

A Framing Metaphorical Analysis of China's National Images

--Based on the 2021 Economic News Reports on China of The Economist

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Abstract: National image is an important part of China's "soft power". *The Economist* uses a large number of metaphorical frames that relate to all aspects of China's development. Through these metaphorical frames, *The Economist* endows reports with its concepts and attitudes towards China, and these metaphorical frames also influence readers in an invisible way. This thesis uses the theory of framing and conceptual metaphor to analyze about 110 economic reports on China in *The Economist* in 2021. Specifically, three kinds of framing metaphors are discussed. They are war metaphors, sport metaphors, and journey metaphors. By analyzing the national images constructed by metaphors in each frame, the thesis finds that the journal sees China as a rising power, with its rising international status, rapid economic growth, world-leading technology and active participation in global governance, which constructs a positive image of China as a developing and progressive country. However, due to the inherent ideological bias of the West, the report maliciously smears China's national image, especially in terms of regime and human power. In addition, it also believes that China restricts freedom of speech and its environmental pollution is serious. In conclusion, *The Economist* has constructed an overall negative national image of China, which has exerted profound international influence. In the context of profound changes in the international communication environment, the author hopes that this thesis can provide some enlightenment for improving China's international discourse power.

Keywords: The Economist, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Framing Theory, China's National Image

1. Introduction

1.1. Previous Studies of Framing Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory

For decades, many disciplines have studied framing theory and conceptual metaphor abroad. The previous studies of conceptual metaphors abroad are prevailing. While the study of conceptual metaphors and framing theory combined are merely. As conceptual metaphors in linguistics, according to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson [1], Metaphor is about conceptualizing experience

and understanding new things. The concept and experience of being can't understand the world without metaphor. Conceptual metaphor is not based on similarity, but on conceptual similarity and human direct or indirect experience. Lakoff [1] put forward two different metaphorical family models in American politics. Meanwhile, he pointed out that most people have more than one value-based frames, which are activated in different fields and at different times. The process of framing and reconstruction are not only related to language, but also to thinking. In recent years, the literature of Conceptual Metaphors and Framing Theory research in China has become a huge and developing research institution in the field of communication, media research and psychology. These studies have promoted the development of cognitive science in China.

1.2. Previous Studies of National Image

The research on “national image” is a hot topic at home and abroad, but it is not easy to give an accurate definition of “national image”. Western scholars studied “national image” earlier. American scholar Martin I.M. [2] believe that national image is a “multi-dimensional” construction, which is “the sum of descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs about a specific country” [3]. The definition is general and macro. P. Kotler and others [4] are more specific. They believe that “national image is the sum total of personal experience, comprehension, views, memories and impressions of a certain country, including personal feelings and aesthetics of the country”.

In the field of linguistics, the study of national image has become the focus of scholars' attention, but it is mostly confined to the analysis of a specific or specific language, and there is no systematic review of China's national image by foreign media. Although some studies [5] have explored national images in the eyes of foreign media, there is little underlying meaning behind these views. Moreover, few scholars have analyzed economic reports about China by using framing theory [6], [7] and conceptual metaphor theory [9], [7]. In view of this, this thesis has some innovations, which analyzes the framing metaphor of the economic aspects of *The Economist's* China coverage in 2021.

1.3. Research Questions

There are two questions for research. Firstly, what are the metaphorical frames involved in these Chinese images and what is the deep meaning of these metaphorical frames used by foreign media? Secondly, what are the main Chinese images constructed in *The Economist's* coverage?

2. Theoretical Framework

In the book *Metaphors We Live By* published in 1980, Lakoff and Johnson not only first put forward the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, but also enumerate plentiful examples of conceptual metaphors to facilitate readers' comprehension. This book is regarded as a classic in cognitive linguistics. The traditional study of metaphor only analyzes metaphor as a common linguistic phenomenon and considers it as a rhetorical phenomenon that modifies speech. As a matter of fact, just as Lakoff [1] said, metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Lakoff [1]'s theory of conceptual metaphor is a new breakthrough in the field of linguistics. Since then, metaphor has broken away from the shackles of traditional rhetoric and formally embarked on the path of cognitive linguistics and cognitive science.

In Lakoff and Johnson's view, metaphors used in our daily life are not just about the concept of our thinking ability, but also govern our daily operations. These concepts construct our cognitive, constitute the us how to survive in this world, and our relationships with others. In short, the concept of system control and guide with all of our lives.

The notion of frame, which first comes up in the area of anthropology, has been thoroughly and widely studied in various fields over the years, like sociology, psychology, linguistics, journalism and

communication and politics. Since the beginning of the 21st century, by means of introducing the concept of frame in frame semantics, sociology and communication into the study of politics and combining his study with the research findings in the fields of cognitive linguistics and neurocognitive science, Lakoff [6] proposes his Framing Theory and has constantly improved it in practice.

This thesis, as an attempt from the perspective of Framing Theory to investigate how conceptual metaphors are framed in *The Economist's* economic news to convey attitudes and ideologies, has both theoretical and practical significance.

3. Result and Discussion

After identifying the conceptual metaphors of the economic news of *The Economist* in 2021, there are many types of metaphors in the text. Among them, three kinds of metaphors are most numerous, which are war metaphors, sport metaphors, and journey metaphors.

3.1. War Metaphors

War metaphor is one of the conventional metaphors, often appear in the political, economic and other kinds of discourse domain concept. In nearly five thousand years of human development process of the communist party of China, there were more than 1.40000 wars, and it provides the experience for war metaphor concept contain war soldier, battlefield, enemy, weapon. According to the meaning of semantic roles and the specific relationship between them, the conceptual domain war can be subdivided into defensive war and offensive war.

Some examples of the metaphorical expressions are demonstrated in the following sentences and show the different political images of China.

Example 3-1 Then again, Mr Xi and his team may draw another moral from those angry smartphone videos: that too little state *control* is the greatest risk of all.

Example 3-2 And he has made it his *mission to reinforce* the party's grip on power.

Example 3-3 In the past Xinjiang had its own business leaders who were Uyghurs. But officials saw them as a *threat*.

Based on the word control in Example 3-1, it indicates that the Chinese government has too much command over the economy, and foreign companies have to put up with restrictions on technology transfer and the freedom of corporate investment. The emphasis is on an authoritarian regime led by the Communist Party. Furthermore, the words mission and reinforce in Example 3-2 indicates that the political power in China is concentrated and the supervision is relatively strict. China's government is increasingly regulating business, limiting the power of big tech platforms and cracking down on business giants. Through these measures, Xi works hard to realize communist ideology. Additionally, based on the word threat in Example 3-3, it implies that the Chinese government is violating the human rights of the people of Xinjiang. The issue of human rights is a common "weapon" used by *The Economist* to construct China's negative national image. Although the magazine recognizes that China's ethnic and religious policies are aimed at preventing the erosion of extremist ideology, it continues to politicize and stigmatize the establishment of vocational skills education and training center in Xinjiang, smearing China's ethnic and religious policies.

China's financial regulator comprehensively regulated Internet financial activities and overhaul Internet platforms in 2021. Internet giants such as Ant Group and Tencent have been summoned by financial authorities to set up a working group to regulate the operation and development of financial services. *The Economist's* coverage of the story has cast doubt on such measures, highlighting the authoritarian Communist party-led regime and portraying the Chinese government as conservative and controlling.

Furthermore, under the guise of human rights, the UK has been fully attacking China's governance policies in Xinjiang, pretending to be a defender of human rights in Xinjiang and smearing China's forced labor and cultural genocide in Xinjiang. It fabricates lies that China has seriously violated the human rights of ethnic minorities.

3.2. Sport Metaphors

When the concept of sport is touched upon, what first crosses people's minds is usually competition between individuals or teams, cooperation within teams, medals or prizes and even penalties. The conceptual metaphor economic activity is sport reflected in the data, according to the classification put forward by Lakoff and Johnson [1], is also a type of framing metaphor. It structures the complex and abstract concept of economic activity in terms of sport, which is more concrete and familiar to people. Therefore, corresponding relationships are established between the structure and components of the source domain sport and those of the target domain economic activity. In this way, with the help of their perception of sport, people can better understand the economic activities.

Some examples of the metaphorical expressions are demonstrated in the following sentences and show the different diplomatic images of China.

Example 3-4 The result is that in some domains the West should seek to confront China (human rights), while in others it should *compete* (most areas of trade) or *cooperate* (health and climate change).

Example 3-5 Early in 2019 the EU published a strikingly honest China strategy, calling the country a *partner*, a *competitor* but also a "systemic *rival*".

Example 3-6 Senior officials believe that if China can get a first mover *advantage* on the cutting edge of technology, it will become not just an economic superpower but a geopolitical and military one, too, writes Mr Roberts of the Atlantic Council.

In a sport, athletes compete against or cooperate with each other to achieve a higher score or ranking and ultimately win. The person who competes with someone is called a rival, and the person who cooperates with them is called a partner. Correspondingly, in international affairs, competition and cooperation exist between countries or companies. Therefore, as is related by the words compete and cooperate in Example 3-4 and Example 3-5, it is a critical relationship that the West realizes that it should compete with China in some areas and cooperate in others. The west still holds the stereotype that China does not fully respect human rights and China is their enemy when it comes to trade. At the same time, China's role in climate governance cannot be ignored.

In a game, to perform better than others in a certain aspect is to have a certain advantage. Correspondingly, a country that is stronger than other countries in a certain area has an advantage over other countries. As is related by the word advantage in Example 3-6, Mr Roberts believes that if China leads the world in cutting-edge technology in the future, it will become a political, economic and military power, and will lead a new global economic order with China as the center.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the West recognizes China's rapid development in economy, science, and military, and realizes that there are areas where they have to work with China. It praises China's peaceful and friendly diplomatic principles, and hopes that China could grow into a responsible and peaceful major country, depicting an increasingly strong Image of China in the context of pluralism in the new era.

3.3. Journey Metaphors

Generally speaking, when the concept of journey is mentioned, people may usually think of destinations, travel plans, travel itinerary and attractive scenery, happy moments as well as some unexpected difficulties along the way. According to Lakoff and Johnson [1], the conceptual metaphor

economic activity is journey is also a kind of framing metaphor: the abstract concept of economic activity is conceptualized in terms of the highly structured concept of journey. By doing so, the structure and components of the source domain journey are correspondingly mapped onto the target domain economic activity.

Some examples of the metaphorical expressions derived from the conceptual metaphor economic activity is journey are demonstrated in the sentences below and show the different economic images of China.

Example 3-7 In the past week alone the government has taken steps to reduce *barriers* between tech giants Alibaba and Tencent, and, according to the Financial Times, ordered the breakup of Alipay, a financial superapp owned by Alibaba's sister company, Ant.

Example 3-8 Such is the *dilemma* China's financial regulators face. They must stop poorly managed groups from hogging capital and allow the worst of them to fail.

As is mentioned earlier, in a travel people may get into trouble on the way to their destinations. They possibly get lost or run out of gas. They may also come across barriers which stand in their way and stop them from heading for their destinations. If people work out solutions to their problems, they can continue their journeys. If not, they have to end their journeys. Similarly, during the processes of development, companies may face various predicaments as well. Those who successfully overcome difficulties are able to develop further, while those that miserably fail may have to shut down. According to Example 3-7, China is cracking down on tech giants such as Alibaba and Tencent to prevent them from monopolizing the market, aiming at reducing obstacles to normal market development. The State Administration for Market Regulation imposed administrative penalties on Alibaba Group Holding LTD and imposed heavy fines on it. It shows the government's strong attitude towards market supervision and resolutely opposes Internet monopoly and market disorder. *The Economist* has paid close attention to China's measures on financial regulation and believed that these measures would deal a severe blow to the booming technology industry.

When people travel, they often face dilemmas on the road. For example, when travelers are stuck in a traffic jam, people can neither go forward nor go back the same way. Because the roads in front and behind are blocked by cars, people can only stay there. According to Example 3-8, China's financial regulators must stop poorly managed groups from hogging capital and allow the worst of them to fail. But they must do so without causing panic or cutting off healthy companies' access to finance. It shows that as more big firms flirt with default, financial regulators face a dilemma in China.

Some examples of the metaphorical expressions derived from the conceptual metaphor economic activity is journey are demonstrated in the sentences below and show the different environmental images of China.

Example 3-9 But policymakers have yet to say when they will *move* to an absolute emissions cap—a step considered necessary to clear China's smoggiest cities.

The traveler gets to one new place, so to speak, by moving from his original place to his destination. Accordingly, people can move from doing one thing to doing another. According to Example 3-9, China has not yet made an Emissions Cap definitely. Therefore, *The Economist* questions if China can realize its plan of reducing the carbon intensity of GDP by 65% by 2030 (compared to 2005 levels) and hitting NetZero emissions by 2060. Besides, it worries that Beijing may not get carbon trading right because the ETS's scope is limited and the programme faces legal ambiguity.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion in the previous chapters, some major findings about the conceptual metaphors and frames reflected in the data can finally be presented in the following paragraphs.

In conclusion, conceptual metaphors are found to abound in the economic news collected from

The Economist. Altogether 98 metaphorical words are identified and it is found that different source domains are adopted to conceptualize the abstract and complex concepts related to economy. Conceptual metaphors generalized can be classified into three groups. Those conceptual metaphors in the order of their frequencies in the data are as follows: war metaphors, sport metaphors, and journey metaphors. These metaphors shape different political, economic, technological, social, diplomatic and environmental images of China.

Politically, *The Economist* has a habit of defining China as an autocratic country, arguing that the situation of democracy and human rights needs to be improved. Especially on the Xinjiang issue, *The Economist* tried to stigmatize and construct China's national image of "lack of democracy and freedom". Moreover, Chinese officials are often referred to as dictators and the Chinese government as autocrats. As a booming socialist country, China's national image will inevitably suffer censure and unfair treatment from western capitalist countries in the reaction of international public opinion. For a long time, western capitalist countries led by Britain and the United States have been in opposition to China, and the difference in ideology has caused the misunderstanding and distortion of China's national image by western mainstream media to varying degrees. Politically, China is often portrayed in a negative light.

In term of economy, *The Economist* has highly recognized China's rapid economic development and China has a leading position in the global economy, and that China's economy will surpass that of Britain and even the United States. However, *The Economist* also sees many problems in China's economic development. This thesis constructs the image of unbalanced regional economic development in China, and holds that the gap of regional economic development in China is widening day by day. It also paid close attention to the reform of China's financial regulation and a series of anti-monopoly measures. They argued that Chinese regulation is immature and it stifles entrepreneurship, which is likely to backfire.

On the technology front, *The Economist* speaks highly of giants such as Huawei, Alibaba and Tencent, arguing that China leads the world in mobile payments, online shopping and even aerospace.

In terms of diplomacy, in the face of China's growing international influence, *The Economist* believes that China's rise is unstoppable and contributes to global governance. Britain gave up the attitude of confronting China everywhere in the past, recognized China's power, and actively sought cooperation with China. Now it has an attitude of both cooperation and struggle with China.

According to the above analysis of the samples, it can be seen that China columns have three basic positions on China's reports, with negative positions accounting for the majority of the reports, while neutral and positive positions are gradually increasing. Although *The Economist* still adopts a satirical rhetoric in its coverage of China news, its reports have taken a more moderate attitude towards China coverage. With the development of China, western understanding of China will continue to improve, the image of China in their writing will become more and more three-dimensional and comprehensive, And China will show the world a real China through its own efforts.

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