

# Critical Metaphor Analysis of the White Paper “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action” From the Perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory

Ruisi Zhang\*

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia;  
School of International Studies, Hunan Institute of Technology, Hengyang, China

Marlina Jamal

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

**Abstract**—COVID-19 has been one of the most threatening infectious diseases in recent years, and China, the epicenter of this epidemic, has suffered a national image crisis, which calls for urgent actions to achieve self-image construction. The government’s white paper, the window of national ideology, is essential in constructing a national image. In this context, the study aims to conduct an ideological exploration of the white paper “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action”. The study relies on conceptual blending theory and van Dijk’s theory of ideology to develop a theoretical research framework to explore the process of ideological construction of metaphorical structures in the blended space. This study comes to the following three conclusions: (1) metaphorical structures in the blended space try to explain China’s actions to the public and arouse sympathy to persuade readers; (2) conceptual metaphors in this white paper reveal major ideologies: “collectivism,” and “people-oriented value”; (3) these ideologies aim to construct a positive national image: a country willing to take responsibilities and cooperate with the world. In conclusion, conceptual blending theory could provide a valuable apparatus for micro-level study in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), enhancing people’s understanding of conceptual metaphors’ functions in ideological construction.

**Index Terms**—government white paper, ideology, national image, critical discourse analysis, conceptual blending theory

## I. INTRODUCTION

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that emerged at the beginning of 2020 is expanding worldwide, bringing unprecedented problems and challenges to countries (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). China’s national image and actions relating to COVID-19 came under scrutiny and were subject to criticism (Chen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2022). According to a Research Center survey (2020), international views of China turned much more damaging in 2020 amidst widespread criticism of its handling of COVID-19. Of the 14 countries surveyed, 61% believe China has mishandled the outbreak. Most advanced economies surveyed have negative views of China, with around 75% or more in Japan, Sweden, Australia, South Korea, and the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

These figures pose a significant challenge to China since the national image is widely considered a country’s intangible soft power (Nye, 2023). Projecting a positive national image to the world is essential to improving a country’s soft power. In times of globalization, a country’s “favorable image and reputation around the world [...] have become more important than territory, access, and raw materials” (Gilboa, 2008, p. 56), which contributes to an ideal destination to attract foreign investment, international tourists, or international aid (e.g., Avraham 2020; Steenkamp, 2021). Against this background, China must improve its global image to communicate with the world better.

National image is a typical external manifestation of national identity, and constructing an ideal national image through discourse depends on appropriately using discourse strategies and strategic choices (Wodak, 2009). Politics is filled with national interests, ideology, and image (Woolard, 2020), and political actions are influenced and played by language (Geis, 2012; Wilson, 2015); political discourse thus aims to discover how the world is presented to the public through particular forms of linguistic representation (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2001). As one kind of political discourse, the white paper is presented as a typical form of a political document, and the officially published white paper is a national discourse in China. China’s government white papers can be considered a bridge connecting China and the world since they are released to present China’s attitudes, beliefs, and actions to the world.

Metaphors effectively communicate and evoke emotion (Horton, 2013). Conceptual Blending Theory, a theory of online meaning construction founded upon mental space theory (Fauconnier, 1997), claims that words are used to prompt

---

\* Corresponding Author

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/11/20-striking-findings-from-2020/>

the construction of mental spaces rather than referring directly to entities (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). While there is an abundance of studies that have been done to investigate the use of conceptual metaphor in political discourse with the use of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (e.g., Ahrens, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 2020), thus far, there has been a lack of studies focusing specifically on the distinctive conceptual metaphors associated with the epidemic in the governmental white paper, which was written under the guise of Conceptual Blending Theory. This study adopts a theoretical research framework of Conceptual Blending Theory and van Dijk's theory of ideology to explore how ideological concepts can be internalized in the white paper and discover their ideological functions in China's national image construction in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *China's National Image: in the Context of COVID-19*

China, the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, has suffered one of its worst international crises in terms of image and prestige since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (Onnis, 2022). The media's information is critical in constructing reality (McCombs, 2014). In France, "Yellow Alert" was used alongside pictures of Chinese people in the media<sup>2</sup>; Trump named COVID-19 the "China Virus" and "Kung Flu" in his public speech and on Twitter (Rubin & Wilson, 2021). Besides naming the virus, *The Times* and *The New York Times*, two major Western mainstream media outlets, describe China as a threatening and autocratic country with harmful appraisal resources to express their attitudes towards China (Xue & Xu, 2021; Mu et al., 2021). Some western European newspapers also employ negative words in describing China's control and prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pietrzak-Franger et al., 2022).

Such negative linguistic representations and unsatisfied opinion polls would lead to consequences. Twitter hashtags such as #Chinese Don't Come To Japan# are widely accepted in Japan<sup>3</sup>; tens of thousands of signatures in Singapore call for petitions to ban the entry of Chinese citizens<sup>4</sup>. What is worse, hate incidents and crimes against Chinese people were widely reported during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data indicates a significant rise in reports of discrimination against individuals of Chinese descent, as well as an increase in anti-Asian hate crimes (Gover et al., 2020).

### B. *Discursive Construction of the National Image*

"Discourse" is a form of social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). There is a dialectical relationship between the discourse and social structures in which social contexts influence the nature of discourse, and in turn, discourses have a reciprocal impact on social and political realities (Wodak, 2002). Discursive acts are socially constitutive: they are primarily responsible for constructing social conditions; they are employed to maintain and perpetuate the status quo (Wodak, 2014).

Using discourses, social actors constitute knowledge, situations, social roles, identities, and interpersonal relations between different social groups (Van Dijk, 2009). Wodak (2009) suggests that the national identity is constructed and conveyed in discourse and thus is the product of discourse. National identity includes "a set of dispositions, attitudes, and conventions largely internalized through socialization" (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 3). National identity can be constructed, perpetuated, transformed, or dismantled through discursive practices (Wodak et al., 2009), among which constructive strategies aim to create "a certain national identity by promoting unification, identification, and solidarity, as well as differentiation" (Wodak, 2009, p. 33). National image is closely linked to national identity since the construction of national identity derives, in part, from the nation's perceived international image in world opinion (Aronczyk, 2007; Stock, 2009). Discourse and national image are thus intimately connected.

### C. *Review of Related Studies*

Many researchers have paid attention to the role of language, or discourse, in constructing a national image. They aim to figure out how to construct a positive image of China and how to make China understood across the world by stressing the importance of a discourse system in the process of national image construction (e.g., Wang & Ge, 2020; Gu & Tipton, 2020). Political discourse, including leaders' public speeches, government reports, press conferences, and white papers, represent diplomatic means to construct China's foreign discourse and image. Wang (2017) takes Chinese President Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream" discourse as an example to construe Chinese nationalism and its functions in constructing national identity. Hu and Li (2022) investigate the construction of the national image in the government document through the analysis of keywords and their collocations in the English translations of the *Government Work Reports*. Gu and Tipton (2020) draw on a corpus containing 20 years of press conference data between 1998 and 2017 with 280 questions to examine interpreters' role in shaping the Chinese government's image while responding to journalists' questions. Meanwhile, some researchers focus on government white papers, mainly Chinese defense white papers, to explore their meanings and the ideology behind them and to demonstrate how they construct China's national image (Zhang, 2012;

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/30/world/asia/coronavirus-chinese-racism.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/30/world/asia/coronavirus-chinese-racism.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://sg.news.yahoo.com/wuhan-virus-petitions-in-singapore-calling-to-ban-travellers-from-china-making-rounds-101950658.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS50ay8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAHbVqvCO5jVwGdcXFytlmz3-c2R5PZgqPRo3JRfThvBcXV5xBjypIvErM0myNxZQI2uysTp-Rni-AfJ3\\_BQ4h0KsP-1D-OJz5ogw0a9u10BBwmTP2S-jjKaliMr8Ta1MvAGtxtXO5o01EMhvx0T97fEUgK\\_4DnH301YE5Hcv6dpc](https://sg.news.yahoo.com/wuhan-virus-petitions-in-singapore-calling-to-ban-travellers-from-china-making-rounds-101950658.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS50ay8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAHbVqvCO5jVwGdcXFytlmz3-c2R5PZgqPRo3JRfThvBcXV5xBjypIvErM0myNxZQI2uysTp-Rni-AfJ3_BQ4h0KsP-1D-OJz5ogw0a9u10BBwmTP2S-jjKaliMr8Ta1MvAGtxtXO5o01EMhvx0T97fEUgK_4DnH301YE5Hcv6dpc)

Yang et al., 2018). In the context of COVID-19, the government white paper explaining China's attitudes or actions during this epidemic takes advantage of shaping China's image more directly than others. However, the function of national image construction within the government white paper has received limited attention.

Related studies concerned with the white paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action" focus primarily on metaphorical translation and conceptual metaphors. Feng and Liu (2022) explore the features of war metaphors in the source text and probe into the translation strategies in the target text. Xin and Yan (2022) categorize and expound metaphors in the original Chinese white paper before exploring the specific translation methods for the entirely different metaphor categories. Besides, a few researchers have turned to analyze the functions of the white paper, such as national image construction. Liu and Liu (2021) take the theory of transitivity system within Systemic Functional Linguistics as the theoretical basis to analyze the white paper and explore the construction of China's national image.

To conclude, the review of studies above has brought to attention several gaps in the existing literature on discursive representations of China's image in COVID-19. Firstly, most studies have predominantly centered on the image of China from the perspective of "others," but they have not extensively studied the discourse used in China for self-portrayal. Secondly, among the studies on political discourse, Chinese President Xi Jinping's speeches and *Government Work Report* have been discussed to figure out China's image portrayed in the discourse. In comparison, relatively few studies link the white paper to the construction of the national image. Thirdly, few researchers have focused on the white paper regarding this health crisis among the various types of white papers in China. The global lack of attention highlights a significant opportunity for research. Gaining a clearer understanding of China's actions and attitudes regarding the health crisis can foster better collaboration between China and the rest of the world in the fight against this global challenge. Finally, as to the theoretical approach, Conceptual Blending Theory has not been applied in the study of national image construction nor the analysis of the government white paper.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### A. *Van Dijk's Theory of Ideology*

According to van Dijk (1998), ideologies are "clusters of beliefs in our minds" (p. 26); ideologies are belief systems, which implies that a theory of ideology requires a cognitive component to effectively illustrate the concepts of "belief" and "belief system" (van Dijk, 2013, p. 116). Ideologies consisting of social representations are socially shared by group members, which define the social identity of a group. Ideologies are not just systems of ideas; they are foundational frameworks of social cognition with internal structures, as well as cognitive and social functions (Van Dijk, 2017). These basic frameworks are assumed to influence a group's social reproduction, which "represents the characteristics of a group in terms of their identity, tasks, goals, norms, values, position, and resources" (van Dijk, 2005, p. 18). That is, ideology is both social and cognitive; it functions as an essential backbone in organizing the social cognition shared by members of social groups, organizations, or institutions. This sociocognitive definition of ideology should be compared with the (neo-)Marxist notion of false consciousness (Koller, 2014).

Van Dijk (2017) summarizes the functions of ideologies in the social and cognitive dimensions: 1) Ideologies organize the social representations shared by the group members; 2) Ideologies are the foundation of the discourses and other social practices of group members; 3) Ideologies direct group members to organize their actions based on the goals and interests of the group; 4) Ideologies function as part of the sociocognitive interface between groups' social structures, discourses, and other social practices.

In conclusion, ideologies' social function is to reproduce or resist the status quo by enhancing the interaction and cooperation of in-group members and interactions with out-group members; their cognitive function enables things to be classified, persons to be grouped, characters to be described, feelings explained, and actions illustrated.

#### B. *Conceptual Blending Theory*

Conceptual blending theory was put forward by linguist Gilles Fauconnier and cognitive scientist Mark Turner in the late 1990s. Mental space is the core concept of Conceptual blending theory. Fauconnier (1997) claims that "the superficial linguistic expression is only the tip of the unnoticeable cognitive process of meaning construction, which signifies the complicated mental operations that operate in our thought, action, and communication" (p. 1). As a powerful discourse strategy, metaphor prompts for the construction of several mental spaces undergoing a specific conceptual blending operation; and "blended spaces are sites for central cognitive work: reasoning..., drawing...and developing emotions" (Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, p. 115).

A complete conceptual integration network contains four interconnected mental spaces: two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space (Fauconnier & Turner, 2003). The two input spaces have partially identical or similar schema structures and exist in partial mapping. The generic space reflects the schema structure and characteristics shared by the two input spaces; the blend space is a new product created by the combined action of the three spaces. The blending space has some of the features shared by the two input spaces and, at the same time, has new content with contextual factors added to it.

Fauconnier and Turner (1998) argue that "conceptual integration is a basic psychological operation that runs at different levels of conceptualization and under drastically different contextual cases" (p. 133). The "basic diagram" is listed below.

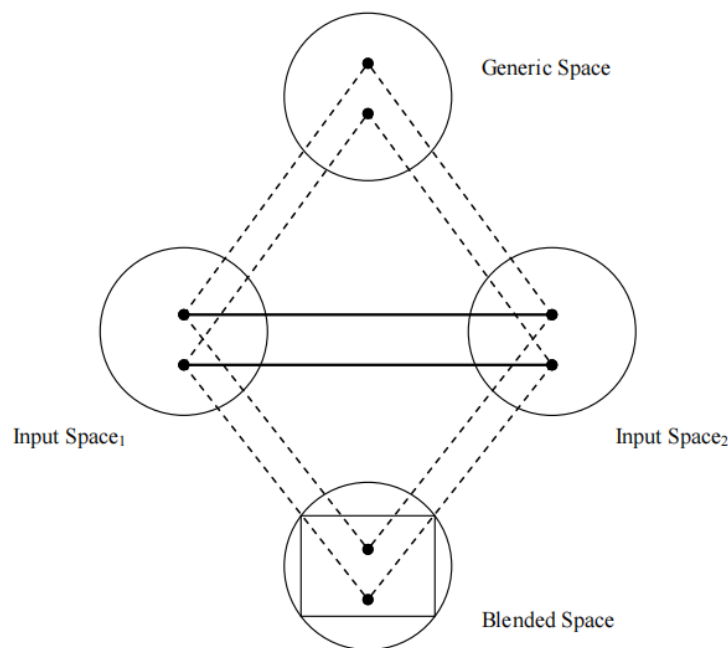


Figure 1. Conceptual Blending Basic Diagram (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 46)

The following is a detailed introduction to the critical concepts of conceptual blending theory.

(1) Input spaces

Blends emerge from the interaction of two input spaces, which involve spaces that have cognitive domains, entities, and elements from two different scenarios. As metaphorical discourse unfolds, a space is created for each scenario. One scenario corresponds to one mental space. In the conceptual blending process, a partial mapping occurs between the two input spaces, allowing shared standard counterparts to connect through cross-mapping. The mapping contains vital relations such as time, space, category, identity, and the cause-and-effect connection (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The dashed lines connecting the elements correspond to conceptual projections. The solid lines between these two input spaces represent the counterpart connections.

(2) Generic space

Concerning generic space, Fauconnier and Turner (2002) point out, “the structure that inputs seem to share is captured in a generic space” (p. 47). The generic space is composed of the general structure. As conceptual integration progresses, elements are drawn from two input spaces. The structures and elements in the generic space are usually more general and abstract than the input spaces.

(3) Blended space

The blended space consists of structures and organizations from two input spaces, and “the structure from two input mental spaces is projected to a new space, the blend” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 47). Blended spaces are interrelated with generic spaces. “Blended space not only includes the general structure of the generic space but also contains more concrete structure, as well as structures not provided by the inputs” (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998, p. 143). In the blended space, the emergent structure arises through the cognitive operations contained in the blend, which is not projected directly from the two input spaces but the outcome of the process of blending operations. As to the emergent structure, Fauconnier and Turner (2002) define “three different operations involved in the conceptual integration process: composition, completion, and elaboration” (p. 48).

“Composition” is the first step to integrating input spaces. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) state that “blending can compose elements from the input spaces to provide relations that do not exist in the separate inputs” (p. 48). The blending involves common elements from the two input spaces and some relations or topologies that do not exist in them.

“Completion” is usually taken unconsciously. “We rarely realize the extent of background knowledge and structure that we bring into a blend unconsciously. Blends recruit great ranges of such meaning” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 48). It is vital that the relative background knowledge is activated during the completion process and that the background knowledge is available from long-term memory. However, not all structures recruited from the two input spaces can be projected into the blended space; the structure related to speakers’ ideologies and communicative intentions can be projected through selective projection.

“Elaboration” is the last step of blending. Hart (2008) claims that “it is the running of the blend” (p. 102). Elaboration is the process of creating a blend using imaginative mental simulation guided by the principles and logic of the blend. A blended structure is created through mental activation in the light of emergent logic. The structure is generated through the cognitive processes inherent in the blended space, where various concepts and ideas interact and synthesize. This integration fosters the emergence of new meanings and insights, thereby shaping the framework in a significant and

meaningful manner.

#### IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study is to investigate how China's national image is represented through the exploration of ideologies in the white paper. Thus, the research questions are designed to achieve this research objective:

- 1) What are the ideological functions of the construal operation---conceptual metaphor used in the white paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action"?
- 2) What are the ideological impacts of conceptual metaphors on China's national image construction?

#### V. METHOD

##### A. Sample Collection

This study chooses the white paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action" published by the Chinese government as the target to make an analysis. There are several reasons for choosing the white paper as the source. The white paper, officially published at a press conference conducted by the State Council Information Office in Beijing on June 7, 2020, records China's efforts in its fight against the virus, shares its experience with other countries, and presents its outlook on the global battle. It is one of the most authoritative and prestigious official documents with strong spreading power, guiding power, influence, and credibility. More importantly, COVID-19 prevention and control measures have played a crucial role in effectively communicating important information on behalf of the government. These efforts are fundamental to our strategy for managing and controlling the epidemic. In sum, research data collected from the white paper provides typicality, reliability, and authority.

##### B. Research Method

In this study, the author adopts a case study to conduct an in-depth study of ideology exploration. Case study research, a qualitative method, examines a defined system through extensive and detailed data collection, utilizing multiple sources of information such as interviews, observations, documents, and reports (Creswell, 2007). "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action" reflects China's efforts and attitude in an all-rounded way with 24311 words and 65 pages, which lays a good foundation for this study. It is made up of four chapters: chapter one---"China's Fight against the Epidemic: A Test of Fire," Chapter Two---"Well-Coordinated Prevention, Control, and Treatment," Chapter Three --- "Assembling a Powerful Force to Beat the Virus," and chapter four--- "Building Global Community of Health for All".<sup>5</sup>

The first chapter, with 25 pages, narrates the fact of how the epidemic started to expand and what progress has been made through China's control and prevention of the virus from the last few days of 2019, when the pneumonia cases of unknown cause were initially found in May 2020, the month before the white paper's release. The second chapter, which is 15 pages long, describes what the government has done and its efforts to control and prevent COVID-19. The third chapter, which is 12 pages long, recounts the power of the Chinese people, that is, how the government takes notice of its people and how the people unite and win the fight. The fourth chapter, which is 9 pages long, concerns China's ideas on controlling and preventing the epidemic and public health. It believes that the entire world should come together to establish a global health community.

The white paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action", an independent document released by the government, is theme-oriented and focuses on China's actions in the health crisis, and is rich in detail in the description of China's attitudes, strategies, problems, and outcomes towards this issue in different stages. Thus, since it is representative in theme and comprehensive in content, the white paper is appropriate for an in-depth case study to answer the research question of how to explore its ideologies through the analysis of construal operations.

#### VI. FINDINGS

This paper adopts the metaphor identification program--- MIPVU of Steen et al. (2010) to discover that the corpus includes six main types of metaphors about COVID-19: war, journey, body, market, race, and test. In this study, an in-depth analysis of the war metaphor will be taken to present the process of constructing COVID-19 events using integrative metaphor structures. Politicians frequently use the domain of war to portray all kinds of struggling campaigns metaphorically, and contradiction for conflicts is defined as fighting, struggle, or competition.

##### A. Analysis of Conceptual Blending Network

###### Example 1

At the critical juncture of the *fight against* the virus, based on a precise understanding of the evolving situation, China took the major decision to continue COVID-19 prevention and control while resuming economic and social development.<sup>6</sup>

###### Example 2

<sup>5</sup> [https://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202006/07/content\\_WS5edc559ac6d066592a449030.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202006/07/content_WS5edc559ac6d066592a449030.html)

<sup>6</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_5.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_5.htm)

The CPC has issued a joint appeal with 240 political parties in more than 110 countries, calling on all stakeholders to put people’s lives and health first, uphold the vision of a global community of shared future, and pull together to **combat** the virus.<sup>7</sup>

**Example 3**

They had done their utmost in the fight to curb the spread of the virus and erected a first line of defense for the nation, making a significant contribution to **beating** the virus.<sup>8</sup>

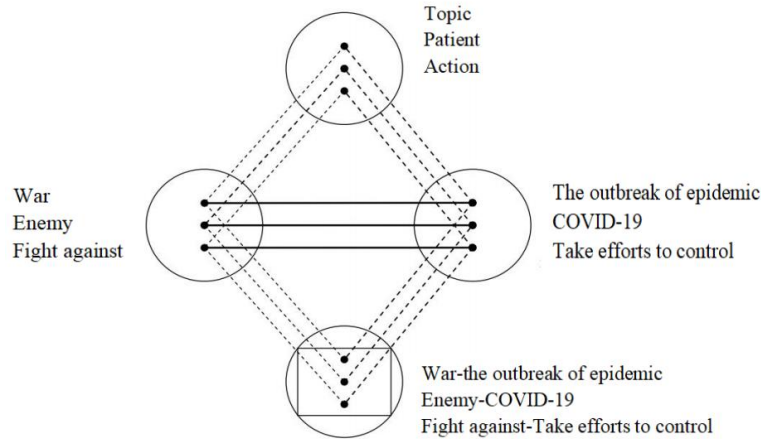


Figure 2. Conceptual Blending Network for “Fight Against”

The conceptual framework related to war employs the phrase “fight against,” indicating that the emergence of COVID-19 is perceived as a conflict against humanity. Additionally, the terms “combat” and “beat” convey similar meanings in this context. Within the blended space of this integration network, controlling the epidemic is conceptualized as hard. It also emphasizes the Chinese people’s courage and strength in controlling this epidemic. It carries the inference that Chinese people are brave and have made great sacrifices in the “war”.

**Example 4**

China won a critical **battle** in **defending** Wuhan and Hubei against Covid-19, which was a major step forward in the nationwide virus control effort.<sup>9</sup>

**Example 5**

Solidarity and cooperation are the most powerful **weapons** available to the international community in the war against the pandemic.<sup>10</sup>

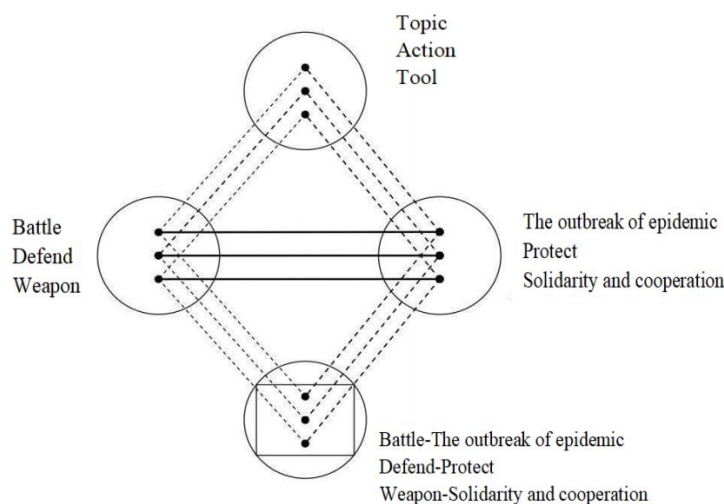


Figure 3. Conceptual Blending Network for the Interaction of “Battle”, “Defend” and “Weapon”

<sup>7</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_6.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_6.htm)  
<sup>8</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_3.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_3.htm)  
<sup>9</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_3.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_3.htm)  
<sup>10</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_6.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_6.htm)

In light of the invasion, it is imperative that we unite to defend ourselves and take appropriate action. The concept of “battle” describes the difficulty of the Chinese people’s situation. The concept of “defend” means that the Chinese government has always taken the Chinese people as the priority for protection. With the keywords “weapon” and “solidarity and cooperation,” two mental spaces are constructed, which enter into a conceptual integration network in which “solidarity and cooperation” are conceptualized as the weapon in a war. This conceptual framework on warfare highlights the significant importance of weapons in military strategy and outcomes. Where hearers are prompted to conceptualize solidarity and cooperation as the weapon, elaboration of such a network makes available the reference that Chinese people are brave and united and cooperation is the key to winning the battle between the virus and human beings.

Example 6

The best doctors and nurses were rapidly dispatched to the *front line* of the fight against the virus.<sup>11</sup>

Example 7

Focusing on the main *battlefield* of Wuhan and coordinating efforts in the most severely-affected areas and across the rest of the country, China pinpointed key R&D areas for different stages of virus control.<sup>12</sup>

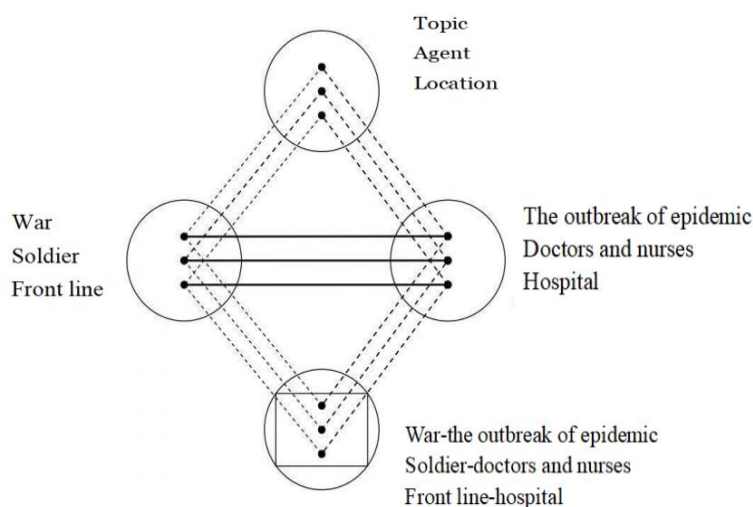


Figure 4. Conceptual Blending Network for “Front-Line” and “Battlefield”

In this blending network, an emergent structure emerges within the blended space where the themes of war and the COVID-19 outbreak intersect. The concept of the “front-line” underscores the critical and challenging nature of epidemic prevention and control efforts, especially within hospitals, which serve as the frontline in this battle. Furthermore, various locations, including communities, cities in China, and other countries, are characterized as “battlefields”. This network’s elaboration focuses on the emotional complexities inherent in battlefield environments. It examines the experiences of frontline personnel, including soldiers and medical workers, who face significant challenges in high-pressure situations. These medical professionals often operate in dangerous conditions, where their safety is at risk while they provide critical care. Their roles reveal the profound emotional impact of working in such precarious settings, emphasizing the importance of resilience and the need for comprehensive support systems to address their unique struggles during times of crisis.

Example 8

People throughout the country observed a silence to mourn the loss of lives and pay tribute to *heroes* who had protected others’ lives at the cost of their own.<sup>13</sup>

Example 9

They (Chinese people) courageously shouldered their social responsibilities, and on this occasion made great *sacrifices* to win the battle against the epidemic.<sup>14</sup>

Example 10

Through painstaking efforts and tremendous *sacrifice*, and having paid a heavy price, China has succeeded in turning the situation around.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_5.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_5.htm)

<sup>12</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_4.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_4.htm)

<sup>13</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_5.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_5.htm)

<sup>14</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_5.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_5.htm)

<sup>15</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_3.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_3.htm)

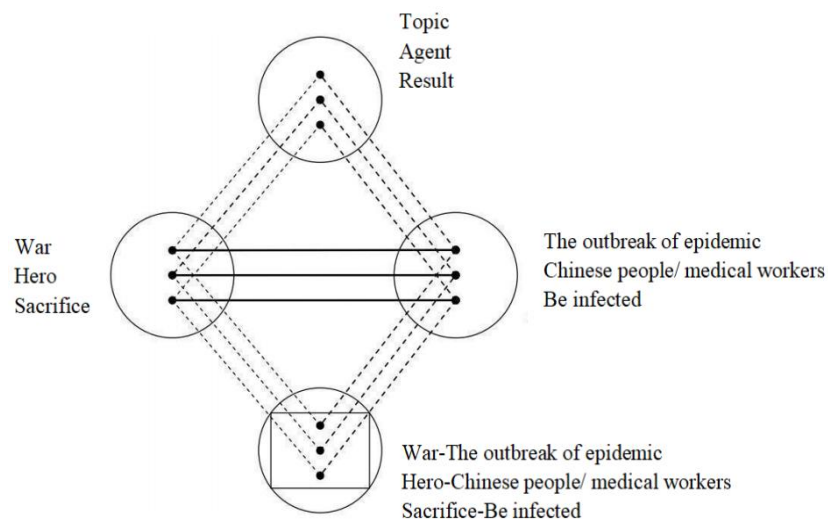


Figure 5. Conceptual Blending Network for the Interaction of “Hero” and “Sacrifice”

Prompted by “hero” and “medical workers”, “sacrifice”, and “being infected”, these two distinct mental spaces are constructed and interwoven into a comprehensive conceptual network. Each mental space represents a unique domain of understanding, complete with its own set of elements and relationships. When two corresponding elements from each input space are thoughtfully combined through the process of composition, an emergent structure arises in the blended space. The blended space creates an emergent structure where medical workers are conceptualized as the heroes who fight bravely against the enemy without fear of death and save thousands of lives at the cost of being infected or even losing their lives. This blended space facilitates cognitive reasoning and emotional development while fostering a network where the dedication and compassion exhibited by heroes and medical professionals deserve our utmost respect. Their ability to evoke emotional responses highlights their critical role in our communities. It is essential to acknowledge and honor their contributions in any discussion surrounding their efforts.

Example 11

The common *enemy* of humanity is this virus, not any particular country or any particular race.<sup>16</sup>

Example 12

The baseless accusation that China concealed epidemic information and death figures is a calculated slur on the 1.4 billion Chinese people, including those *killed* by the virus, and on millions of Chinese medical workers.<sup>17</sup>

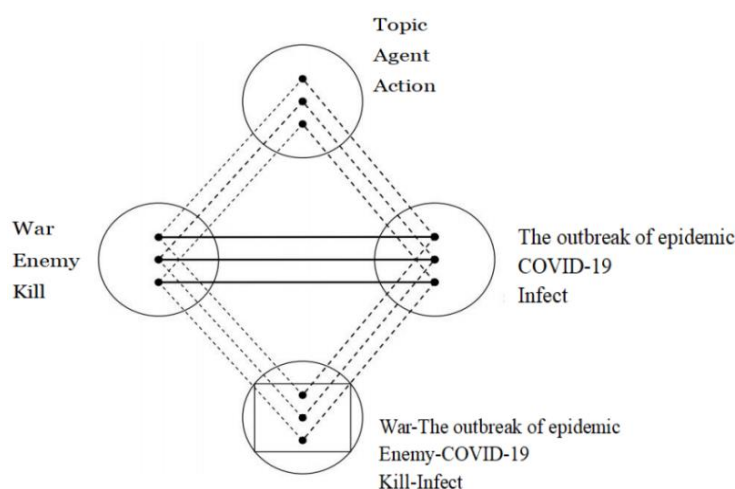


Figure 6. Conceptual Blending Network for the Interaction of “Enemy” and “Kill”

In this war, the novel coronavirus is the “enemy” who uses might to force intimidation to bring people into submission, as shown by the word “kill”. These keywords about combat process and enemy construct the specific conceptual

<sup>16</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_6.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_6.htm)

<sup>17</sup> [http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content\\_76135269\\_6.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269_6.htm)

metaphors that COVID-19 is the enemy. The synergistic interaction of these two metaphors can facilitate the construction of a blended network. An integrated structure develops within the blended space as three corresponding elements from each input are skillfully combined through a systematic composition process. This approach carefully examines how each component interacts and contributes to the synergy. The virus poses a threat that transcends national borders, affecting not only individual countries but also presenting a challenge to the well-being and safety of all humanity. Its impact is felt across the globe, reminding us that we are united in our struggle against a common enemy that knows no boundaries.

### *B. Discussion*

Discourses contribute to disseminating certain ideologies, which are realized through linguistic forms (Kress & Hodge, 1979; Kress, 1985). Social groups using discourses express their attitudes through organized general opinions about relevant social topics (van Dijk, 2002). “Metaphors are widely used in political discourse as effective, pragmatic devices to perform ideological articulation and sensationalization, as well as emotional arousal” (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007, p. 275). Metaphor choice in political discourses is motivated by the ideology of a particular speech community. The power structure reveals the existence of the ideology in political discourses. This paper defines ideology as a collection of shared ideas, including conventions, policies in a particular community, and ways of viewing the environment. Applying war metaphors to frame the epidemic can reconstruct the social reality and reflect some ideologies, including collectivism, patriotism, and humanitarianism, particularly with Chinese characteristics.

#### (1) Collectivist Orientation

One of the primary concerns of all cultures involves people’s relationships with the larger social groups. Collectivist orientation emphasizes loyalty to the group and considers the impact of actions on in-group objectives, often leading individuals to prioritize collective welfare over personal interests (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Those with a collectivist orientation are expected to consider the organization’s attributes rather than its attitudes when determining their commitment (Wasti, 2003). In a collectivist culture, decision-making emphasizes the benefits to the group rather than to individuals. As a result, there is an expectation that the group will actively support and care for its members.

Chinese people hold that the prosperity of the country or the solidarity of the community is the basis for the well-being of individuals. Thus, every person in the community is responsible for guarding the country or the community. Based on Confucianism, Chinese culture attaches great importance to community, morality, and practicality and has the concept of family orientation and the unity of nature and man. In this discourse, “solidarity and cooperation” is the weapon for fighting against the epidemic. It is based on collectivism and social common interests and advocates mutual assistance. Achieving comprehensive protection relies on the effective sharing of credible scientific information, which forms the foundation for informed decision-making. Additionally, fostering a spirit of global solidarity is essential, as collaboration and mutual support among nations enhance our collective ability to address challenges and protect public health. When an epidemic strikes one country, it should share information about the outbreak with the world, while other nations should be willing to extend a helping hand.

#### (2) Chinese Humanitarianism /People-oriented

Humanitarianism essentially refers to the sense that humankind should help vulnerable people suffering from immediate crises (Barnett, 2013). For states, humanitarian action effectively expresses ethical values and ideologies and enhances their national image. For China, humanitarianism consists of benevolence, compassion, dedication, and sacrifice rooted in the classics of Confucianism, which advocates that the well-being of the people in a country should be the foremost priority. It is essential to extend our care beyond ourselves and our families to encompass the broader community (Hirono, 2013). The concept of responsibility towards others is closely aligned with the principles of Western humanitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of alleviating human suffering.

In this battlefield, the epidemic is described as the enemy of the world, which means that the critical thing people should notice is that the spread of an epidemic in any country endangers the entire human species. Thus, humanitarianism is regarded as a vital factor in winning the epidemic. Chinese government’s determination to save every Chinese person suffering from the epidemic tells that it is sincerely to respect every life and to put all efforts into surviving every patient. This kind of humanitarianism is the key to winning the battle against the epidemic.

In sum, the utilization of conceptual blending frameworks is influenced by a complex interplay of ideological, historical, and cultural factors. Key elements include a collectivist ethos, a persistent spirit of heroism, and a scientific approach that promotes harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. To be specific, China is a socialist country that follows communism and is in favor of collectivism. The heroic spirit has a deep root in the Chinese people, for it has experienced the trial of warfare in history and led the Chinese nation to achieve the final victory. The Chinese nation advocating Confucianism always upholds the theme of peace and development and firmly believes that man and nature should live in harmony.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The white paper is an essential political document that records China’s efforts in fighting against the epidemic, summarizes the experience, and demonstrates the Chinese people’s determination and resolution. It contains an abundance of conceptual metaphors, which help convey the underlying culture and ideology. This paper has attempted to discover these ideologies with a theoretical framework by which metaphor may be addressed in CDA.

Based on the analysis, this study has found that (1) Conceptual Blending Theory, along with the processes of composition, completion, and elaboration, provides a framework for micro-level analysis. Metaphorical structures, particularly in the context of war metaphors, effectively convey China's actions to the public, stirring emotions to persuade readers; (2) conceptual metaphors in this white paper are rich in ideologies. For instance, in the "war" against the epidemic, "solidarity and cooperation" is construed as the weapon for fighting against the epidemic. This idea is grounded in the principles of collectivism, which prioritize the well-being of the community over individual interests. It highlights the importance of shared social goals and mutual support among members of society. The conceptual blending of "heroes" and "sacrifice" portrays medical workers as fearless "heroes" who save countless lives, often at the risk of infection or even their own lives; (3) the ideologies examined in this discourse play a crucial role in fostering a favorable national image: despite the challenges posed by the epidemic, the country and its citizens are committed to assuming responsibilities and offering support to the global community.

In conclusion, conceptual blending theory can enhance people's understanding of conceptual metaphors' role in ideological construction. It is conducive to helping audiences better comprehend China by evoking their emotional resonance with its practice in fighting the epidemic and persuading them to reinforce or enhance their trust in China for its positive actions in facing the epidemic crisis.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Ahrens, K. (2009). Analysing conceptual metaphors in political language. In *Politics, gender and conceptual metaphors* (pp. 1-5). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- [2] Aronczyk, M. (2007). New and improved nations: Branding national identity. In *Practicing culture* (pp. 115-138). Routledge.
- [3] Avraham, E. (2020). Nation branding and marketing strategies for combating tourism crises and stereotypes toward destinations. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 711-720. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.02.036>
- [4] Barnett, M. (2013). Humanitarian governance. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16(1), 379-398. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-012512-083711>
- [5] Brewer, M. B., & Chen, Y. R. (2007). Where (Who) Are Collectives in Collectivism? Toward Conceptual Clarification of Individualism and Collectivism. *Psychological Review*, 114(1), 133-151. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.114.1.133>
- [6] Chen, H., Zhu, Z., Qi, F., Ye, Y., Liu, Z., Sun, M., & Jin, J. (2020). Country image in COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of China. *IEEE Transactions on Big Data*, 7(1), 81-92. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TBDATA.2020.3023459>
- [7] Chilton, P. (2004). *Analyzing political discourse: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- [8] Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications.
- [9] Fairclough, N. (2001). Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 121-138). Sage.
- [10] Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis, in T.A. van Dijk (ed.) *Discourse as Social Interaction* (1st ed) (pp. 258-284), London: Sage.
- [11] Fauconnier, G. (1997). *Mappings in thought and language*. Cambridge University Press.
- [12] Fauconnier, G. and Turner, M. (1996). Blending as a central process of grammar. In A. E. Goldberg (Ed.), *Conceptual structure, discourse and language* (pp. 113-130). Stanford, California: CSLI Publications.
- [13] Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (1998). Conceptual integration networks. *Cognitive science*, 22(2), 133-187. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0364-0213\(99\)80038-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0364-0213(99)80038-X)
- [14] Fauconnier, G. and Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- [15] Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2003). Conceptual blending, form and meaning. *Recherches en communication*, 19, 57-86.
- [16] Feng, Z. B. & Liu, Z. Q. (2022). English translation of war metaphors in publicity discourse of COVID-19 prevention and control: A case study of "Fighting COVID-19: China in action", *Journal of Weinan Normal University*, 1, 68-73.
- [17] Flowerdew, J., & Leong, S. (2007). Metaphors in the discursive construction of patriotism: the case of Hong Kong's constitutional reform debate. *Discourse & Society*, 18(3), 273-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507075476>
- [18] Geis, M. L. (2012). *The language of politics*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- [19] Gilboa, E. (2008). Searching for a theory of public diplomacy. *The American Academy of Political and Social Science annals*, 616(1), 55-77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312142>
- [20] Gover, A. R., Harper, S. B., & Langton, L. (2020). Anti-Asian hate crime during the COVID-19 pandemic: Exploring the reproduction of inequality. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 647-667. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1>
- [21] Gu, C. & Tipton, R. (2020). (Re-) Voicing Beijing's discourse through self-referentiality: A corpus-based CDA analysis of government interpreters' Discursive mediation at China's political press conferences (1998-2017). *Perspectives*, 28(3), 406-423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2020.1717558>
- [22] Hart, C. (2008). Critical discourse analysis and metaphor: Toward a theoretical framework. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 5(2), 91-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405900801990058>
- [23] Horton, W. S. (2013). Character intimacy influences the processing of metaphoric utterances during narrative comprehension. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 28(3), 148-166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2013.797735>
- [24] Hirono, M. (2013). Three legacies of humanitarianism in China. *Disasters*, 37(2), 202-220. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12022>
- [25] Hu, K., & Li, X. (2022). The image of the Chinese government in the English translations of Report on the Work of the Government: a corpus-based study. *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, 9(1), 6-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23306343.2022.2066814>
- [26] Koller, V. (2014). Cognitive linguistics and ideology. In J. R. Taylor and J. Littlemore (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to cognitive linguistics* (pp. 234-252). Bloomsbury.

- [27] Kress, G. & Hodge, R. (1979). *Language as ideology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- [28] Kress, G. (1985). *Linguistic processes in sociocultural practice*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- [29] Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2020). Conceptual metaphor in everyday language. In S. D. Sarasvathy, N. Dew and S. Venkataraman (Eds.), *Shaping entrepreneurship research* (pp. 475–504). Routledge.
- [30] Liu, Z., & Liu, H. (2021). The Construction of China's National Image From Transitivity Perspective—A Case Study of "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action". *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 11(11), 1421-1427. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1111.09>
- [31] McCombs, M. (2014). *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion*. England: Polity Press.
- [32] Mu, J., Zhao, H., & Yang, G. (2021). A critical discourse analysis of reports about China on the COVID-19 pandemic in *The New York Times*. *Open Access Library Journal*, 8(8), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1107746>
- [33] Onnis, B. (2022). COVID-19 and China's global image. *Asia Maior*, (2), 73-87.
- [34] Pokhrel, S., & Chhetri, R. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher education for the future*, 8(1), 133-141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>
- [35] Pietrzak-Franger, M., Lange, A., & Söregi, R. (2022). Narrating the pandemic: COVID-19, China and blame allocation strategies in Western European popular press. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25(5), 1286-1306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494221077291>
- [36] Nye, J. S. (2023). *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition: Shifting Sands in the Balance of Power Between the United States and China*. Springer Nature Singapore.
- [37] Rubin, D. I., & Wilson, F. A. (2021). Blame China: Trump and anti-Asian sentiment during COVID-19. In *A Time of Covidiocy: Media, Politics, and Social Upheaval* (pp. 10-31). Brill.
- [38] Steenkamp, J. B. (2021). Building strong nation brands. *International Marketing Review*, 38(1), 6-18. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-10-2019-0253>
- [39] Steen, G., Dorst, A., Herrmann, J., Kaal, A. & Krennmayr, T. (2010). Metaphor in usage. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 21(4), 765-796. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cogl.2010.024>
- [40] Stock, F. (2009). Identity, image, and brand: A conceptual framework. *Place branding and public diplomacy*, 5, 118–125. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2009.2>
- [41] Van Dijk, T. A. (2009). *Society and discourse: How social contexts influence text and talk*. Cambridge University Press.
- [42] Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.
- [43] Van Dijk, T. A. (2002). Political discourse and political cognition. In C. Schäffne & P. Chilton (Eds.), *Politics as text and talk: Analytic approaches to political discourse* (pp. 203-237), Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- [44] Van Dijk, T. A. (2005). Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. In C. Schäffne & A. L. Wenden (Eds.), *Language & peace*. (pp. 17-33). Routledge.
- [45] Van Dijk, T. A. (2013). Ideology and discourse analysis. In M. Freeden (Ed.), *The Meaning of Ideology* (pp. 110-135). Routledge.
- [46] Van Dijk, T. A. (2017). Socio-cognitive discourse studies. In J. Flowerdew and J Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of critical discourse studies* (pp. 26-43). Routledge.
- [47] Wang, H., & Ge, Y. (2020). Negotiating national identities in conflict situations: The Discursive reproduction of the Sino-U.S. trade war in China's news reports. *Discourse & Communication*, 14(1), 65-83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481319893406>
- [48] Wang, J. (2017). Representing Chinese nationalism/patriotism through president Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream" discourse. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(6), 830-848. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.16028.wan>
- [49] Wasti, S. A. (2003). Organizational commitment, turnover intentions and the influence of cultural values. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 76(3), 303-321. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317903769647193>
- [50] Wodak, R. (2009). *Discursive construction of national identity*. Edinburgh University Press.
- [51] Wodak, R., De Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., and Liebhart, K. (2009). *The Discursive Construction of National Identities (2nd rev. ed)*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- [52] Wodak, R. (2002). Fragmented identities. In P. Chilton, C. Schäffner, *Politics as Text and Talk* (pp. 143-169). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [53] Wodak, R. (2014). Critical discourse analysis. In R. Wodak (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to English Studies* (pp. 302–316). Routledge.
- [54] Woolard, K. A. (2020). Language ideology. *The International Encyclopedia of Linguistic anthropology*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786093.iela0217>
- [55] Wilson, J. (2015). Political discourse. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, and D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- [56] Xin, H. J. & Yan, W.C. (2022). Enlightenment of Relevance Theory in Metaphor Translation of "Fighting Covid-19: China in Action", *Journal of Ningbo University*, 4, 79-84.
- [57] Xue, Y., & Xu, Q. (2021). An ecological discourse analysis of news coverage of COVID-19 in China in *The Times* and *The New York Times*. *Journal of World Languages*, 7(1), 80-103. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jwl-2021-0005>
- [58] Yang, S., Isa, S. M., & Ramayah, T. (2022). How are destination image and travel intention influenced by misleading media coverage? Consequences of COVID-19 outbreak in China. *Vision*, 26(1), 80-89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972262921993245>
- [59] Yang, Y. E., Keller, J. W., & Molnar, J. (2018). An Operational Code Analysis of China's National Defense White Papers: 1998-2015. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 23, 585-602. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-017-9524-5>
- [60] Zhang, J. (2012). China's Defense White Papers: a critical appraisal. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 21(77), 881-898. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2012.684969>

**Ruisi Zhang**, born on 10<sup>th</sup>, November, 1985, is a PHD student studying in Universiti Sains Malaysia and an associate professor in Hunan Institute of Technology, China, majoring in discourse analysis.

**Marlina Jamal** is a senior lecturer in School of Languages, Literacies and Translation (PPBLT), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), majoring in discourse analysis.