Research on China's National Image Construction From the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor: A Case Study of the Culture-related Reports in the Japanese Version of *People's Daily*

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China's mainstream media constitute the major carrier of discourse and the vital communication platform for its national image construction. This research adopts the conceptual metaphor theory and a corpus-based approach, to analyze both qualitatively and quantitatively the culture-related discourse in the Japanese version of *People's Daily*, which is among China's mainstream media. Specifically, the conceptual metaphor types utilized, the features of the culture-related discourse, and China's national image thus constructed are closely examined. Results suggest that substance metaphor, war metaphor, plant metaphor, and travel metaphor are commonly used to represent the culture-related discourse, which features vigor, interaction, a driver of cultural exchange, and readiness to be embraced by foreign readership. Based on this, a reliable, lovely, and respectable national image of China, which is culturally rich and confident, is successfully formed.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, China's national image, culture-related reports, the Japanese version of *People's Daily*

Introduction

Culture-related report is one of the key elements in national image construction. As a window for the transmission of Chinese culture to the world, the culture-related reports of China's mainstream media, *People's Daily*, play an important role in the construction of China's national image. Pan Jianhong and Zhu Lingling (2024) points out that we should stay confident in our culture, for being cultural confident can not only make cultural subjectivities inherit and develop national culture actively, but also encourage them to absorb the quintessence of foreign culture with open and inclusive attitudes while standing firm to national culture, thus promoting exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations. Therefore, it can be seen that the mainstream media is the major carrier of discourse for spreading Chinese culture, promoting exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations, and shaping China's national image.

In recent years, the academia has gradually paid more attention to the research on culture-related discourse, which mainly concerns two aspects. One involves the discussion of the status quo of culture-related discourse's international communication, and the scope and methods of discourse construction (Zeng, 2021). The other focuses on the relationship between culture-related discourse and the enhancement of national image and the construction of international discourse system (Xue, 2020). In summary, there are not many studies on the culture-related discourse of Chinese mainstream media from the perspective of conceptual metaphor, especially on the relationship between the culture-related reports of mainstream media's Japanese version and the construction of China's national image, which needs to be further studied. Therefore, taking the culture-related reports of the Japanese version of *People's Daily* as the corpus, this paper analyzes the types of conceptual metaphor in the mainstream media's culture-related reports and the national image they have constructed. Meantime, this paper provides examples for the practice of analyzing the international culture-related discourse of Chinese mainstream media, and offers some strategies and suggestions for the construction of the mainstream media's culture-related discourse as well as the enhancement of China's cultural soft power and national image.

Conceptual Metaphor and National Image Construction of Mainstream Media's Culture-related Discourse

Proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), conceptual metaphor exists not only in language, but also in mindset and behavior. Its essence is to understand and experience one thing (vehicle) in terms of another (tenor) and its cognitive mechanism is a structure mapping from source domain to target domain. Charteris-Black (2004) holds that metaphor has the function of triggering emotion, manifesting ideology, and serving for the discourse's communicative intent. Metaphor can also form and influence the belief, attitude, and behavior of the target audience, while striking a chord with the audience, which also plays a vital role in the construction of world view. It is obvious that metaphor is a commonly used mindset when people try to understand the world. They perceive and understand a strange thing through the mapping from one cognitive domain to another. Metaphor is a key element in triggering emotion of the target audience and provoking the sense of identity, and thus it is effectual and serves for the discourse's communicative purpose.

It is obvious that the construction of national image cannot be explored through culture-related discourse without the analysis of metaphor. As a representation of Chinese mainstream media and an important way and carrier to spread Chinese culture, *People's Daily* is an authoritative, credible, and convincing media platform. Liang Xiaobo (2013) points out that, being a key measurement in the construction of mindset, conceptual metaphor serves as a vital part in shaping national image from such perspectives as prominent image, cognitive innovation, and living language. As national image relies heavily on language to express and construct, conceptual metaphor becomes an important means of its construction. *People's Daily Online* has always adhered to the multi-dimensional, multi-perspective, and systematic way for culture-related reports, and the connotation of national image thus shaped has become richer, which make *People's Daily* a main force in the construction of national image. Therefore, through analyzing different types of conceptual metaphor and sense-making in culture-related discourse of *People's Daily*'s Japanese version, researchers can dig deeper into the discourse representations of foreign culture reports, summarize China's national image constructed by the mainstream media, explore the strategies of discourse to enhance China's national voice and image, and make a timely and in-depth complement to Chinese mainstream media's strategies of discourse and public opinion analysis, so that the vital part that language researches play in serving the country and the society can be presented (Liu, 2022).

Research Design

Research Corpus

The text of culture-related reports in the Japanese version of *People's Daily* was selected as the corpus for this study for the following reasons. Firstly, *People's Daily* is a representative of China's mainstream media and one of the world's top 10 newspapers. Secondly, *People's Daily* has a wide range of audience, and its overseas social media accounts rank among the top newspaper media in the world in terms of fans' bases and activeness. Finally, the Japanese version of *People's Daily* has attracted a large number of Japanese audience over years for its authority and timeliness, which builds a communication bridge for China between Japan and the world and widens the way of foreign publicity for China to go abroad and for the world to understand China. In this paper, the researchers selected the texts of culture-related reports from the Japanese version of *People's Daily* from January 2019 to December 2023. With the help of corpus analysis software—KH Coder (2017), the researchers collected all the texts of the news reports with the search term "culture". After removing the irrelevant and repetitive texts, 314 culture-related reports were obtained, with a total number of 257,794 characters. With the analysis of the contents, the topics of these culture-related reports are mainly classified into sports, arts and entertainment, cultural heritage, education, food, cultural exchanges, and tourism.

Research Questions

With corpus analysis, this paper applies the conceptual metaphor theory of cognitive linguistics, to qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the culture-related reports of the Japanese version of *People's Daily*, to examine the types of conceptual metaphors in culture-related discourse and their construction meaning, and to summarize China's national image constructed by the mainstream media's culture-related discourse. This paper mainly addresses the following questions: (1) What are the commonly used types of metaphors? What kind of culture-related discourse is constructed? (2) What kind of China's national image is constructed by mainstream media through these conceptual metaphors? What's the communicative effect?

Research Procedure

In order to avoid the metaphors omitted by the analysis software, this study also combines manual screening to ensure the accuracy and reliability of metaphor identification, and the metaphor identification adopts MIPVU, a metaphor identification tool developed by Steen, Dorst, Herrmann, Kaal, Krennmayr, and Pasma (2010). First, candidate metaphors are selected by careful reading of the text, and with the reference to the identification program MIPVU, the words with metaphorical meanings are classified as metaphor keywords. The usage of these keywords in the text is measured. Then the context of these metaphor keywords in the text is analyzed and the types of conceptual metaphor are summarized. At last, after being identified, these metaphors are described and illustrated with the combination of the textual and socio-cultural contexts, and the communicative functions of these metaphors and their constructed culture-related discourse characteristics are analyzed.

Results and Analyses

After classifying the metaphor types of the 314 culture-related report texts in the Japanese version of *People's Daily* according to the methods and steps of metaphor identification described above, it is found that the metaphors appearing more frequently include 13 types: material, war, plant, journey, architecture, anthropomorphism, stage, color, weather, disaster, music, competition, and family. Among them, the types of metaphors used more frequently are material metaphors and war metaphors. In the following, the original context and socio-culture

context combined, the paper analyzes the meanings of these two types of metaphors, through specific examples in the text of culture-related reports and the functions of the metaphors in triggering the audience's emotions and serving the purpose of communicative discourse, so as to further explore the characteristics of the discourse and the national image constructed by metaphors.

Material Metaphors

Material metaphors, which are the highlighted metaphors in the book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), are the most frequently used type of metaphor in the culture-related reports in the Japanese version of *People's Daily*. Conceptual metaphor is used to systematically describe an event by employing the public's familiar conceptual domains to make people perceive and comprehend relatively abstract conceptual domains.

Example 1. 干支をテーマにした切手は、新春の到来を祝うだけでなく、さらには文化クリエイティブ産業と融合し発展する媒介資源として、世界に進出する中国の一枚の<u>文化の名刺</u>としての役割を担っている[1]。(the Japanese version of *People's Daily* 2020-01-07)

In Example 1, the "cultural card" serves as the source domain. A business card is the fastest and most effective method for friends to introduce themselves and get to know each other. When this word projected into the target domain, it signifies that China has staged on the international platform, where China fully showcases itself by spreading fine traditional Chinese culture to the world. The concept of a "business card" is quite common in daily life, and thus its use can be easily understood by the audience. The Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches are ancient Chinese methods of observing celestial phenomena. They are not only used to record time, but also embody rich cultural and historical value, and they are still in use today. Therefore, the use of this material metaphor makes it easier for the foreign audience to understand and accept fine traditional Chinese culture shown on the stamps. Efforts made by China's mainstream media to actively promote excellent traditional culture to the world and drive the prosperity and development of Chinese culture can enhance the international influence of Chinese civilization and effectively improve China's cultural soft power and its national image.

Example 2. 人類発展史は、多元的文明が共存し、肩を並べて進む歴史であり、さまざまな文明から知恵を求め、栄養を吸収し、長所に学んで短所を補い、共に進歩しなければ、人類文明という『<u>星空</u>』が光り輝き、人類共通の『家園（故郷）』が和やかに繁栄することはできない。(2023-09-15)

Example 2 vividly constructs the material metaphor that "human civilization is a starry sky." The source domain "the night sky" is mapped onto the target domain "the history of human civilization", aiming to illustrate that the diverse civilizations of different nations are like stars in the brilliant night sky and each civilization emits its unique light in the cosmos of human civilization, which form and thrive human civilization. Mainstream media utilize such vivid material metaphors to convey China's consistent advocacy of an inclusive and open philosophy of civilization. Therefore, the use of such material metaphors demonstrates China's long-standing commitment to deepening exchanges and mutual learning among world civilizations and respecting the diversity of civilizations. This effectively evokes emotional resonance and fosters a sense of identity among the audience, thereby constructing a confident yet humble, mutually respectful yet friendly, trustworthy, lovable, and admirable image of China as a nation.

War Metaphors

War metaphor is a commonly used conceptual metaphor in culture-related reports of mainstream media, only second to material metaphor in frequency. It primarily emphasizes antagonism and competitiveness, which

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[1] All Japanese example sentences used in this paper are quoted from the Japanese version of *People's Daily*, URL: http://j.people.com.cn.

can enhance the tones of speech and attract the audience's attention.

Example 3. 河南省は20以上の王朝の変化を経験してきた歴史ある古都ということもあり、その地元テレビ局である河南衛視は、奥深い伝統文化の面で多くの経験を積み、それを武器として、インターネット時代の今、若者と「対話」する方法を見つけ出したと言えるだろう。(2021-09-23)

As shown in Example 3, the source domain "weapon" is mapped onto the target domain "traditional culture", metaphorically equating "traditional culture" with "weapon". A weapon can be understood not only as a tool in war, but also as a means to effectively communicate with modern young people. Henan Satellite TV has found a way to strike a chord with young people by producing programs that preserve and reinterpret traditional culture. The Japanese version of *People's Daily* employs war metaphors to enhance rhetorical tone, emphasizing the importance and necessity of preserving traditional culture, conveying confidence and recognition of traditional culture's value, and achieving the communicative purpose of guiding young audiences to appreciate and embrace the unique charm of traditional Chinese culture. It is obvious that China's mainstream media utilize war metaphors to highlight the enduring China's outstanding traditional culture in the new era, demonstrating the power of cultural confidence, and constructing China's national image that upholds cultural confidence and actively promotes the inheritance and development of fine traditional Chinese culture.

Conclusion

This paper adopts a conceptual metaphor perspective to qualitatively and quantitatively analyze culture-related discourse and the national image constructed by China's mainstream media, using culture-related reports from the Japanese version of *People's Daily* as case studies. It is found that mainstream media utilize "material metaphors" and "war metaphors" to construct a positive and uplifting culture-related discourse that deepens civilizational exchange and mutual learning, making it easier for foreign audiences to understand and identify. This discourse inspires emotional responses and fosters a sense of identity, thereby constructing a national image of China that is confident, trustworthy, lovable, and admirable. As seen from the above analysis, the Japanese version of *People's Daily* plays an irreplaceable role in conveying messages through culture, deepening multicultural exchanges, and building consensus. Metaphors, as a discourse strategy, play a very important role. We should fully utilize the main discourse platform of mainstream media, effectively employ discourse strategies, better tell the story of fine Chinese culture, and promote Chinese culture to the world. To achieve this end, we should strengthen the construction of China's mainstream media's international cultural discourse system, establish a discourse system that is easy for foreign audiences to understand and accept, further promote China's cultural soft power, and effectively disseminate and shape China's national image abroad. Due to confinements in the corpus, this study has certain limitations. Future research could collect corpus materials from various China's mainstream media culture-related discourses for analysis, and continue conducting in-depth studies, in order to achieve a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding and discovery.

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