistic design. At the other end of the spectrum, *yuán* is also commonly used in everyday contexts to describe much smaller, practical spaces designed for agricultural purposes. For instance, *càiyuán* 菜园 denotes a vegetable garden, often a small backyard plot where vegetables and herbs are cultivated for household use.

The broad applicability of the term *yuán* underscores its versatility, indicating that it generally denotes an enclosed space designed for a specific purpose, with its size and function varying significantly depending on the context.

Based on the above discussion, the meaning of *yuán* is explicated as follows:

[C] *yuán* 园 ('garden/plantation/park')

- a. places of one kind
- b. there are places of this kind because people want this
- c. often, there are things of many other kinds growing [m] out of the *dimiàn* [m] (ground [m]) in a place of this kind
because, sometime before, some people did some things to the ground in this place
- d. there are things of some kinds in places on all the sides of a place of this kind
because people do some things
- e. a place of this kind is on one side of these things
other places are on the other side of these things

The explication of *yuán* 园 ('garden') emphasizes its artificial origin and the deliberate intent behind its creation, while also highlighting its primary use in agricultural contexts, which is the most common setting for this term. Component (b) includes the phrase 'because people want this', emphasising that *yuán* is not a naturally occurring space but rather one that is deliberately established by people to serve a particular purpose. This distinguishes *yuán* from purely natural landscapes, reinforcing its role as a human-constructed space.

Component (c) focuses on the presence of plants within *yuán*, stating that they grow there specifically because 'people want them to be there'. This highlights the intentional cultivation and maintenance involved in a *yuán*, whether it is a garden, orchard, or plantation. Unlike wild vegetation, the plants in a *yuán* are carefully selected, planted, and nurtured by humans to serve specific purposes. The use of 'often' at the beginning of component (c) aims to clarify that although agricultural purposes are a primary function of *yuán*, this is not always the case. Exceptions include its usage in terms like *gōngyè yuán* 工业园 (industrial park) and

shìbó yuán 世博园 (World Expo park), which are designed for commercial or business purposes.

Component (d) addresses the boundary or enclosing nature of *yuán*. This defining feature further demonstrates that *yuán* is not a natural occurrence but a deliberate human intervention, reinforcing the idea that a *yuán* is a controlled and organised space with clear boundaries that separate it from surrounding areas.

Component (e) delves into the concept of 'boundary', illustrating how people perceive the distinction between one place and the areas around it. This understanding of spatial division is crucial to the concept of *yuán*, as its enclosed nature is a key characteristic that differentiates it from open, unstructured space.

Overall, the above explication illustrates that *yuán* is a human-designed enclosed space, purposefully shaped to fulfill aesthetic, agricultural, or business functions. Its existence is driven by human intent, and its boundaries, contents, and organisation reflect deliberate planning and intervention.

The next term to be discussed in this chapter is *cháyuan* 茶园, which can be translated as tea garden or tea plantation. As the name suggests, *cháyuan* refers to a designated area where farmers cultivate tea trees. Unlike many other agricultural sites that mainly function as production centres, *cháyuan* also carries important cultural and aesthetic meanings (see, e.g., Zhang & Taylor, 2020).

The dual role of *cháyuan* is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and broadly recognised by the Chinese people. Beyond its agricultural function, *cháyuan* are often valued as picturesque and peaceful landscapes, drawing visitors who come not only to observe tea cultivation but also to appreciate the natural beauty and tranquil ambience of these tea-growing areas. This notion is evident in common corpus expressions like *guānguāng cháyuán* 观光茶园 (sightseeing tea garden) and in contexts where *cháyuan* are portrayed as popular tourist destinations. The following corpus examples illustrate how *cháyuan* emphasises its experiential and recreational qualities, highlighting its significance beyond tea cultivation to include cultural tourism and sightseeing.

1. 到杭州我从不购物，也不到商店，而是去当地人认为最能体现杭州特色的地方。比如，我去**茶园**、竹林、水乡，走过西湖，在湖上泛过舟。(When I visit Hangzhou, I never go shopping or visit stores. Instead, I go to places that locals believe best represent the essence of Hangzhou. For example, I visited **[cháyuan] tea gardens**, bamboo forests, and water towns, strolled around West Lake, and enjoyed boat rides on the lake.)

(BCC Corpus)

2. 位于南安市西北部蓬华镇境内，由台商独资兴建，是一个集生态**茶园**、果园、旅游观光休闲度假于一体的综合性旅游景区。(Located in Penghua Town, in the northwest of Nan'an City, this tourism complex was solely funded by Taiwanese entrepreneurs. It is a comprehensive tourist destination that integrates an ecological **[cháyuan] tea garden**, orchards, sightseeing, and leisure resorts.)

(BCC Corpus)

Given this rich cultural and aesthetic dimension in the meaning of *cháyuán*, this thesis adopts ‘tea garden’ as the preferred translation of *cháyuán*, rather than ‘tea plantation’. While both terms can be regarded as the equivalent of *cháyuán* in English, ‘tea garden’ more effectively conveys its broader significance in Chinese tradition—not just as a site of tea cultivation, but also as a place of aesthetic appreciation, cultural heritage, and sightseeing.

In the Chinese tourism industry, sightseeing tea gardens have emerged as a key component of the tourism experience, with certain tea gardens and the teas they produce becoming iconic symbols tied to specific tourist destinations. For example, West Lake Longjing Tea in Hangzhou and Da Hong Pao Tea from Mount Wuyi are not only renowned for their unique qualities but also for their close association with these scenic spots. Local travel agencies frequently include visits to these tea gardens in their sightseeing packages, positioning them as key attractions within the larger scenic areas. On online platforms like TripAdvisor (May 20, 2025), sites such as Longjing Resort and Longjing Tea Village within the West Lake Scenic Area, as well as the Da Hong Pao Tea Garden in Wuyi Mountain, are frequently identified as key attractions. This highlights the prominent status of *cháyuán* as an essential destination in contemporary travel discourse.

Cháyuán have become a popular tourist attraction not just because of their appeal and the sale of tea products, but also due to the significant role that tea culture plays in Chinese society. Given the long and rich history of tea culture in China, it would be impossible to cover the cultural practices of tea drinking in every historical period within the confines of this section. Instead, this discussion will focus on how traditional Chinese tea culture

continues to shape contemporary understandings of *chá* 茶 (tea) and *cháyuan* (tea gardens) among modern Chinese people. This reflection will highlight the enduring influence of tea culture on contemporary views of relevant concepts, which continue to be deeply rooted in Chinese heritage and identity.

Chá 茶 (tea) first became a common drink of choice in China during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) and Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) (Anderson, 2007; Hinsch, 2016). Since then, tea has become a carrier of Chinese culture in multiple ways. As Hinsch (2016) points out, in Chinese culture, *chá* can become ‘a lofty cultural pursuit, a source of personal cultivation, and even a platform for spiritual attainment’ (p. 6). With pragmatic social issues as the core of Chinese thought, which distinguishes Chinese ways of thinking from the other parts of the world, *chá* inevitably became one of the most significant media for expressing social ethics in ancient China. Tea culture was intimately associated with high culture in ancient China, a social environment with a very clear social hierarchy. As Hinsch (2016) notes, *chá* was used as a tool to stand out from the crowd and create a superior social image:

Various kinds of people used tea to distinguish themselves from others and construct a superior social persona. Buddhist monks, emperors, poets, and gentlemen connoisseurs all deployed tea culture somewhat differently. Even so, for all of them the basic goal remained the same. They manipulated tea to stake a claim to some kind of special status, drinking it in ways that could somehow mark them off as better than others. (Hinsch, 2016, p. 121)

Chá is not only a social and cultural symbol in China but also a tool for personal cultivation. The opening line of *The Classic of Tea* (*Chá Jīng* 茶经), written by Lu Yu (733–804 CE) in the eighth century CE, states that the way of *chá* ‘embodies frugality and virtue (最宜精行俭德之人)’ (Lu, ca. 760–780 CE/2016, p. 37). While tea was deeply embedded in political rituals, court life, and social hierarchy in ancient China, it also served as a medium for individuals to embrace a simpler, more modest lifestyle as a form of spiritual aspiration. As Hinsch (2016) describes, *chá* provides a pathway for individuals to ‘pursue modest simplicity as a kind of spiritual ideal’ and ultimately ‘attain inner peace’ (p. 67).

This introspective and meditative aspect of tea culture has been embraced by the three major philosophical and ideological traditions that have shaped Chinese civilisation: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Taoism views *chá* as a means of harmonising with nature, cultivating a Daoist mindset, and even seeking immortality (Lai, 1999). Confucianism regards tea as a practice of self-discipline, fostering virtues such as frugality, purity, tranquillity, and inner peace, as described in *Dàguān Chálùn* 大观茶论 (*Treatise on Tea*) by Emperor Huizong (1082–1135 CE) of the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE). Meanwhile, Zen Buddhism draws a direct parallel between the way of *chá* and the practice of dhyāna (meditative absorption). This is reflected in the Buddhist concept of *cháchán yīwèi* (茶禅一味), meaning ‘the oneness of tea and Zen’.

Due to the enduring presence of tea culture and the deep cultural appreciation for tea among Chinese people, *cháyuán* has never been seen merely as an agricultural site. Instead, it serves as a space that embodies tea culture and offers a meaningful experience cultural immersion for visitors.

Beyond the cultural significance mentioned earlier, it is also important to note that tea plants thrive in specific climates and do not grow well in extremely cold regions. Consequently, the location of *cháyuan* is often tied to landscapes and climates, reinforcing their cultural and historical associations with certain regions. For example, Longjing tea is closely associated with West Lake in Hangzhou, and its recognition is deeply connected to this specific geographic and cultural context. Out of the 2,815 total entries of Longjing in the BCC Corpus, 657 feature the pairing of Longjing tea and West Lake. Apart from Longjing tea, most of the other tea gardens are also found in southern China as testified by Lu (ca. 760–780 CE/2016) ‘Tea is a fine tree of the south (茶者，南方之嘉木也)’ (p. 6). In Chinese discourse, tea cultivation is predominantly linked to certain mountainous regions in southern China (see e.g., Dao, 2022, November 30).

Drawing on the above discussion, Chinese people’s conceptualisation of *cháyuan* is explicated as below:

[D] *cháyuan* 茶园 (‘tea garden’)

- a. places of one kind
- b. places of this kind are very big places
- c. there are places of this kind in some places because people want this
- d. often, there are many *cháshù* [m] (tea trees [m]) growing out of the ground [m] in a place of this kind because, sometime before, some people did some things to the ground in this place
- e. places of this kind are often in a place where there are many *shān* [m] (mountains [m])
places of this kind are often in a place where is *wēnnuǎn* [m] (warm [m])
zhōngguó [e] (China [e]) *nánfāng* [e] (south [e]) is one of these places
- f. when people are in a place of this kind
they can see something good

they can *wén* [m] (smell [m]) something good
they can drink *chá* [m] (tea [m])
because of this, they feel something good
because of this, they want to be in this place at some times

Component (b) depicts *cháyuan* as vast expanses of land, a perception reinforced by the measure unit of *mǔ* 亩 (acre), which is commonly used to measure large areas. In the BCC Corpus, *cháyuan* is often described as hundreds and thousands of ‘*mǔ*’, highlighting its significant scale and capacity for large-scale tea production, often yielding substantive quantities measured in kilograms. Furthermore, the classifier *piàn* 片, which is used for flat objects or extensive stretches of land, serves as the designated classifier for *cháyuan*. This linguistic feature further emphasises the conceptualisation of *cháyuan* as expansive landscapes rather than small, localised plots.

Component (c) highlights the man-made and cultivated nature of *cháyuan*. Component (d) further specifies that *cháyuan* is where people cultivate tea trees, reinforcing its agricultural function. Meanwhile, component (e) addresses the typical geographical setting of *cháyuan*, which is predominantly found in mountainous regions and southern China.

In the BCC Corpus, the co-occurrence of *cháyuan* and *shān* 山 (‘mountain’) appears 148 times, making it the most frequently mentioned geographical location for *cháyuan*.

Additionally, the term *yúndǐng* 云顶 (lit. cloud top) is a common modifier for sightseeing-oriented *cháyuan*, reflecting the breathtaking scenery often associated with these high-altitude tea gardens. This connection is further supported by official information provided on

the website of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China, which highlights the visual and environmental appeal of mountain tea gardens.

我国茶产业多分布在山区，是当地的特色产业和农民收入的重要来源，集中产区茶叶收入占农民收入 50%以上。(The tea industry in our country is predominantly located in mountainous regions, making it a distinctive local industry and a significant source of income for farmers. In concentrated tea-producing areas, the income from tea accounts for more than 50% of the farmers' total income.)

(Press Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the
People's Republic of China, 2018)

Lastly, component (f) highlights the aesthetic perspective and human experience aspect in the meaning of *cháyuan*. The two primary values of *cháyuan* are beautiful scenery and tea tasting, are described in this component.

To fully grasp the concept of *cháyuan*, it is essential to appreciate both its aesthetic and cultural significance. Without a thorough understanding, one risks misinterpreting its true meaning. A notable example of undermining the cultural significance of *cháyuan* is the exclusion of *cháyuan* from the West Lake Cultural Landscape World Heritage designation. While United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added the West Lake to its World Heritage List in 2011, recognising it for 'bearing an exceptional testimony to the cultural tradition of improving landscapes to create a series of vistas reflecting an idealised fusion between human and nature' (UNESCO, 2011), it excluded the tea gardens that China included in its World Heritage application.

Since then, ongoing discussions (e.g., Zhang & Taylor, 2020) have highlighted how cultural landscapes are perceived differently by Chinese people and those from other cultural backgrounds, particularly Western countries that set heritage standards through organisations like UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). This debate arises from two key factors: cultural misinterpretations and fundamental differences between Eastern and Western perspectives on nature.

In many Western traditions, nature and human activity are often viewed as separate entities. In contrast, Eastern philosophies, particularly in Chinese culture, see nature and human influence as interconnected and harmonious. As Tayler (2007) points out, ‘looking back at the World Heritage List, there are many sites in Asia that have been designated as natural heritage, when in fact there are too many landscapes associated with humanity that have been erased’ (p. 6). This statement highlights a recurring issue in heritage classification—many landscapes in Asia, shaped by human interaction while maintaining their natural essence, are often categorised solely as ‘natural heritage’, overlooking their cultural and historical significance. This approach erases their human connections from official heritage recognition.

The exclusion of tea gardens from the West Lake Cultural Landscape World Heritage designation is a prime example of this differing perspective between Western and Asian countries (e.g., Taylor, 2004). China views tea gardens as an integral part of the cultural landscape, reflecting centuries of agricultural tradition, aesthetic values, and human-nature harmony. Yet, within the Western heritage frameworks, *cháyuán* are often reduced to

modified agricultural spaces, a classification that overlooks their cultural significance. This misalignment highlights the urgency of re-evaluating how cultural landscapes are conceptualized and assessed worldwide. (see e.g., Taylor, 2004; Zhang & Taylor, 2020).

The semantic analysis and discussion of *cháyuan* shows that the cultural aspects in such landscapes in China do not necessarily reflect in physical evidence, such as man-made buildings or activities conducted in these places. Instead, the profound cultural perspectives in the Chinese conceptualisation of such places are deeply embedded in language, arts, and philosophical thinking. Unlike purely agricultural landscapes, *cháyuan* holds profound cultural meanings that go beyond its function as farmland.

In this section, I have shown that a semantic study of Chinese terms for cultural landscapes can significantly enhance cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication on heritage conservation. Understanding the cultural and linguistic nuances in landscape classification can bridge the gap between Asian and Western heritage perspectives, ensuring that diverse worldviews are represented in global heritage discourse.

8.4 Cǎoyuán 草原 ('grassland')

Based on the statistics provided by the National Forestry and Grassland Administration of People's Republic of China, grasslands account for 40.9% of China's total land area. Most of the grasslands are distributed in northern China, among which the three provinces with the largest grassland areas are Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang (National Park Administration, 2021). Although grasslands account for a large proportion of the country's total area, they are not home to the majority of China's Han population, but to ethnic minorities, such as the

Mongols, Xinjiang Uyghurs, and Tibetans (National Park Administration, 2021). The meaning and significance of grasslands likely differ between Han people and these traditionally nomadic ethnic minority groups. This chapter's semantic analysis will adopt the Han cultural perspective as encoded in the Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) lexical item *cǎoyuán*.

In MSC, *cǎoyuán* generally refers to vast, naturally formed grassland. In Chinese culture, these landscapes are primarily associated with animal husbandry, which has traditionally been practised through nomadism rather than pasture-based grazing. The ethnic minorities who inhabit *cǎoyuán* have distinct languages and cultural traditions, setting them apart from the Han people living in China's central regions. Consequently, *cǎoyuán* has become a symbol of nomadic culture in MSC, representing a way of life that contrasts with the sedentary agricultural traditions of the Han majority.

When referring to the size of *cǎoyuán*, the classifier *piàn* 片 is commonly used. Descriptive modifiers such as *guǎngkuò* 广阔 (vast), *liáokuò* 辽阔 (extensive), and *yīwàng wújì* 一望无际 (boundless) are frequently applied to emphasise its expansiveness. Additionally, due to the flat terrain and relatively low vegetation, visibility in the *cǎoyuán* is generally unobstructed, allowing people to see far into the horizon. As a result, adjectives like *kāikuò* 开阔 (open and wide) and *kōngkuàng* 空旷 (open and spacious) are often used in MSC to describe its vastness.

Cǎoyuán is often regarded as a complete ecosystem, serving as a habitat for wildlife, livestock, plants, and other organisms such as birds and insects. A well-known depiction of the *cǎoyuán* in Chinese culture is found in the lyrics of the famous Mongolian song *Tiāntáng*

天堂 (Heaven) popularised by renowned singer Tengger. This song vividly captures the essence of the grasslands, painting a familiar and evocative image for many Chinese listeners.

天堂

蓝蓝的天空

清清的湖水

绿绿的草原

这是我的家

奔驰的骏马

洁白的羊群

还有你姑娘

这是我的家

我爱你，我的家

我的家，我的天堂

(Tengger, 1997)

Heaven

I see a blue sky,

Over a green lake,

Vast is the grassland,

This is my homeland.

Horses running wild there,

Sheep as white as snow,

Girl wait for me,

Where my heart's at home.

I love you, my homeland,

My homeland, my heaven.

(Tengger, 2001)

The following folk song, *Chile Song* 敕勒歌, of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589 CE) is featured in the third-grade Chinese textbook. It also represents one of the most iconic depictions of *cǎoyuán* in the collective imagination of the Chinese people.

敕勒川，	Tchirek River,
陰山下。	Beneath Dark Mountains.
天似穹廬，	The sky is arched like a tent,
籠蓋四野。	Caging steppe's four ends.
天蒼蒼，	The sky so gray,
野茫茫，	Wilderness so vague,
風吹草低見牛羊。	The winds blow, the grass leans low and see the cattle go.
(MEPRC, 2017, p. 84)	(Yip, 2020, p. 128)

The meaning of *cǎoyuán* 草原 (grassland) is presented in the following explication:

[E] *cǎoyuán* 草原 ('grassland')

- a. places of one kind
- b. places of this kind are very very big places
- c. there are a lot of *cǎo* [m] (grass [m]) in all places of a place of this kind
there can be *huā* [m] (flowers [m]) in some places of a place of this kind
- d. often, there are big animals [m] of some kinds in places of this kind because people want this
often, there are *mǎ* [e] (horses [e]) in places of this kind
often, there are *niú* [e] (cows [e]) in places of this kind
often, there are *yáng* [e] (sheep [e]) in places of this kind
- e. people want this because these animals [m] can *chī* [m] (eat [m]) the grass in these places
- f. often, when people are in a place of this kind
they can see places very very far from this place
- g. when people think about a place of this kind, they often think like this:
 'some people live in this place,
 these people are the same people,

they live not like people live in other places’

Component (b) highlights the vastness of *cǎoyuán*. In the BCC Corpus, the size of *cǎoyuán* is often quantified using the term *wànqǐng* 万顷 (thousands of hectares). The phrase ‘very, very big’ is employed to describe land that stretches beyond the visible horizon.

Component (c) conveys that *cǎoyuán* is covered extensively with grass, with flowers occasionally appearing in some areas. When contrasted with the British English term *meadow*, *cǎoyuán* evokes a raw, untamed landscape rather than the artificially tranquil and picturesque image associated with *meadow* (see Bromhead, 2018).

Components (d) and (e) are like their counterparts in the explications of *meadow* and *field* (see Bromhead, 2018), indicating that the presence of large animals such as cows and horses is due to human intent. These animals are not wild inhabitants but are closely linked to pastoral or nomadic lifestyles.

Component (f) explores the human experience of *cǎoyuán* from the perspective of sight. Due to the predominance of low-lying herbaceous vegetation and the immense scale of the grasslands, the landscape appears to extend infinitely. This openness feature of *cǎoyuán* is conveyed by the phrase ‘they can see places very very far from this place’.

Finally, component (g) addresses the social cognition embedded in the concept of *cǎoyuán*, emphasising that it is predominantly inhabited by ethnic groups that lead a nomadic lifestyle.

These ethnic groups have developed unique cultural and linguistic traditions that differentiate them from the Han people residing in central China.

8.5 *Tiányuán* 田园 ('countryside', lit. fields and gardens)

Now, I will turn to the Chinese term *tiányuán* 田园 ('fields and gardens'), which translates to 'fields and gardens' and represents an idealised vision of rural life in the minds of Chinese people. According to the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, *tiányuán* is defined as such: *tiándì hé yuánpǔ, jièzhǐ nóngcūn* 田地和园圃，借指农村 (farmland and gardens, metaphorically referring to the rural areas) (ILCASS, 2005, p. 1350).

From the above definition, it can be seen that the concept of *tiányuán* is closely associated with *xiāngcūn* 乡村 ('countryside'). However, *tiányuán* does not simply refer to any rural area or agricultural land. Instead, it evokes an idyllic setting characterised by picturesque scenery and an atmosphere that invites aesthetic appreciation.

Tiányuán is deeply connected to the tradition of cultivated agriculture, which contrasts with the vast *cǎoyuán* 草原 (grassland) and the nomadic lifestyle represented by *cǎoyuán*. This distinction stems from the fact that agriculture in most parts of China is predominantly based on crop cultivation rather than livestock farming. As a result, the countryside represented by *tiányuán* is typically associated with fertile fields, well-tended gardens, and an environment that embodies harmony between humans and nature. This romanticised vision of rural life reflects not only physical landscapes but also cultural ideals that celebrate simplicity, self-sufficiency, and the beauty of agrarian living.

One of the most renowned and salient literary depictions of *tiányuán* is the classic essay *Táohuā Yuán Jì* 桃花源记 (*An Account of the Peach Blossom Spring*) written by Tao Yuanming⁶. This timeless piece is included in the Year 8 Chinese textbooks and can be recited by many Chinese people. In this essay, Tao narrates the tale of a fisherman who, while navigating a river, stumbles upon a secluded utopian village hidden beyond a dense grove of peach trees in full bloom. The passage leading to this village is narrow and unassuming, yet beyond it lies a world untouched by time. Before making this remarkable discovery, the fisherman describes the scenery outside the village in detail, setting the stage for his unexpected journey into this idyllic realm. The essay beautifully captures the essence of *tiányuán*—a vision of pastoral harmony, natural beauty, and an existence free from the burdens of the outside world.

忽逢桃花林，夹岸数百步，中无杂树，芳草鲜美，落英缤纷。

Suddenly, he came upon a forest of peach blossoms on both sides of the river, several hundred paces away. There were no other trees among them. The fragrant grass was fresh and beautiful, the fallen blossoms scattered about in their myriad ways. (Tao, ca. 220–589 CE/2021)

And then when the fisherman finally found the hidden village in a valley, he describes the village as follows:

⁶ Tao Yuanming (365–427 CE), also known as Tao Qian, was a writer and a poet in the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420 CE). He is often regarded as the first Chinese writer to use *tiányuán* as a means of expressing his discontent with the political climate and his longing for an idealised rural life (see e.g., Tian, 2005).

土地平旷，屋舍俨然，有良田，美池，桑竹之属。阡陌交通，鸡犬相闻。其中往来种作，男女衣着，悉如外人；黄发垂髫，并怡然自乐。

The land was flat and vast with houses and buildings neatly arranged. One could see things like fertile fields, beautiful ponds, trees of mulberry and bamboo. The footpaths between the fields met at intersections. One could hear the cries of the dogs and the chicken. As for the men and women who went by and those who were at work in the fields, their clothing was very much like those on the outside. There were both elders and children who were all content. (Tao, ca. 220–589 CE/2021)

Tao Yuanming's essay *An Account of the Peach Blossom Spring* serves as a powerful expression of the author's dissatisfaction with the political climate of his time and his yearning for a life of tranquillity, free from the constraints of government affairs (Owen, 1996). Through his vivid depiction of an idealised *tiányuán* lifestyle, he establishes a literary tradition that would inspire generations of writers. Tao is credited with pioneering the *tiányuán* style of writing, which emphasises not only the beauty of rural landscapes but also the emotional and philosophical fulfilment that comes with living in seclusion, far from the imperial court (Tian, 2005).

Throughout Chinese history, numerous writers have followed in Tao's footsteps, using the *tiányuán* theme as a means of expressing their longing for a peaceful and self-sufficient life in the countryside. This literary style typically consists of two key elements: first, the portrayal of picturesque and aesthetically pleasing rural scenery, and second, the sense of

contentment and spiritual fulfilment experienced by those who reside in such a place, distanced from the political centre.

As previously noted, *An Account of the Peach Blossom Spring* is included in the Chinese curriculum for Year 8 students, making it one of the earliest literary encounters with the concept of *tiányuán* for many Chinese students. Despite being written over 1,500 years ago, the essay continues to shape contemporary perceptions of the concept of *tiányuán*, reinforcing an idealised vision of rural life. The enduring influence of this work is evident in MSC's usage of the term *tiányuán*, as illustrated by the examples below from the BCC Corpus, which demonstrate how *tiányuán* remains a powerful and evocative symbol of an idyllic countryside.

3. 田园之中，村宅点缀，绿树四合，翠竹依依，朝夕炊烟弥漫升腾，景致淡雅纯朴，形成百丈长卷画。(Amid the **[tiányuán] countryside**, village houses are scattered, surrounded by lush green trees and delicate bamboo swaying gently. Cooking smoke rises and drifts in the morning and evening, creating a serene and rustic scene that unfolds like a hundred-*zhàng*-long scroll painting.)

(BCC Corpus)

4. 《南归》的帷幕是在一个富有江南农村情味的布置中拉开，农舍、水井、桃花，处处透露出宁静的田园气息。(The story of *Return to the South* takes place in a rich rural area in the south of the Yangtze River, where there are farmhouses, wells and peach trees in full bloom, revealing a peaceful **[tiányuán] countryside** atmosphere.)

(BCC Corpus)

5. 翠绿的树丛里，如茵的草地上，羊群在悠闲地散步，好一派田园风光。(Sheep are strolling leisurely in the woods and meadows. Such a **[tiányuán] countryside scenery!**)

(BCC Corpus)

6. 在约一点五米高度的石坡上，十几层梯田错落有致，参差分明，阡陌相通，潺潺流水，终年不绝，好一派田园风光。(On a stone slope of about 1.5 meters in height, there are more than a dozen layers of terraced fields, crisscrossed and interconnected. The water runs all year round. Such a **[tiányuán] countryside scenery!**)

(BCC Corpus)

The examples above illustrate that when people refer to rural areas using the term *tiányuán*, they are not simply describing places far from the city, but rather those with aesthetic values. Frequent lexical modifiers collocating with *tiányuán* include *xiùlì* 秀丽 (pretty), *měilì* 美丽 (beautiful), *yōuměi* 优美 (graceful), *mírén* 迷人 (enchanting), *tiánjìng* 恬静 (peaceful), and *níngjìng* 宁静 (tranquil), among others. Thus, *tiányuán* represents an idealised, filtered image of the *xiāngcūn* (乡村, countryside).

Historically, *tiányuán* referred to the peaceful retreats of ancient scholars who, after resigning from government posts, sought seclusion in rural areas. In contemporary China, beyond writers and philosophers, many Chinese people visit *tiányuán* as a retreat from the

hustle and bustle of city life. Here are some examples of how contemporary Chinese people embrace a *tiányuán* lifestyle:

7. 农业旅游在北京朝来农艺团，学生们可以坐马车、野炊、钓鱼，享受农家饭菜、体验田园妙趣。(Agricultural tourism at the Zhaolai Agricultural Art Troupe in Beijing offers students the opportunity to take carriage rides, enjoy outdoor cooking, go fishing, savour home-cooked meals, and experience the charm of **[tiányuán] countryside** life.)

(BCC Corpus)

8. 从前有个朋友对我说，她讨厌都市的繁华，愿一辈子过着田园式的生活，与世无争。(A friend once told me that she hates the hustle and bustle of the city and wish to live a peaceful, **[tiányuán] countryside** life, free from worldly conflicts, for the rest of her life.)

(BCC Corpus)

9. 今年，‘绿岛’崇明将吸引更多生活在都市钢筋水泥森林里的游客来闻一闻泥土的芳香、试一试田野里自耕自种的苦趣、尝一尝农家饭菜的香甜，过一天田园生活。(This year, 'Green Island' Chongming will attract more visitors from the urban concrete jungle to breathe in the fragrance of the earth, experience the bittersweet joys of self-cultivated fields, taste the delicious flavours of home-cooked meals, and spend a day living the **[tiányuán] countryside** life.)

(BCC Corpus)

10. 祖祖辈辈当农民的人，往往喜欢做城市梦，而长期呆在城里的人，大都向往农村那别有一番情趣的田园生活。(People who have been farmers for generations

often dream of city life, while those who have lived in the city for a long time tend to long for the unique charm of **[*tiányuán*] countryside** life.)

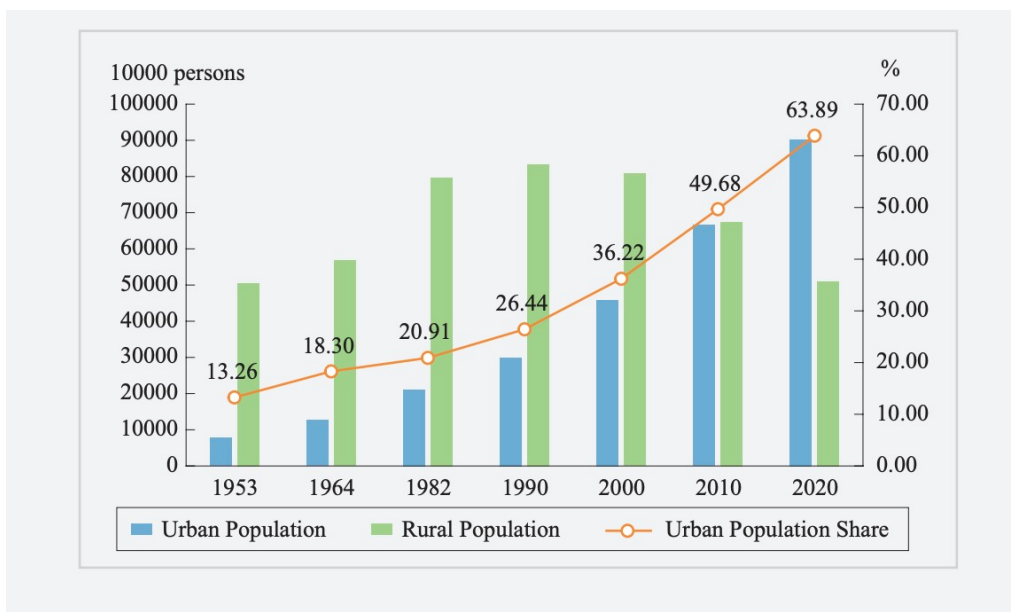
(BCC Corpus)

As demonstrated by the above examples, the concept of *tiányuán* life often encompasses simple rural activities such as farming and fishing. However, these activities only touch the surface, leaving out the more complex realities and challenges faced by farmers, such as the hard labour in the fields, poor quality of education, and lack of job opportunities in rural areas—issues typically associated with another Chinese term for rural areas: *nóngcūn* 农村 (rural area, lit. agriculture village). *Tiányuán*, in this context, presents an idealised version of rural life, detached from its practical difficulties.

Example 11 illustrates how the notions of *tiányuán* and urban life are often seen as opposites, much like the opposing sides of a besieged city, where each group holds an idealised and somewhat illusory view of life on the other side. Notably, all the descriptions of *tiányuán* found in the corpus come from the perspective of urban dwellers. There is no linguistic evidence suggesting that people living in the *xiāngcūn* (乡村, countryside) would describe their own lives as *tiányuán*. This observation is further supported by the data in the following table:

TABLE 8-1

Urban and Rural Population in Each Population Census



(Office of the Leading Group of the State Council for
the Seventh National Population Census, 2021b)

The above table, sourced from the most recent population census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, illustrates the dramatic increase in China's urban population since 1953. Meanwhile, the rural labour force, particularly among younger generations, has significantly declined since 1990. One of the consequences of this trend is the growing issue of left-behind children and the elderly, as individuals born in rural areas often migrate to larger cities for work. These rural residents, however, would not describe their daily lives in *xiāngcūn* 乡村 (countryside) as *tiányuán* life. News reports frequently associate rural life with various social issues, including poor education, inadequate infrastructure, and poverty. As such, *tiányuán* life does not equate to *xiāngcūn* life ('country life'). Instead, it represents an idealised version of rural living, often shaped by the perspectives of urban residents.

The final aspect of this concept to explore is how Chinese people evaluate *tiányuán* as a cultural group. Linguistic evidence suggests that life in *tiányuán* is frequently characterised

using terms such as *měihǎo de* 美好的 (happy), *píngjìng de* 平静的 (peaceful), *yōurán zìdé* 悠然自得 (leisurely), reflecting a lifestyle that people often *xiàngwǎng* 向往 (yearn for) and *xiǎngshòu* 享受 (enjoy), as demonstrated in the following example. *Tiányuán* is commonly associated with joy and contentment, perceived as a place where individuals can attain inner peace through a close connection with nature.

11. 现代都市人对于田园生活有一种向往。Modern city dwellers often yearn for a
[*tiányuán*] countryside lifestyle.

(BCC Corpus)

12. 他在太湖的三山岛有一处简单的房舍，常去那里享受陶渊明的田园之乐。He
has a simple house on Sanshan Island in Taihu and often goes there to enjoy the
[*tiányuán*] countryside pleasures of Tao Yuanming.

(BCC Corpus)

Moreover, since *tiányuán* embodies a way of life, people's evaluation also extends to the individuals who live this lifestyle. The *tiányuán* literati, represented by Tao Yuanming, are typically characterised by their disregard for authority, indifference to fame and wealth, and detachment from ambition. As a result, they are deeply respected in Chinese culture and have become the archetype of those who lead a *tiányuán* lifestyle in the collective Chinese imagination (see also the discussion on *shānshuǐ* 山水 [landscape] in Chapter 4).

Based on the above discussion, I convey the meaning of *tiányuán* 田园 (countryside, lit. fields and gardens) as such:

[F] *tiányuán* 田园 (countryside, lit. fields and gardens)

- a. many people in the *chéngshì* (city [m]) think like this:
- b. this place is far away from places where many people live
- c. there are many places in this place
there can be *tián* [m] in this place
there can be *yuán* [m] in this place
- d. there can be many *huācǎo shùmù* [m] (flowers, grass, trees and bush [m]) in this place
- e. when someone is in this place
this someone can see many good things that they can't see in the *chéngshì*
this someone often do some things like people often do in the *xiāngcūn* [m] (countryside [m])
this someone can not-think about things like people often think in the *chéngshì*
this someone does not live like people live in the *chéngshì*
because of this, this someone can feel something very good
because of this, this someone can want to be in this place at some times
- f. some people want to live in this place for a long time
because they don't want to live like people live in the *chéngshì*
other people often think about these people like this:
'these people are not like people live in the *chéngshì*
It is good if people want to live like this'
- g. people often say something very good about this place

In component (a), I use 'many people in the *chéngshì* 城市 (city [m]) think like this' to indicate that *tiányuán* is a conceptual notion rather than being used to refer to concrete places. Component (b) addresses its location, highlighting that it is situated far from the city.

Next, in component (c), I aim to convey the diverse nature of this vast space, which consists of various elements such as groves, farmland, and villages. Component (d) focuses on the

landscape, as it is essential to specify this aspect in the explication—after all, a barren land could hardly be considered *tiányuán*.

Following this, component (e) outlines people's experiences and activities in this environment, structured in a sequence: what people see, what they do, and how they feel while living there. Given that the *tiányuán* lifestyle, as exemplified by writers like Tao Yuanming, is deeply ingrained in Chinese perceptions of *tiányuán*, I seek to reflect this stereotype in component (f). Finally, component (g) encapsulates people's overall evaluation of *tiányuán*.

My explication of *tiányuán* provides a foundation for cross-cultural comparisons of idealised rural life, including concepts such as Arcadia, the pastoral, and the idyll. The desire to retreat to the countryside and attain inner peace through a closer bond with nature is not exclusive to Chinese culture; it is also deeply rooted in Western traditions and likely present in many other cultures as well. By examining the meaning of *tiányuán*, this study lays the groundwork for future comparative research on how different cultures conceptualise and idealise countryside life.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the semantics of several Chinese terms for agricultural places. A recurring theme that has emerged from the analysis is the role of 'human manipulation of land' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 168) as an integral part of the lexical semantics of these terms. For instance, the term *tián* reflects how Chinese people manage land, emphasising activities within the field. Another example is the Chinese term *yuán*, which

conveys human intent through engaging in specific activities in these places and building boundaries such as fences and edges around them.

Beyond their physical characteristics, these terms also carry cultural and conceptual significance, particularly through the notion of *tiányuán*. *Tiányuán* represents an idealised vision of rural life, emphasising harmony between people and nature. It evokes a pastoral way of living deeply embedded in traditional Chinese cultural values, portraying agricultural landscapes as a peaceful escape from the imperial court or the fast-paced life of the city.

The meanings of these terms reveal the importance of human intent and the cognitive processes that emerge from interactions with agricultural landscapes. Explications of these terms frequently include phrases like 'people want this' or 'people want to be in/do things in this place', emphasising that these landscapes are not merely physical spaces existing independently of humans, but are instead shaped by human desires, needs, and intentional engagement.

The semantic distinctions embedded in the meanings of these agricultural terms are influenced by various factors, including environmental features, patterns of land use, and the utility of these terms. For example, *cǎoyuán* refers to expansive grassy landscapes, typically found in northern and western China. These areas are historically linked with nomadic pastoralism, where people herd livestock such as sheep, cattle, and horses. Therefore, the semantics of *cǎoyuán* reflect this mobile, livestock-centred lifestyle characterised by seasonal migrations and economic reliance on animal husbandry.

By contrast, terms associated with sedentary agricultural communities, like *tiányuán* (田园, pastoral fields), reflect a lifestyle centred on crop cultivation and village-based living. This distinction illustrates how environmental conditions, subsistence practices, and cultural factors influence the semantics of agricultural vocabulary.

Cultural associations further shape the connotations of these terms in literature and discourse. While *cǎoyuán* often evokes images of boundless freedom, nomadic traditions, and rugged survival, *tiányuán* is more commonly associated with tranquillity, simplicity, and harmonious coexistence with nature. These linguistic differences demonstrate how agricultural terminology reflects both the physical landscape and the cultural meanings attached to different modes of life.

Human engagement with agricultural spaces also ties these terms to 'social cognition' (Bromhead, 2018, p. 141). For example, in the case of *cǎoyuán*, social cognition is captured in expressions like 'some people live in this place, these people are the same, they do not live like other people live.' This reflects how agricultural landscapes often serve as identity markers, forging connections between inhabitants of specific environments and their corresponding modes of life and cultural practices.

The semantic contrasts between *cǎoyuán* and *tiányuán* also highlight broader cultural tendencies. Chinese perceptions of rural life tend to favour agrarian lifestyles over herding-based ones. *Cǎoyuán* evokes images of nomadic freedom but remains less prominent in mainstream cultural imagination. In contrast, *tiányuán* aligns with the agrarian ideals of settled farming, village life, and a harmonious relationship with nature. These values, deeply

embedded in Chinese values, continue to shape how rural life is romanticised and perceived by Chinese people.

Ultimately, the Chinese understanding of agricultural landscapes is conveyed not only through physical modifications by human but also by language utility and cultural ideas. Places like *cǎoyuán*, *cháyuán*, and *tiányuán* may undergo minimal human alteration, yet they carry profound cultural significance. The rich literary depictions found in classical and modern Chinese works further attest to this cultural resonance. In such instances, it is linguistic evidence, rather than visible man-made structures, that offers vital insights into the cultural landscapes these terms evoke.

Future semantic research on agricultural terminology can enhance our understanding of how people conceptualise landscapes across cultures. Such studies can provide valuable insights into the cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of how humans engage with the land, offering a richer, more nuanced view of the relationship between language, environment, and cultural identity.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I have developed, with the help of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach and the data sources listed in Chapter 3.3, a total of 25 semantic explications of landscape terms across five different categories in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC). Where relevant, I have also compared their meanings with counterparts in other languages examined by other scholars (e.g., Bromhead, 2017, 2018; Mark et al., 2011a). The semantic analysis conducted in this research represents a preliminary yet in-depth attempt to investigate the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape from a semantic perspective.

The semantic analysis conducted in this study has demonstrated that the NSM approach is an effective tool for uncovering the internal structure and logic embedded in the meanings of complex landscape terms. This study has identified 29 complex concepts that function as semantic molecules and 11 concepts that function as exemplars in the meanings of the examined landscape terms (see Table 9-1 and Table 9-2 below). Both common and culture-specific molecules have been identified in the meanings of Chinese landscape concepts.

The findings reveal that Chinese speakers perceive the geographical features not solely based on their physical characteristics but also through their own experience of interacting with these places and through a deeply rooted cultural perspective. This conceptualisation extends beyond tangible attributes of landscape features such as size and shape to encompass aesthetic appreciation and cultural ideas. The interplay between language, perception and conceptualisation of the landscape uncovers the depth and complexity of

how the landscape is understood in Chinese thought, reflecting an intricate fusion of the natural world and human experience.

All things considered, this study offers a comprehensive and in-depth semantic analysis of Chinese landscape terms, shedding light on the cultural and linguistic factors that influence how different languages and cultures conceptualise the physical world. The following sections will present the primary findings in alignment with the research objectives. Subsequently, the contributions of this study, along with its limitations and potential avenues for future research, will be discussed in detail.

9.2 Major Findings of this Study

9.2.1 The Chinese Conceptualisation of the Landscape: Building Blocks and Semantic Templates for Landscape Concepts

This study has demonstrated that the NSM approach is a powerful tool for elucidating intricate concepts by systematically utilising semantic primes, semantic molecules and internally coherent explications. The NSM explications serve as ‘mini-portraits’ of the terms under examination (Bromhead, 2018, p. 17), enabling more in-depth analysis and facilitating cross-linguistic comparisons.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, certain complex concepts function as transitional units of meaning in the meanings of landscape concepts in Chinese. NSM researchers (e.g., Goddard, 2012; Wierzbicka, 1992) have recognised that concepts related to the concrete world are built on both semantic primes that are shared by all languages and complex lexical

meanings, known as semantic molecules in NSM theory. The semantic molecules that function as building blocks in the meanings of Chinese landscape concepts, as identified in this thesis, are summarised in the table below.

TABLE 9-1

Semantic Molecules in the Explications of Chinese Landscape Terms

Type	Semantic Molecules ([m])/Derivational Base ([d])/Exemplars ([e])	Landscape Concepts
Natural Elements	<i>nítǔ</i> 泥土 (earth)	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain') <i>shānqū</i> 山丘 ('hill') <i>táng</i> 塘 ('pond') <i>qiānmò</i> 阡陌 ('footpaths of field')
	<i>shítou</i> 石头 (stone)	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain') <i>fēng</i> 峰 ('peak') <i>tán</i> 潭 ('deep pond')
	<i>shuǐ</i> 水 (water)	<i>hé</i> 河 ('river-1') <i>jiāng</i> 江 ('river-2') <i>xī</i> 溪 ('creek/stream') <i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake') <i>diàn</i> 淀 ('shallow lake') <i>chí</i> 池 ('pool') <i>táng</i> 塘 ('pond') <i>tán</i> 潭 ('deep pond') <i>quán</i> 泉 ('spring')
Spatial concepts	<i>dìmiàn</i> 地面 (ground)	<i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake') <i>diàn</i> 淀 ('shallow lake') <i>chí</i> 池 ('pool') <i>táng</i> 塘 ('pond') <i>tán</i> 潭 ('deep pond') <i>quán</i> 泉 ('spring') <i>tián</i> 田 ('field')

		<i>yuán</i> 园 ('garden') <i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden')
	<i>dǐngbù</i> 顶部 (top)	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain') <i>shānqiū</i> 山丘 ('hill') <i>fēng</i> 峰 ('peak') <i>shānlúan</i> 山峦 ('a stretch of mountains')
	<i>dǐbù</i> 底部 (bottom)	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain') <i>fēng</i> 峰 ('peak') <i>shānqiū</i> 山丘 ('hill') <i>hú</i> 湖 ('lake') <i>diàn</i> 淀 ('shallow lake') <i>chí</i> 池 ('pool') <i>táng</i> 塘 ('pond') <i>tán</i> 潭 ('deep pond')
Plants and Animals	<i>huācǎo shùmù</i> 花草树木 (flower, grass, trees and bush)	<i>shān</i> 山 ('mountain') <i>xī</i> 溪 ('creek/stream') <i>tiányuán</i> 田园 ('countryside')
	<i>huā</i> 花 (flowers)	<i>cǎoyuán</i> 草原 ('grassland')
	<i>cǎo</i> 草 (grass)	<i>cǎoyuán</i> 草原 ('grassland')
	<i>chá</i> 茶 (tea)	<i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden')
	<i>cháshù</i> 茶树 (tea trees)	<i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden')
	<i>dòngwù</i> 动物 (animals)	<i>cǎoyuán</i> 草原 ('grassland')
Shape and size	<i>cháng</i> 长 (Long)	<i>líng</i> 岭 ('mountain ridge') <i>shānmài</i> 山脉 ('Mountain range') <i>hé</i> 河 ('river-1') <i>jiāng</i> 江 ('river-2') <i>xī</i> 溪 ('creek/stream') <i>qiānmò</i> 阡陌 ('footpaths of field')
	<i>wén</i> 闻 (smell)	<i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden')
	<i>zhǎng</i> 生长 (grow)	<i>xī</i> 溪 ('creek/stream') <i>diàn</i> 淀 ('shallow lake') <i>tián</i> 田 ('field') <i>yuán</i> 园 ('garden')
Verbs and human activities		

	<i>chī</i> 吃 (eat)	<i>tián</i> 田 ('field') <i>cǎoyuán</i> 草原 ('grassland')
	<i>zuò</i> 制作 (make things)	<i>tián</i> 田 ('field')
	<i>wā</i> 挖 (dig)	<i>chí</i> 池 ('pool')
	<i>zǒu</i> 走 (walk)	<i>qiānmò</i> 阡陌 ('footpaths of field')
Environment	<i>wēnnuǎn</i> 温暖 (warm)	<i>quán</i> 泉 ('spring') <i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden')
Other Landscape concepts	<i>shān</i> 山 (mountain)	<i>shānshuǐ</i> 山水 ('landscape') <i>líng</i> 岭 ('mountain ridge') <i>fēng</i> 峰 ('peak') <i>shānmài</i> 山脉 ('Mountain range') <i>shānlǜan</i> 山峦 ('a stretch of mountains') <i>shāndì</i> 山地 ('mountains') <i>Xī</i> 溪 ('creek/stream')
	<i>shānqiū</i> 山丘 ('hill')	<i>shāndì</i> 山地 ('mountains') <i>qiūlíng</i> 丘陵 ('hills')
	<i>tián</i> 田 (field)	<i>qiānmò</i> 阡陌 ('footpaths of field') <i>tiányuán</i> 田园 ('countryside')
	<i>yuán</i> 园 (garden)	<i>tiányuán</i> 田园 ('countryside')
Cultural-specific molecules	<i>nánfāng</i> 南方 (south)	<i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden')
	<i>chéngshì</i> 城市 (city)	<i>tiányuán</i> 田园 ('countryside')
	<i>xiāngcūn</i> 乡村 (countryside)	<i>tiányuán</i> 田园 ('countryside')
	<i>guójiā</i> 国家 ('country')	<i>héshān</i> 河山 (the land of one particular country)
	<i>zhōngguó</i> 中国 (China)	<i>jiāng</i> 江 ('river-2') <i>cháyuan</i> 茶园 ('tea garden')

Building on the preceding semantic analysis, this study has demonstrated that Chinese landscape concepts are formed through a combination of universal and culture-specific semantic molecules. These molecules serve as essential building blocks in the explications of landscape-related terms, reflecting both fundamental cognitive elements shared across languages and those unique to Chinese cultural and linguistic perspectives. The table above

categorises the different types of semantic molecules embedded in these explications, highlighting the key factors that play a significant role in how MSC speakers conceptualise and describe landscapes.

The first category of semantic molecule is the ‘natural elements’, including *nítǔ* 泥土 [m] (soil [m]), *shítou* 石头 [m] (stone [m]) and *shuǐ* 水 (water [m]). The molecules *nítǔ* and *shítou* primarily serve to present the stereotypical material composition of certain landscape concepts. For instance, *táng* 塘 (‘pond’) is typically associated with muddy water (see Chapter 7), while *fēng* 峰 (‘peak’) is commonly linked to rocky formation (see Chapter 5). These molecules help convey the prototypical material composition of landforms as they are traditionally perceived by MSC speakers.

By contrast, *shuǐ* (water) serves as a core semantic molecule for all water-related landscapes, providing a unifying conceptual thread across different geographical features involving water. The presence of *shuǐ* is one of the key factors in why these places are labelled, reflecting its significance in human interaction with the landscape.

Spatial concepts function as essential semantic molecules that help define the physical dimensions of various landforms. For example, *dìmiàn* 地面 [m] (ground [m]) serves as a fundamental reference point for enclosed water bodies, while also representing the physical terrain where plants grow in agricultural landscapes. Likewise, *dǐngbù* 顶部 [m] (top [m]) and *dǐbù* 底部 [m] (bottom [m]) are employed in explications to express vertical aspects of landforms, such as the height of elevated places and the depth of enclosed water places.

Within the ‘plants and animals’ category, general terms for living things such as *huācǎo* *shùmù* 花草树木 (flowers, grass, trees, and bushes) and *dòngwù* 动物 [m] (animals), function as semantic molecules in the meanings of landscape terms, reinforcing the Chinese perception of nature as an interconnected, organic whole rather than a collection of isolated entities. Meanwhile, specific vegetation terms like *cǎo* 草 (grass) and *chá* 茶 (tea) function as defining features that shape the categorisation of particular landscape features, as exemplified by *cǎoyuán* 草原 (‘grassland’) and *cháyuan* 茶园 (‘tea garden’).

Size and shape play a crucial role in emphasising that both vision perception and physical interaction are fundamental ways of experiencing the landscape. While the concepts of ‘big’, ‘very big’, ‘very very big’, ‘small’, and ‘very small’ are semantic primes found in all languages, ‘long’ functions as a significant semantic molecule that conveys this notion of shape and size within the meanings of landscape terms. The component of size and shape in the meanings of certain landscape terms not only captures the physical form or outline of specific landforms but also reflects how these features influence human movement through the environment. For instance, the shape of a river or mountain may imply linearity or elevation, which in turn suggests how it might hinder navigation. Thus, this type of component contributes to the conceptualisation of landscape features not merely as static forms, but as elements that structure human spatial experience and engagement with the physical world.

The verb molecules listed in the table primarily serve to describe two key aspects: the growth of plants in specific locations and various human activities that take place in particular environments. Specifically, they indicate plant growth in areas with distinct

ecological features, such as *lúwěi* 芦苇 (reeds) growing in *diàn* 淀 (‘shallow lake’) and *cǎo* 草 (grass) growing in *cǎoyuán* 草原 (‘grassland’). Additionally, verb molecules also capture human activities associated with such landscape features, especially in agricultural landscapes where cultivation and land use practices are prominent.

Certain landscape terms function as building blocks in the meanings of other landscape terms. This interconnectedness highlights how the Chinese conceptualisation of various landscape features is both interwoven and hierarchically structured.

Finally, the analysis in this thesis has further demonstrated that cultural semantic molecules play a significant role in the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape. Due to the distinctive way in which Chinese people perceive and interact with their physical surroundings, some complex concepts in other categories have been identified functioning as building blocks in the meanings of landscape terms in Chinese. For example, in the explication of *cháyuan* 茶园 (‘tea garden’), *nánfāng* 南方 [m] (south [m]) is utilised to describe the geographical positioning of *cháyuan* in the southern regions of China. The integration of such elements into the meanings of landscape terms illustrates the interconnectedness between language, culture, and the physical environment in Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape.

Apart from semantic molecules, the semantic analysis in this study has also identified exemplars—complex concepts that are deeply intertwined with the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape but do not serve as building blocks in their meanings. In other words, these exemplars contribute to the stereotypical images that Chinese people

associate with certain landscape features. The table below provides a summary of the exemplars included in the explications of this thesis.

TABLE 9-2

Exemplars in the Explications of Chinese Landscape Terms

Type	Semantic Molecules ([m])/Derivational Base ([d])/Exemplars ([e])	Landscape Concepts
Living Things	dòngwù 动物 (animals)	shān 山 ('mountain')
	mǎ 马 (horses)	cǎoyuán 草原 ('grassland')
	niú 牛 (cows)	cǎoyuán 草原 ('grassland')
	yáng 羊 (sheep)	cǎoyuán 草原 ('grassland')
	yú 鱼 (fish)	táng 塘 ('pond')
		diàn 淀 ('shallow lake')
	niǎo 鸟 (birds)	shān 山 ('mountain')
		diàn 淀 ('shallow lake')
	wā 蛙 (frogs)	táng 塘 ('pond')
Concepts for Vegetation	hé 荷 (waterlily)	táng 塘 ('pond')
		diàn 淀 ('shallow lake')
	lúwěi 芦苇 (reed)	diàn 淀 ('shallow lake')
Other Landscape concepts	xī 溪 ('creek')	quán 泉 ('spring')
	chí 池 ('pool')	quán 泉 ('spring')

It can be seen from the above table that specific plant and animal names are adopted as exemplars in the explications of certain landscape terms to evoke the stereotypical imagery associated with the physical features represented by these terms. These associations are firmly rooted in cultural imagery of certain landforms and often acquired from literary depictions that Chinese people learn at school. In addition, the inclusion of *xī* 溪 ('creek') and

chí 池 ('pool') as exemplars in the explication of *quán* 泉 ('spring') reveals the links between landscape concepts, hence the interactions between different landscape features.

Both my explications and those of Bromhead (2017, 2018) reveal recurring patterns in the semantic analysis of landscape concepts. By examining MSC landscape terms in the present study and drawing on Bromhead's research on English, Australian English, French, Spanish, and Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, it becomes evident that explications for landscape terms in these languages share certain cross-linguistic patterns. These patterns generally encompass components related to categorisation, size, material, shape, ecological features, human interaction through activities or cultural ideas, and connections to broader conceptual frameworks, such as national identity. The specific sequence and inclusion of these elements should be determined through in-depth semantic analysis, as demonstrated in this study.

9.2.2 Chinese Culture in Landscape

One of the key findings of this study is the intricate and reciprocal relationship between Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape and Chinese culture. Chinese culture is both reflected in and actively shapes the meanings of landscape terms in multiple ways.

Aesthetics plays a pivotal role in shaping the way landscapes are perceived and understood in Chinese culture. The semantic analysis presented in Chapters 4 and 8 of this study highlights two key aesthetic dimensions. First, there is a strong cultural tendency to view the landscape through an aesthetic lens, a practice deeply embedded in Chinese traditions and further reinforced by patriotic sentiment—particularly evident in terms like *héshān* 河山

(territory, literally ‘river-1 mountain’) and *jiāngshān* 江山 (state power/landscape, literally ‘river-2 mountain’). Second, as reflected in the conceptual analysis of *shānshuǐ* 山水 (landscape, lit., mountains and waters) and *tiányuán* 田园 (countryside, lit. fields and gardens), aesthetic engagement with the landscape is closely linked to the ideal of *chūshì* 出世 (withdrawal from worldly affairs), in which nature functions as a sanctuary for introspection and spiritual cultivation.

The influence of culture on Chinese landscape conceptualisation is strongly reinforced through the utility of language, particularly in literary depictions featured in Chinese textbook materials. As shown in the earlier semantic analysis, terms like *diàn* 淀 (‘shallow lake’), *táng* 塘 (‘pond’) and *cǎoyuán* 草原 (‘grassland’) are imbued with cultural connotations shaped by literary traditions. Throughout this study, the semantic analyses have demonstrated that linguistic data, especially from educational and literary sources, serves as a reliable source for uncovering the cultural dimensions of how people perceive and relate to their physical environment.

Cultural practices and traditional ways of life also influence how Chinese people perceive their physical surroundings and navigate the landscape, and these influences are reflected in the meanings and connotations of certain landscape terms. For example, the semantic analysis of *cǎoyuán* 草原 (‘grassland’) reveals a strong association with the nomadic lifestyle traditionally led by Mongolian communities. Likewise, terms like *cháyuan* 茶园 (‘tea garden’) reflect the symbolic role of tea culture in shaping how regions associated with tea cultivation are perceived. These examples demonstrate that landscape terms go beyond merely

describing physical features; they also encapsulate cultural values and traditional ways of life within their meanings.

In conclusion, the semantic analysis in this study shows that Chinese culture significantly influences how people perceive, engage with, and interpret the physical world. Landscape terms in MSC go beyond simply referring to landforms based on their geographical features; they are richly infused with shared cultural experiences and ideas and reflect traditional ways of life. This research highlights the intricate relationship between language, cultural knowledge, and human experience of navigating the environment in shaping the conceptualisation of landscape within the Chinese context.

9.2.3 Driving Factors for the Chinese Conceptualisation of Landscape

The Chinese conceptualisation of landscape aligns with Wierzbicka's (1989) assertion that topographical concepts are relative to human vision. Furthermore, this study has also found that Chinese people also experience their surroundings through other senses, such as smell and hearing, as well as through human–environment interactions, utility of language and cultural ideas.

Building on the semantic analysis of Chinese landscape terms and their comparison with equivalents in other languages in the preceding chapters, four key driving factors have been identified for the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape: (a) the physical environment and landform features; (b) human interactions with the land; (c) Chinese cultural ideas; and (d) the utility of landscape terms.

The primary factor influencing people's label for a certain landform is its existence among other landforms. As Bromhead (2018) observes, Australian Aboriginal people conceptualise the landscape in a distinct way, largely due to the unique terrain of central Australia. Similarly, the rich geographical diversity across China has shaped how Chinese speakers perceive and categorise their environment. Notably, the prominence of two specific types of landforms—elevated places and water places—has contributed to a broader and more nuanced vocabulary for these features in MSC compared to other landform types. Furthermore, China's overall topographical features and population distribution also influence people's understanding of certain geographical characteristics.

The Chinese conceptualisation of landscape is also influenced by their relationship with the land, which encompasses both the sensory and physical experiences through which the natural world is perceived, as well as the ways of life traditionally associated with specific landforms. As demonstrated in the discussion of agricultural places in Chapter 8, two distinct ways of life, namely farming and nomadism, have significantly influenced how Chinese people perceive and relate to their surrounding environment. These ways of life shape not only practical interactions with the land but also the cultural meanings and values attached to different landscape features.

Culture is another key factor shaping the distinctive Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape. As Norman Bryson (1988) observed, 'when individuals collectively interpret their visual experiences, they must align their personal perceptions with socially established descriptions that define an intelligible world' (p. 91). The interaction between cultural practices and environmental perception has shaped a landscape vocabulary in MSC that

reflects not only the geographical features of the physical world but also landscape aesthetics, cultural values, and traditional ways of life. As demonstrated through the semantic analyses in the preceding chapters, these terms encode culturally specific understandings that arise from the lived experience of engaging with the environment, revealing the deep interconnection between language, culture, and landscape conceptualisation.

The last driving force identified in this study is the utility of landscape terms. In MSC, the meanings and connotations of many landscape terms are not only rooted in geographical features but are also continually shaped and reinforced through their use in widely recognised literary texts, especially those included in textbook materials and frequently encountered in everyday language. The imagery of certain landscape features created by these texts is the primary factor shaping the stereotypical mental images of these landforms among MSC speakers.

The four driving factors covered above do not operate on their own. Rather, they frequently interact with each other and contribute to the formation of linguistic variations in how landscapes are conceptualised. Consequently, rather than being influenced by a single factor, the way the landscape is conceptualised in MSC is the outcome of the combined effort of all these factors. The dynamic interaction among these factors cannot be generalised and must be examined on a case-by-case basis through detailed semantic analyses of individual landscape terms, as demonstrated in this study.

9.2.4 Brute Fact or Anthropocentric Perspective

In this study, I have shown that the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape is deeply shaped by anthropocentric and cultural factors, including traditional ways of living (such as farming), cultural ideas, and the conceptual formation inherent in the Chinese language. As a result, the meanings conveyed by Chinese landscape terms are not merely 'brute facts' in the sense proposed by the philosopher John Searle (1995) but are instead infused with anthropocentric perspectives that reflect human experiences and cultural interpretations (e.g. Bromhead, 2017, 2018; Tuan, 2001; Wierzbicka, 1996).

The anthropocentric perspective can be viewed from two dimensions: the objective anthropocentric perspective and the subjective anthropocentric perspective. The objective perspective relates to measurable characteristics of the landscape that hold significance for humans, such as the height of mountains or the depth of water places, but not the height of an anthill or the size of a dewdrop. Although these measurements are objectively quantifiable, they are inherently framed in relation to human perception and needs. In other words, these objective scales are meaningful primarily because of their relevance to human perception and way of living.

In addition to the objective anthropocentric perspective discussed earlier, the Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape also incorporates a subjective dimension. This subjective perspective is evident in the aesthetic appreciation of the physical world, the cultural values and symbolic meanings associated with various landscape features, and the stereotypical or idealised images that Chinese people hold regarding specific types of landscapes. These cultural and perceptual factors shape not only how landscapes are described and categorised but also how they are experienced and valued by Chinese people.

The discussion on the anthropocentric perspective also brings us back to the question of whether the referents of landscape terms should be considered as objects or places (see, e.g., Burenhult & Levinson, 2008; Lyons, 1977). From a semantic standpoint, this study argues that regarding the referents of landscape terms solely as ‘things’ is inadequate, considering the anthropocentric perspectives outlined earlier. Landscape terms serve not only to label geographic features but also to convey how people engage with, perceive, think and feel about those landscapes. Therefore, regarding the referents of landscape terms as ‘places’ provides a more comprehensive understanding of human conceptualisation of the physical world.

9.3 Implications, Limitations and Future Directions

9.3.1 Implications and Contributions of the Study

First and foremost, this study is groundbreaking as it addresses a significant gap in the semantic study of Chinese landscape terms. By applying the NSM semantic analysis approach, this thesis presents the first in-depth semantic analysis of 27 Chinese landscape terms and formulates 25 explications in the format of NSM formulae.

The in-depth semantic analysis conducted in this study provides valuable insight into the unique ways in which Chinese conceptualise the landscape and how factors such as cultural ideas and conceptual formation shape the meanings of landscape concepts within a particular culture, leading to differences across languages and cultures. Consequently, this study also establishes a foundation for comparative research on the conceptualisation of landscape between Chinese and other languages and cultures.

This study highlights both the significance and effectiveness of the NSM approach in the semantic analysis of landscape concepts. The findings demonstrate that the NSM framework allows for a detailed unpacking of the meanings of landscape terms using simple, cross-translatable concepts. Additionally, this research identifies the fundamental building blocks from which these terms are developed, as well as recurring patterns in the component types commonly found in explications of landscape terms. This insight provides a foundation for further exploration of building blocks for landscape terms across languages and semantic templates within the NSM framework.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the significant potential for collaboration between the NSM approach and other fields of landscape research. For example, in cultural landscape studies, the NSM framework and semantic analysis of landscape terms can uncover cultural ideas associated with specific landscape features that have undergone minimal human intervention yet hold deep cultural significance. This underscores the important contribution that a fine-grained semantic study can make to deepening our understanding of cultural landscapes and bridging the gap between Asian and Western perspectives on their interpretation.

9.3.2 Limitations and Future Directions

While this study makes contributions to the semantic studies on landscape terms in Chinese, it also has certain limitations.

First, this study primarily examines MSC landscape terminology from the perspective of the Han ethnic group. However, it is important to acknowledge that members of other ethnic groups may interpret these landscape terms differently, reflecting their unique cultural and environmental experiences. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese conceptualisation of the landscape, future research could incorporate a broader and more diverse selection of Sinitic varieties. A typological study on Chinese landscape conceptualisation would also provide valuable insights. Additionally, comparative studies with other languages and their landscape terms would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of landscape conceptualisation across cultures.

Second, this study has only touched on the surface of semantic templates shared by landscape terms across languages and semantic molecules that are considered building blocks for landscape concepts. Due to the limited number of semantic studies on landscape terms, the semantic templates discussed in this study propose component types that may be included in explications for landscape terms, without specifying the sequence of these components. Additionally, the building blocks identified in this study are based solely on the semantic analysis of the contemporary meanings of MSC landscape terms. Further cross-linguistic semantic research on landscape terms could provide deeper insights into the cognitive processes underlying landscape conceptualisation across different languages and cultures. Such studies could refine semantic templates and more systematically identify the fundamental building blocks of landscape concepts.

Finally, while this study has briefly explored how semantic analysis can contribute to landscape-related fields such as cultural landscape studies and ethnophysiology studies, it

has not developed a structured framework for integrating these approaches. Future research could investigate possible ways to integrate semantic studies into landscape studies and establish collaborative methodologies. This would enable a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of landscape conceptualisation across different languages and cultures.

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