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A Comparative Study on Multimodal Metaphors in the Front Pages of Chinese and Western Mainstream Newspapers: The Case of *China Daily* and *The Economist*

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Abstract: The study of metaphor has a long history. Traditional metaphor theories focus on metaphor as merely a figure of speech. In cognitive linguistics, researchers believe that metaphor is not only a linguistic rhetoric phenomenon, but a fundamental and universal cognitive way for human beings to understand the world. With the development of the Internet age, multimodal information is becoming increasingly abundant, thus more attention has been paid to the study of multimodal metaphor. However, there are few studies on multimodal metaphor in the context of cultural differences between China and the West at present. Therefore, this paper takes the multimodal metaphors embodied in the images and words reflected on the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist* as data to analyze the different ideologies and cultural values reflected in them. This comparative study analyzes the similarities and differences between the multimodal metaphors in the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist*. It is found that the front pages of *China Daily* contain more traditional Chinese cultural elements, and tend to convey positive values, while the multimodal metaphors in *The Economist* often have abundant connotations, indicating a more political and sarcastic tone. Meanwhile, the reasons for the different choices of images are analyzed from three aspects: ideology, culture and context, thus providing some enlightenment on how to further enhance cultural confidence and better construct China's national image for domestic media.

Keywords: multimodal metaphor; critical metaphor analysis; front pages of *China Daily*; front pages of *The Economist*; cultural confidence

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1 Introduction

The study of metaphor has a long history that can be traced back to ancient Greece. Philosophers and rhetoricians at that time considered metaphor as a “temporary self-explanatory change in the usage of a general or singular term” (Hills 2017: 5). In the 1980s, the rise and development of cognitive linguistics changed people’s cognition of metaphor from simply a figure of speech to a mode of thought (Lee 2001; Croft & Cruse 2004). Andrew Ortony’s *Metaphor and Thought* (1979) as well as Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) laid the foundation for analyzing metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon (Forceville 2009).

As metaphor can be found in various modes rather than language alone, metaphor scholars, notably Forceville, put forward the theory of multimodal metaphor. In the age of the Internet, people have to deal with much information in a variety of modes (Ma & Gao 2020). As a result, multimodal metaphor analysis has become a popular research topic, mainly focusing on advertisements, political cartoons, movies, etc., which are composed of images, words, sounds and other symbols and modes (Zhong & Li 2014). These studies, conducted from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, may contribute to a better understanding of how modern people think and behave (Pan 2011).

In recent years, as China has gradually intensified its publicity efforts to the international society, multimodal metaphor analysis has also been used to analyze the national image. Some scholars have taken the national publicity films as cases to explore the construction of China’s national image (Zhang 2013; Zeng & Liang 2017; Yin 2018). At the same time, the coverage of China by the international mainstream media is gradually increasing with China’s growing influence on the international stage. However, inadequate attention has been paid to the comparative study of metaphors between Chinese and Western media. Thus, this paper takes *China Daily* and *The Economist* as its research objects to analyze multimodal metaphors embodied in various images and words on their front pages and further explore different ideologies and cultural values reflected by the multimodal metaphors.

Two main objectives are expected to be achieved through this study: firstly, to classify and interpret the metaphors embodied in the images and words on the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist*; secondly, to disclose through comparative analysis the reasons why the images are chosen on the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist*.

Based on the findings, the significance of this research can be revealed both theoretically and practically. For one thing, it will fill the gap that there is scant research on the comparative study of the multimodal metaphors reflected in Chinese and Western mainstream newspapers. For another thing, by comparing multimodal metaphors reflected in *China Daily* and *The Economist*, this study tries to provide a new perspective on constructing China’s national image, which aims to offer some implications for Chinese culture promotion, further strengthening cultural confidence and building a strong nation of socialist culture.

2 Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Multimodal metaphor

In July 2005, the Ninth International Pragmatics Conference held in Italy gathered a number of elite scholars who had made remarkable achievements in related fields to discuss multimodal metaphor, directly leading to the milestone publication of *Multimodal Metaphor*. This collection of 18 papers, edited by Forceville and Urios-Aparisi, focuses on the study of multimodal metaphors applied in advertisements, comic books, cartoons, music scores, oral conversations, lectures, movies, etc. Main research perspectives involve the genre features of multimodal metaphor, distinctive features of multimodal metaphor, the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, etc.

The study of multimodal metaphor also provides a new paradigm in the context of interdisciplinary research. In the field of advertising, multimodal metaphor analysis has been used to study the construction of the brand image in commercial advertising and public service advertising (Koller 2014; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi 2009). There is also much multimodal metaphor research on political satirical comics, social comics, etc. (El Refaie 2003; Schilperhoord & Maes 2009; Shinohara & Matsunaka 2009). When it comes to music, Zbikowski (2009) studied how music and language construct thought by using various examples of musical passages, showing how music serves as a source domain for a multimodal metaphor.

So far, there has been an upsurge of multimodal metaphor research conducted by scholars abroad, but the research of multimodal metaphor in the framework of cognitive linguistics at home started relatively late. Zeng (2004) is the first study in China focusing on multimodal metaphor from the perspective of semantic conflicts. Since then, research of multimodal metaphor has been gradually expanded to other fields, such as print advertising (Lan & Cai 2013; Zhao & Xie 2020) and political comics, including the composition, identification and interpretation of multimodal metaphors with examples (Yu 2013). Moreover, with the framework of systemic functional theory, Feng (2011) attempts to provide a new perspective for the construction and classification of multimodal metaphors. He proposes a multimodal metaphor model (Figure 1) by mapping the relationship between text and image. In this modal, A1 and B1 are the target and source domains in text respectively, and A2 and B2 are the target and source domains in image respectively.

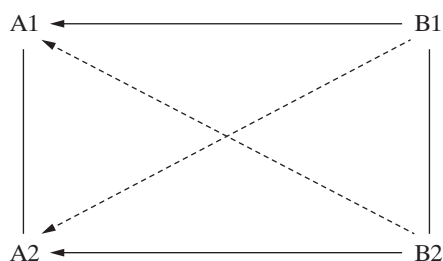


Figure 1: Multimodal metaphor mapping model by Feng Dezheng

In this multimodal metaphor mapping model, we can analyze four different mapping relationships: (1) A1B1 and A2B2 single-modal metaphors, (2) A1B2 and A2B1 multimodal metaphors, (3) A1B1B2, A1B1A2, A1B2A1 and A2B2A1 multimodal metaphors, (4) A1B1 and A2B2 multimodal metaphors, which helps to achieve a more comprehensive interpretation of the construction of multimodal metaphor.

2.2 *Critical metaphor analysis (CMA)*

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) is a method of metaphor analysis aiming to reveal the implied intention and ideology of language users (Charteris-Black 2004) as well as the conceptual nature of metaphor (Agbo et al. 2018). It is a new and effective supplementary method to study the relationship among language, thought and social context (Ji & Chen 2007). Charteris-Black (2004) points out that the study of metaphor should take the pragmatic feature into consideration since metaphor uses a simple meaning to connect two different components that are absent in different contexts. Therefore, metaphor is no longer the simple transfer between words, but the exchange of ideas, or interaction between contexts (Zhao 2010).

Studies of CMA abroad generally focus on the function of metaphor (Carver & Pikalo 2008), the relationship between metaphor and discourse sociality (Koller 2005), research of metaphor and ideology (Goatly 2007), etc. Meanwhile, the research on CMA is also diversified at home, covering different areas including metaphor and political discourse (Feng 2013), research on metaphor corpus (Yan & Li 2010), image construction through CMA (Chen 2014), policy discourse analysis based on CMA (Tang 2016), etc.

It is worth mentioning that though a number of studies have been done on multimodal metaphor, there is still no systematic critical method to analyze multimodal metaphor. To fill the gap between CMA and multimodal metaphor research, Bai (2017) put forward the Critical Multimodal Metaphor Analysis (CMMA). According to him, to identify multimodal metaphors, it needs not only to recognize the pictorial and verbal metaphorical meaning, but also to consider the information beyond the text. While interpreting multimodal metaphors, it is necessary to determine the specific characteristics projected from the source domains to the target domains. Moreover, three ideological functions will be involved in explaining multimodal metaphors: the function of information selection, the function of evaluation and the function of arousing emotions.

3 Theoretical Basis

The analysis of multimodal metaphor is based on conceptual metaphor analysis. However, since the multimodal metaphor contains a variety of modes, conveying different information which often needs to be integrated to express the complete metaphorical meaning, the multimodal metaphor integration model has been put forward, which can more directly reveal the working mechanism of multimodal metaphor. The analysis of multimodal metaphor in this comparative study is also based on the mechanism embodied in this integration model. In addition, the whole analysis process adopts three steps suggested by Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), namely, metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation.

3.1 Conceptual metaphor

Early in ancient Greece, Aristotle defined metaphor as “borrowing or transference of a concept from a domain in which it is familiar and well defined, for redeployment in one in which it is novel, unfamiliar, or ‘improper’” (Hills 2017: 6). Then pushed by the development of cognitive linguistics, the theory of conceptual metaphor was put forward. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 5) point out in *Metaphors We Live By* that metaphor is not simply a figure of speech, but that “thought itself is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” and the essence of metaphor is “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”.

Metaphor contains the comparison between two concepts in that one is constructed in terms of the other. There are two kinds of domain in conceptual metaphor: one is the target domain, which is what is described by the metaphor, the other is the source domain, referring to what we use to describe the experience. The metaphorical process of two concepts (A and B) is realized due to a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target and such a process between the source domain and the target domain is analyzed as “mapping”. Thus, the mapping process must contain two different things while they must have something in common. For example, LOVE IS JOURNEY (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) is a classic metaphor in conceptual metaphor research. Lovers may suffer setbacks in their relationship as companions may encounter difficulties in their travel. Based on the common features, JOURNEY, as the source domain, is used to help understand LOVE, the target domain.

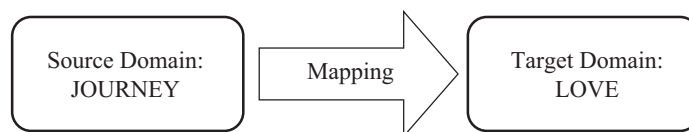


Figure 2: Mapping of conceptual metaphor

3.2 Multimodal metaphor

Forceville (2009: 4), the founder of the theory of multimodal metaphor, defined multimodal metaphor as “a metaphor whose target and source rendered exclusively or predominantly in two different modes/modalities”. However, to study multimodal metaphor, it is necessary to make clear what mode or modality is. Zhu (2007) stated that mode refers to the channel and medium of information exchange, including language, technology, image, music and other symbol systems. Kress (2009: 54) defined mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning”. According to Forceville (2009: 22), the model is a “sign system” that can be interpreted by using specific perceptual process, and it can be divided into the following categories: pictorial signs, written signs, spoken signs, gestures, sounds, music, smells, tastes and touch.

According to the characteristics of multimodal discourse and the related factors of multimodal discourse, Zhao (2013) proposed a multimodal metaphor integration model based on the conceptual integration model put forward by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Figure 3, translated from the Chinese version of Zhao’s integration model, clearly shows how this model works (The S and T in the boxes represent the source domain and the target

domain respectively):

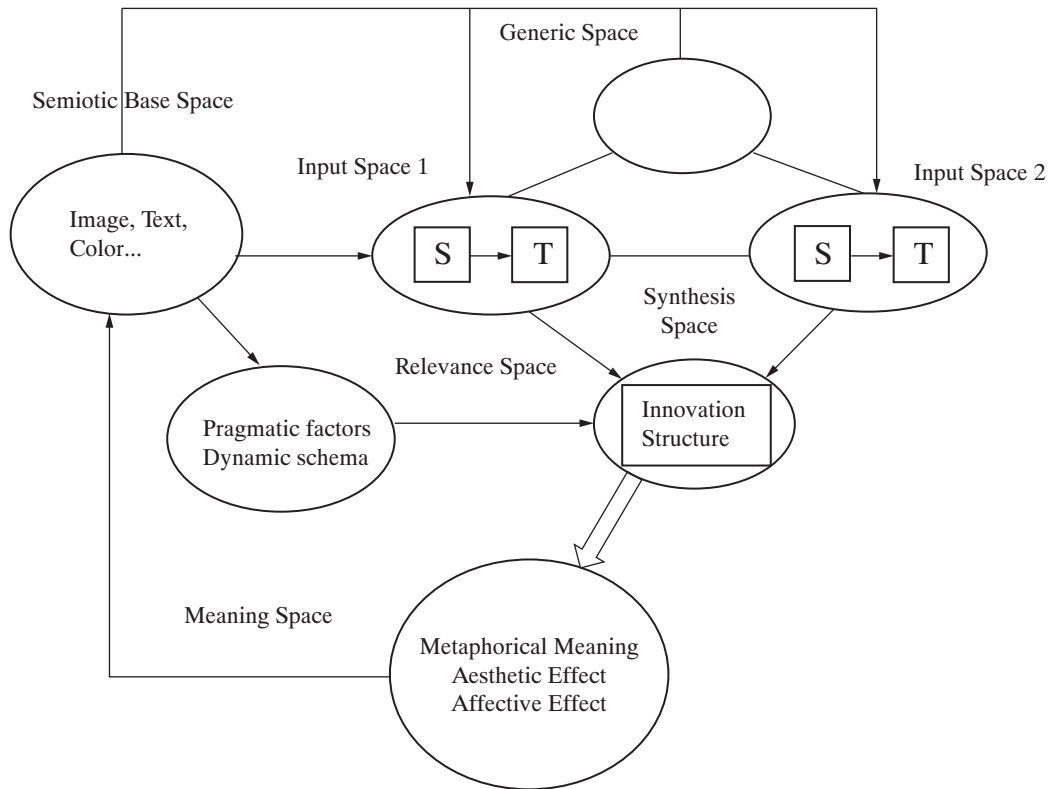


Figure 3: Integration model of multimodal metaphor

In this model, the multi-level spatial mapping and interaction between symbols are integrated into a complete system, highlighting the dynamic generation process of conceptual meaning, affective effect and aesthetic effect of a multimodal metaphor. For example, the relevance space in this model contains all kinds of pragmatic information, including the subject and carrier of communication, social cognition, cultural value, etc., which are directly related to the construction and generation of multimodal metaphor, making the meaning of multimodal metaphor more complete. In the process of analyzing multimodal metaphor in this paper, many social background factors are considered, which is also based on the relevance space in this model.

3.3 Critical metaphor analysis (CMA)

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) uses the research methods of corpus analysis, pragmatics and cognitive linguistics to analyze the linguistic, pragmatic and cognitive characteristics of metaphor, and reveals the beliefs, attitudes and feelings of the discourse group.

CMA adopts corpus to identify metaphor, interprets metaphor from pragmatic and cognitive perspectives, and determines its ideological and rhetorical basis by analyzing its discourse function. There are three steps to analyze a metaphor in CMA: metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation.

In terms of metaphor identification, Charteris-Black (2004) suggested that to identify a metaphor, reading texts carefully is necessary so that the hidden candidate metaphor can be found. And then by putting the metaphorical keywords into a certain corpus context, readers can distinguish whether they are literal or

metaphorical. Metaphor interpretation requires identifying conceptual metaphors as well as connecting the metaphors and the determining cognitive factors. Metaphor explanation is to analyze the persuasive function in realizing social goals.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research questions

The objectives of this research are to classify and interpret the metaphors reflected in the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist*, as well as to disclose the reasons why the images are chosen. To achieve these objectives, three research questions are put forward in this research:

(1) What conceptual metaphors are embodied in the images on the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist* on the topics of China, COVID-19 pandemic and China-U. S. relationship respectively?

(2) What are the similarities and differences in the features and ideological functions of these conceptual metaphors on each topic between *China Daily* and *The Economist*?

(3) What are the factors that influence the choice of images in *China Daily* and *The Economist*?

4.2 Data

The research chose *China Daily (Global Weekly)* and *The Economist* as the representative newspapers of domestic and Western mainstream media. For one thing, as one of the world's most influential newspapers, *The Economist* launched a China column in 2012. It is worth noting that *The Economist* only opened up columns for two countries — the last one is the U. S. early in 1942, which to some extent represents the increasing attention that Western mainstream media pay to China. For another, as the only national English language daily in China, *China Daily* plays the role of an important window for the world to understand China. With the highest reprint rate among foreign media, it has effectively entered the international society, introducing China to readers globally.

In this paper, data was collected from the Internet, mainly including the website of *China Daily* (<http://newspress.chinadaily.net.cn/>), the Weibo account of Min Li (<https://weibo.com/u/1990450131>), illustrator of *China Daily*, and the website of *The Economist* (<http://www.economist.com/printedition/covers>). It should be noted that *The Economist* is published in different areas of the world; however, the different regional editions contain the same content (there are three extra pages of Britain stories in the Britain edition), just in a separate order, and rarely with other covers. This study only deals with the global uniform front pages; thus, different editions have no impact on this study. In comparison, there is only one overseas edition of *China Daily*, named *China Daily (Global Weekly)*. Therefore, *China Daily* is taken as the abbreviation in the whole paper.

Ten front pages in total (five for each newspaper) dated from 2019–2020 that are rich in metaphors are selected to build the corpus of this research. The pages are mainly around three topics: the development of China

(including economy, science and technology), China-U. S. relationship and the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to China's growing influence on the international stage, all kinds of media coverage on China's development are increasingly comprehensive, involving political, economic, cultural and other aspects. Additionally, the trade disputes between China and the United States and the COVID-19 have become the main topics for the year 2019 and 2020. Therefore, these three topics constitute the significant focuses of both *China Daily* and *The Economist* in 2019–2020, which are conducive to making a comparative study. The comparative analysis of multimodal metaphors in the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist* will be discussed according to the three main steps suggested by the approach of CMA and CMMA: multimodal metaphor identification, interpretation and explanation.

5 Data Analysis and Discussion

The comparative analysis follows three steps: the identification of multimodal metaphors, mainly including the classification of images involved in this paper; the interpretation of multimodal metaphors, including the comparative analysis of the two newspapers aiming at the same topic; the explanation of multimodal metaphors, including the multimodal metaphor comparison between *China Daily* and *The Economist*, as well as the analysis of the factors influencing the image selection.

There are mainly 40 images from ten front pages chosen in this study, which can be generally divided into nine kinds of conceptual metaphors, involving human being metaphor, animal metaphor, transport metaphor, plant metaphor, object metaphor, landscape metaphor, color metaphor, organ metaphor, and virus metaphor (Table 1).

Since metaphor is essentially a cognitive process based on human experience, individuals may have various understandings of the multimodal metaphors analyzed in this paper. Therefore, the author's subjectivity to some extent inevitably influences the classification and interpretation of multimodal metaphors in this research.

Conceptual Metaphors	Subordinate images
Human being metaphor	
Animal metaphor	Panda
	Phoenix
	Magpie
	Sika deer
	Lion
Transport metaphor	Airplane
	Ship
Landscape metaphor	Oriental Pearl Tower

续表

Conceptual Metaphors	Subordinate images
Virus metaphor	COVID-19 virus
Plant metaphor	Flower
Object metaphor	Globe
	National flag
	Moon
	Fire
	Jewel
	Robot
	Gears
Organ metaphor	Eye
Color metaphor	Red

Table 1: Distribution of conceptual metaphors in the corpora

The multimodal metaphors reflected in the pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist* are mainly pictorial and written signs. According to the multimodal metaphor integration model by Zhao (2013), the integration process includes generic space, input space, relevance space and synthesis space, which are combined to form the meaning space of multimodal discourse. The input space is divided into two parts: image and text. The input space itself needs to go through the metaphor mapping to its respective target domain, and then carry out the selective mapping between the two domains so as to reach the synthesis paper space and produce the innovation structure. Also, the relevance space contains pragmatic information, which directly relates to the construction of multimodal metaphor. Therefore, in the interpretation of multimodal metaphor, cognitive factors, cultural factors, background and other relevant information should be considered to get a relatively objective integrated metaphorical meaning.

5.1 Multimodal metaphors reflected in the front pages about the COVID-19 pandemic

The “COVID-19” became a keyword of 2020. BBC reported that the Oxford English Dictionary by Oxford University Press, has selected “COVID-19” as a keyword for the unprecedented 2020. As a result, the COVID-19 also becomes a crucial topic in the mainstream media at home and abroad.

On the front page of *China Daily* (Figure 4), people in traditional costumes and the representative flowers are used to map onto three countries: Qipao, kimono and Hanbok are traditional national clothing of China, Japan and South Korea. Similarly, Cherry Blossom and hibiscus are the national flowers of Japan and South Korea, and peony is one of the top ten flowers in China. Moreover, the magpie is a symbol of good fortune in traditional Chinese culture, expressing good wishes under the pandemic situation. With the pictorial and verbal information combined, the metaphorical meaning is that people from China, Japan and South Korea helped each



Figure 4

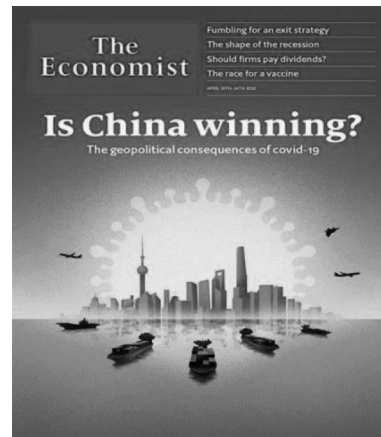


Figure 5

other while fighting against the pandemic. At the same time, it also suggests that people around the world should unite to battle against the pandemic.

On the front page of *The Economist* (Figure 5), the landscape of Shanghai, the Oriental Pearl Tower, represents China. The sailing ships and flying airplanes are symbols of the recovery and prosperity of China after the pandemic. The sun should be the symbol of hope. However, here a virus-shaped sun is ironic to some extent. Combining the interrogative text “Is China winning?”, it shows Western’s doubt and skeptical attitude towards China’s achievements in fighting against the pandemic.

5.2 Multimodal metaphors reflected in the front pages about China’s 5G technology

On May 15, 2019, the U. S. Department of Commerce said that Huawei and its 70 affiliated enterprises would be included in the “Entity List”, which means that Huawei will not be able to buy components from American enterprises without the approval of the U. S. government. Then on July 14, 2020, the British government decided to ban its mobile operators from purchasing Huawei 5G equipment from 2021 and exclude Huawei from the U. K. 5G equipment supply before 2027. Therefore, the topic of technology represented by 5G and Huawei has also been discussed by both domestic and Western media.

The pictorial presentation in Figure 6 uses a Chinese woman and a panda, a British woman and a lion to represent China and the U. K. respectively. Furthermore, there is a bunch of flowers in a vase held by the Chinese woman, which extends up to the British woman who is touching the flower. Animal metaphors are usually the common choice to represent a country. The giant panda is the “national treasure” of China, which is often used by domestic and Western media to represent China. There are three main reasons: first of all, the giant panda inhabits only in China, and is famous for its rarity in the world. Secondly, the giant panda is also a symbol of China’s diplomacy, or more accurately, a barometer. Since 1936, the government of the Republic of China has begun to present giant pandas to diplomatic countries. After 1949, especially after the thawing of Sino-U. S. relations in 1972, within two years, the United States, Japan, West Germany, Britain, France and other Western countries all received a pair of giant pandas from China. Furthermore, thanks to the naive and unaggressive image of the giant panda, it receives welcome and love from people around the world. Similarly, the lion is also the treasure of the U. K. Since Medieval England, the lion has been regarded as a symbol of the



Figure 6



Figure 7

majesty of the British royalty. During the reign of Henry II, three lions were depicted on the British royal weapons. The front page also uses flowers to connect two women, which clearly symbolize a kind of connection between China and the U. K.

The pictorial presentation on *The Economist's* front page is relatively concise (Figure 7), with a big national flag of China occupying the whole page. However, a staring eye is deposited in the middle of the biggest star, connoting that China is using its 5G to spy on other Western countries. The verbal information strengthens this view, alluding that the Western countries possess no trust in China while with the fast development of China, they have to find a way to do business with China.

5.3 Multimodal metaphors in the front pages about Sino-U. S. relations

China-U. S. relations have been one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world today. Especially, the trade war between China and America has been a crucial issue of Sino-U. S. relations. In essence, the current contradictions and problems between China and the United States are the disputes between multilateralism and unilateralism, justice and hegemonic power, and the world for the public and the priority of the United States (People's Daily 2020). China has always been not interested in seeking hegemony, but committed to maintaining multilateralism, fairness and justice. The United States has taken unilateralist measures and provoked a trade war, which has led to the escalation of trade frictions and disputes between China and the United States.

On the front page of *China Daily* (Figure 8), five people in four different skin colors, with different national flowers in their hands, represent five continents, or the world's peoples. A sika deer is in the middle of the picture, which is the symbol of auspiciousness in traditional Chinese culture. Sika deer is one of the mascots in ancient China. Moreover, it also has the meaning of "power". Since ancient times, deer was the prey that people used to chase. Therefore, when people see the ruling class fighting for power, they naturally associate with the situation of chasing deer in daily life, so that deer then becomes a metaphor for power. Here, the deer and people are encircled with a piece of silk, combing the verbal text, which denotes China's position on safeguarding multilateralism in its foreign policy.



Figure 8



Figure 9

On the front page of *The Economist* (Figure 9), a globe refers to the whole world. The national flags of China and the U. S. are at the poles of the globe, which suggests that China and the U. S. are two major powers in the world. The textual information “break-up” refers to the trade war between China and the United States.

All of the multimodal metaphors in this research are reflected by the images chosen on the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist*. By comparison, it is found that there are some similarities in the image selection by these two media. For one thing, both of them prefer to use the well-known panda to refer to China, which also benefits from China’s “panda diplomacy”. As an ambassador of friendship, the panda has always been given to other countries or regions as gifts, which has made indelible contributions to the development of friendly relations with foreign countries. Therefore, it is well known and recognized by people all over the world and becomes one of the symbols of China. For another thing, the media mostly choose red as the primary color when it comes to China. Red is the favorite color of the Chinese nation, representing festivity, auspiciousness, and harmony. The national flag of China is also set in red, which shows that “China Red” has become the cultural totem and spiritual embodiment of Chinese people.

The differences in the choice of images are more evident between these two media. First of all, *China Daily* mainly uses people to represent each country or race. The front pages of *China Daily* chosen in this paper all include human metaphors. By comparison, *The Economist* prefers to choose animals or objects as the reference of a country. Second, most of the metaphors in the front pages of *China Daily* are intuitive and easy to understand, while metaphors in *The Economist* are often more indirect and obscure. Thirdly, the metaphors in the front pages of *China Daily* are primarily positive and optimistic, communicating the idea of harmonious coexistence. In contrast, the metaphors in *The Economist* are more ironic and political. Finally, most of the metaphors in the front pages of *China Daily* contain many elements of traditional Chinese culture, while *The Economist* usually only uses common, well-known images to represent China and express connotations.

According to the discourse model for metaphor put forward by Charteris-Black (2004), both individual and social factors can influence the choice of metaphor. Fang (2018) viewed that culture, time and context will influence the selection and understanding of the source domain of metaphor in cognitive linguistics.

Therefore, the paper chooses three main factors: ideology, culture and context to analyze the choice of

images in *China Daily* and *The Economist*.

First of all, in terms of ideology, *Collins Cobuild (3rd Edition)* defines ideology as “a set of beliefs, especially the political beliefs on which people, parties, or countries base their nation”. Contemporary China pursues the ideology of socialist society, while America is a capitalist society and “liberalism” has always been the mainstream. The essential difference between these fundamentally determines the different values conveyed in multimodal discourse, thus affecting the choice of images. For example, the multimodal metaphors in *China Daily* tell that different countries, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, work together to fight the pandemic, and that people all over the world live in harmony. While the metaphors in *The Economist* often express unilateralism and liberalism values through elements such as the poles of the globe.

Secondly, culture is also a critical perspective to choose metaphor. Lakoff (1980) viewed that metaphor may exist in different levels of abstraction (if there is a metaphor in certain language domains). Conceptual metaphor is most likely to arise from cultural or linguistic conventions. The United States is a country composed of immigrants. Thus, the American people attach great importance to independent individuals. The “American Dream” emphasizes that people can get a better life through their own efforts. By contrast, China is an ancient country with a long history, and has formed a culture that emphasizes stability and harmony. Thus, social interests are always valued higher than individual interests. Various traditional Chinese elements can be seen in the multimodal metaphors’ design in *China Daily*, which is also a presentation of cultural confidence.

Thirdly, Forceville (2008) pointed out that situational context plays a dominant role in metaphor. Context is a relative dynamic factor that will influence the choice of metaphor. Metaphor is the result of explaining the reader’s own thoughts in the process of seeking the best relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1986). When the scope of the signifier is broad, it must be put in a specific context to judge the corresponding relationship between the signifier and the signified. In terms of the front page of media, the specific contexts refer to the current affairs or significant events at home and abroad. In *China Daily* and *The Economist*, there are many topics related to current affairs, such as the China-U. S. trade war, COVID-19, the U. S. sanctions against Huawei, etc. In these contexts, the two newspapers choose different images to express their views and attitudes, which will also give readers different impressions and cause different emotions.

6 Conclusion

The present study selects ten front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist* to conduct a comparative analysis of multimodal metaphors. Altogether, forty images, classified into nine categories, are identified, of which human beings and objects are often the source domain of multimodal metaphors.

The similarities and differences between *China Daily* and *The Economist* are then analyzed by comparing their choices of front-page images. It is found that both of them tend to choose images with distinct Chinese characteristics such as “panda” and “red” to represent China, which to some extent indicates that more diversified Chinese culture needs to be integrated into international communication, breaking the traditional stereotype of China.

As for the differences, *China Daily* contains more human being metaphors and many traditional Chinese cultural elements, which are always simple to understand and transmit positive values. Also, these cultural

elements promote the Chinese culture to spread overseas so that people in other countries in the world can understand and be more familiar with it. In contrast, object metaphors and animal metaphors are more common in *The Economist*, which also contains more profound, ironic, and political meaning.

Furthermore, it is found that the metaphorical expressions of *China Daily* and *The Economist* have different styles, representing different social values. In *China Daily*, a number of multimodal metaphors express the values of China's great harmony and multilateralism, while in *The Economist*, expressions of power politics are not difficult to find. Such discrepancies are caused by the essential differences between socialist and capitalist ideologies, the differences in values between collectivism and individualism, and the influence of current events as well as other contexts. Since the core of a culture is its value, cultural communication is essentially the interaction of different values. Therefore, it is crucial to make people in other countries understand and appreciate Chinese values.

In the past few years, China has made great efforts to strengthen its cultural confidence and promote the construction of socialist cultural power. With the overseas promotion of Chinese culture, traditional Chinese culture is increasingly recognized by the world. Through the comparative study of the multimodal metaphors in the front pages of *China Daily* and *The Economist*, this research puts forward some inspiration for domestic international communication media in terms of the construction of China's national image.

The Chinese nation has a profound cultural tradition and has formed a distinctive ideological system, which embodies the knowledge, wisdom and rational speculation accumulated by the Chinese people for thousands of years, thus Chinese culture should be promoted through more diversified ways by domestic media and research on the promotion of traditional Chinese culture from different perspectives should also be carried out. Additionally, to strengthen cultural confidence, embracing the cultures of all countries with an open and inclusive attitude is of great importance. The integration of various ethnic cultural elements also reflects the inclusiveness of Chinese culture as well as the values of cultural diversity and cultural harmony of the whole world. In that sense, more studies on the comparison of Chinese and Western cultures reflected by their mainstream media, by adopting a more systematic multimodal metaphor analysis methodology and with a larger sample size than that of the present study, should also be encouraged in future research.

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