WAR Metaphor's Persistent Prevalence in Chinese Pandemic Coverage

LI Jun[a]; JIANG Xiangyong[b];*

[a] Foreign Languages College, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.
[b] Associate professor, Foreign Languages College, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.
* Corresponding author.

Abstract

The WAR metaphor pervades public discourse, offering a swift comprehension and eliciting urgency and rapid response. Universally, it emerges as the primary conceptualization for COVID-19 across nations. Nevertheless, certain Western media explore alternative metaphors, wary of potential adverse effects, while Chinese news media steadfastly embrace the WAR metaphor in pandemic coverage. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this article qualitatively analyzes the phenomenon. Conclusively, the study reveals deep-seated historical, cultural, and social contextual motivations, evident in China's distinct war history, collectivist values, and the pandemic situation. This exploration sheds light on the unique discourse of Chinese media on pandemic response, aiding global understanding and contributing to metaphor in cultural and news discourse research.

Key words: COVID-19; WAR metaphor; news media discourse; CMT

INTRODUCTION

At the close of 2019, the sudden onset of the COVID-19 epidemic took the world by surprise. Its rapid proliferation, formidable challenges in prevention and control, and significant harm induced a global state of panic. Consequently, it emerged as the most severe global public health crisis since the conclusion of the Second World War.

Metaphor, recognized as a heuristic and interactive tool, enables individuals to comprehend new, abstract, and complex concepts or events by relating them to more familiar and concrete ones (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Chilton, 1993). In response to the need to inform the public about this mysterious and unfamiliar disease swiftly and prompt collaborative action against it, various metaphors have been employed in reports by both Chinese and Western media.

Among a myriad of metaphors, the WAR metaphor stands out due to its pervasive frequency. Noteworthy figures such as former U.S. President Donald Trump and then-UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson portrayed themselves as "wartime leaders" engaged in a battle against the invisible enemy, the coronavirus (Chapman & Miller, 2020; Hanne, 2022). Chinese President Xi Jinping also delivered speeches emphasizing the unity of the Chinese people to triumph over the battle of epidemic prevention and control. Mainstream news media in Western countries and China incorporated elements from these speeches, including the WAR metaphor, resulting in an even more prevalent use of the WAR metaphor in news discourse related to COVID-19.Naturally, the dominant distribution of WAR metaphor in pandemic-related news discourses promptly caught the eye of researchers from various disciplines including linguistic ones on a worldwide basis. A multitude of studies have been conducted and examined the use of martial language in COVID-19-related discourses in different countries. For instance, Bates (2020) analyzed the use of WAR

metaphor in Trump's public speaking and concluded that a rejection of Trump's WAR metaphor is needed for the entailments of eliciting some negative effects on national and international policy responses to the threat of the pandemic. Preux et al. (2021) discovered the different roles played by WAR metaphor and SPORTS metaphor in shaping the thoughts, emotions, and actions of the audience regarding the COVID-19 crisis by surveying more than 700 native Spanish speakers, confirming the great impact that metaphor exerted on our cognitive mechanism and psychological state. Hanne (2022) also conducted a detailed analysis of WAR metaphor for COVID-19 occurred in Donald Trump's and Boris Johnson's rhetoric, unveiling their effects on the national pandemic control as well as their ideological power, and articulated his favor for alternative metaphors like ecologically inspired ones. These Western scholars all closely investigate the distribution and function of this prevailing metaphor in pandemic news reports, and to some degree, draw a relatively similar conclusion that it is necessary to find and apply novel and alternative metaphors to frame the national health crisis for the public. Actually, many scholars such as Walker (2020) have found that WAR metaphor employment in Western news media reports related to COVID-19 presents a significant decline due to the concern of its latent or confirmed counterproductive effects on public communication of the pandemic. These findings in return contribute to a further decrease in the choosing of that universal framing patterns by reporters in Western countries (Hanne, 2022). However, Chinese media presents a different picture while portraying this pandemic, with the language of warfare still taking the overall supremacy among multifarious choices of metaphorical representation for the pandemic (Li, 2021; Gui, 2021; Yang, 2021).

Unfortunately, this distinct metaphorical characteristic of Chinese epidemic prevention and control discourse received incongruously insufficient interest and exploration from the linguistic area. Most articles published on WAR metaphor in Chinese news reports concerning COVID-19 mainly focused on the distribution, operating mechanism, and functions of this metaphor along with the motivation and ideological attachments behind it. For instance, Kalinin and Romanov (2021) did an empirical analysis of the metaphorical projections of COVID-19 in the Chinese and Russian media, revealing the role WAR metaphor played in China's combating the plague through a quantitative investigation of its frequency and entailments. Yang (2021) had a deep look into the metaphorical models of war used in Chinese pandemic news discourse and exposed the ideological entailments based on the framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis proposed by Charteris-Black (2004). These studies uncovered the universal motivations (human conceptual mechanism, the strong framing power of war domain, the pressing need for communicating the risks

and urgency, etc.) behind the prevalent usage of WAR metaphor, but the special ones related to the specific history, culture and pandemic situation of a certain country like China haven't been explored technically. This study, therefore, aims to serve as a sprat on this interesting topic. The goal of this present article is to explain the reasons of the unremitting favor for WAR metaphor in the COVID-19-related reports of Chinese news media. It will start by delineating the relationship between WAR metaphor and the global pandemic. And then the unrelenting prevalence of WAR metaphor in China's framing of COVID-19 will be presented. In the end, special social, historical, and cultural reasons for the insistence on WAR metaphor will be discussed.

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR, THE WAR METAPHOR, AND THE PANDEMIC

Traditionally, metaphor, as opposed to simile, was regarded merely as a rhetorical and stylistic device facilitating the comprehension of one concept through another based on their similarities. Its usage was predominantly observed in formal writing such as articles and poems. However, this conventional understanding of metaphor underwent a systematic transformation with the introduction of conceptual metaphor theory in "Metaphors We Live By," a seminal work in cognitive linguistics by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. According to their perspective, metaphor not only pertains to our language system but, more crucially, to our cognitive mechanism concerning emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. In this context, a more familiar and concrete concept (source domain) is employed to conceptualize an unknown and abstract one (target domain) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

During the cognitive process, components belonging to the two domains undergo a systematic topological mapping, resulting in sets of correspondences being projected consistently. For instance, in the metaphor "LOVE IS A JOURNEY," elements from the journey domain map onto the corresponding love domain. Consequently, expressions like "Our relationship is going nowhere" or "Our relationship has hit a dead-end street" emerge in our daily language. This type of metaphor is conceptual in nature, as its motivation occurs at the cognitive level, connecting two seemingly unrelated semantic domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The linguistic expressions we employ, on the other hand, represent the linguistic realizations of the conceptual metaphor "LOVE IS A JOURNEY." This showcases its advantage in condensing and simplifying the complex and abstract emotion of love into a more tangible concept, such as a journey (Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Consequently, this cognitive processing enables humans to conceptualize the under-explored world through embodied experience.

Moreover, the non-negligibly mighty power of conceptual metaphor derives from its framing function. The operating mechanism is that whenever each mapping between a particular source domain and target domain happens it highlights certain perspectives and conceals others regarding a situation or problem that the chosen metaphor intends to represent.(Burgers et al., 2016; Goatly, 2007; Lakoff & Wehling, 2016) In other words, the audience's perceptions and evaluations of particular topics will be shaped by the metaphors used by the addressers because each source domain of a specific metaphor foregrounds some aspects of the target and backgrounds the others. For example, the metaphor of ARGUMENT IS WAR foregrounds aspects of an argument like confrontation and backgrounds other less prominent ones like cooperation. Undoubtedly, the metaphorical framing of a concept, situation, or matter will definitely induce particular, and in most cases, expected emotions, attitudes, and behaviors of the target recipients. In the above case, the parties who are involved in the war-like perceived argumentation would have a stronger tendency to use aggressive tactics with the purpose of winning the *battle*. As for the audience of the verbal fight, they would unconsciously take sides, and support their "allies" while condemning the assumed enemies. Therefore, it is no surprise that the depiction of the emergent health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, enlists the power of varied and sundry metaphors, among which WAR metaphor is an obvious choice for their non-negligibly fabulous framing function.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), WAR metaphor is a typical structural metaphor in which non-war categories are described in terms of military ones. In addition, the WAR metaphor proves itself to be one of the most effective metaphors in both daily and formal thinking and communication for the following reasons summarized by Flusberg et al. (2018). First, the source domain of WAR exists in our conceptual system as a substantially salient knowledge frame with a well-defined schematic structure making it possible to be evoked and utilized easily. When people conjure up a war, a clear image of two opposing forces fighting on a battlefield with weapons in their hands will naturally turn up. Also, there are different hierarchical roles like general and common soldiers engaging in the war and bearing particular responsibilities in order to win and achieve specific goals. All of these elements of the war frame can be metaphorically employed in various discourses like the "wartime leader" in the utterance of Donald Tramp. Second, knowledge of war is quite familiar and widespread in almost every linguistic community for the common first-hand or second-hand experience of war, conducing to relatively shared interpretation and understanding of war-related expressions. Third, many social matters bear some cognitively structural resemblances to the war frame, making WAR metaphor an apt choice for the discussion revolving around those issues. Finally, the above three facts lead to the prevalence of WAR metaphor, which in turn strengthens their effectiveness in thinking and communication for the operating mechanism of human cognition, i.e. the cognitive processing time of conventional metaphors like WAR metaphor is shorter than novel ones (Blank, 1988; Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). Equipped with the above features, WAR metaphor effortlessly wins dominant frequency in discussing various topics concerning such fields as politics, health, medicine, sports, economics, etc.

Besides, the war frame is known for its efficiency in grabbing the recipients' attention, evoking strong emotions of fear, and mobilizing collective responses towards a target problem while emphasizing the threat and emergency (Chatti, 2021; Horton, 2007, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Health threats especially the ones posed by a highly contagious and life-killing disease like COVID-19 call for such effective communicative devices. COVID-19 was listed as a global pandemic by an official announcement of the World Health Organization (WHO) at the press conference held on 11 March 2020, which was the first time that coronavirus infection was assessed as a pandemic, indicating the great risks and threat it posed on the lives and properties of people in the global community. Hence, the war frame stands out as a perfect choice for constructing and communicating the image of COVID-19 to the public. It was also empirically evidenced by numerous studies that both in Western and Chinese contexts the military frame has been found to be widely used in pandemic coverage (Gillis, 2020; Semino, 2021; Walker, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

PERSISTENT PREVALENCE OF WAR METAPHOR IN CHINA'S FRAMING OF COVID-19

Because of its persuasive function, WAR metaphor was pervasive in both Western and Chinese news discourse concerning the pandemic since its outbreak. However, as increasing voices (e.g. Bates, 2020; Jenkins, 2020; Semino, 2021; Sered, 2020) arguing that excessive use of WAR metaphor in framing the pandemic could do harm rather than good to society, journalists in Western countries started to cautiously restrain and gradually decrease the use of WAR metaphor. However, journalists in China show little sign of scaling back the use of WAR metaphor in their pandemic-related discourses, which can be evidenced by recent official political reports including Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech (1) delivered at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 16th, 2022.

（1）特别是面对突如其来的新冠肺炎疫情，我们坚持人民至上、生命至上，坚持外防输入、内防反弹，坚持动态清零不动摇，开展抗击疫情人民战争、总体战、阻击战，最

大限度保护了人民生命安全和身体健康，统筹疫情防控和经济社会发展取得重大积极成果。

In responding to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, we put the people and their lives above all else, worked to prevent both imported cases and domestic resurgences, and tenaciously pursued a dynamic zero-COVID policy. In launching an all-out people's war to stop the spread of the virus, we have protected the people's health and safety to the greatest extent possible and made tremendously encouraging achievements in both epidemic response and economic and social development.

The party congress system is a fundamental organizational system of the party, which is of decisive significance for ensuring the party's leadership, promoting the party's unity, and constantly winning new victories in China's revolution, construction, and reform (Han, 2022). In the party congress system, the political report of the party's national congress is an important part. The political report of the National Party Congress has an extremely important position in playing the role of the highest leading body of the Party Congress. After the release of the report, a proliferation of similar coverage made by the *People's Daily* upsurge. As the mouthpiece of the CPC (the Communist Party of China), the *People's Daily* boasts significant influence and authority in the nation with great circulation. The journalists of the news media either quote the original words or cite them with even more extensions of those war-like expressions. The examples below.

在抗击新冠肺炎疫情斗争中，32万余支青年突击队、550余万名青年奋战在抗疫一线，<u>为打赢疫情防控的人民战争、总体战、阻击战</u>作出重大贡献。（《人民日报》，2022.11.4）

In the fight against COVID-19, more than 320,000 youth commandos and more than 5.5 million young people fought in the front line of the epidemic, making significant contributions to winning the all-out people's war to stop the spread of the virus. (People's Daily, 2022.11.4)

要适应病毒快速传播特点，切实落实"四早"要求，以快制快，避免战线扩大、时间延长。要集中力量打好重点地区疫情歼灭战，采取更为坚决、果断措施攻坚，尽快遏制疫情扩散蔓延，尽快恢复正常生产生活秩序，决不能等待观望、各行其是。（《人民日报》2022.11.11）

To adapt to the rapid spread of the virus, we must effectively implement the "four early" requirements and immediately set out, so as to avoid the expansion and extension of the battle. It is necessary to concentrate on fighting to wipe out the virus in key areas and take more firm and resolute measures to win the decisive victory of curbing the spread of the epidemic, and restore normal production and living order as soon as possible. We must not wait and see and go our own way. (People's Daily, 2022.11.11)

要紧紧依靠人民群众打好人民战争，加强信息发布，主动回应社会关切，及时解决群众实际问题，凝聚同心战疫、共克时艰的强大力量。（《人民日报》，2022.12.15）

We should firmly rely on the people to fight the people's war in a way to strengthen information dissemination and actively respond to social concerns, as well as promptly solve practical problems of the people, and unite powerful forces to fight the epidemic and overcome the difficulties together. (People's Daily, 2022.12.15)

In the above examples, the term "人民战" (people's war) used by President Xi Jinping in the congress report also occurs in (2) and (4) accompanied by some extension of other metaphorical war expressions like "一线" (the front line), "歼灭战" (war of annihilation) and etc. The *People's Daily* exists as one of the most representative mainstream newspapers in China, and as Qiang and Liu (2015) argued mainstream media has great credibility and impact on the audience. Therefore, other influential news media in China (e.g. the *Global Times*, the *Guangming Daily*, and the *Economy Daily*), to some extent, follow and imitate some of its expressions including the metaphorical ones of war in order to gain trust from the public, further enhancing the high frequency of WAR metaphor in the pandemic coverage. Chen and Zhou's (2022) corpus-based study verified WAR metaphor's popularity. They explored 1110 coverages concerning COVID-19 in three Chinese media (*The People's Daily, The Caixin Weekly,* and *The Sanlian Lifeweek Magazine*) and examined the metaphors used in them. The results revealed an absolute dominance of WAR metaphor in the framing of epidemic coverage, accounting for about 80% among all kinds of metaphors in all the above three media's pandemic coverage. Of one accord, other research (Huang, 2021; Ji, 2022; Kong, 2023; Zhan, 2020) conducted on the metaphors used in the Chinese pandemic reports arrived at a similar conclusion. However, as mentioned above, both the presidents and the news media of Western countries like the U.S. and the U.K. have already decreased or even abandoned the war frame of COVID-19. The discussion below will unfold the motivations for China's insistence on WAR metaphor.

REASONS FOR WAR METAPHOR'S POPULARITY IN CHINA'S COVID-19 REPORTS

Undeniably, due to the powerful function of WAR metaphor just mentioned above, almost every country affected by the COVID-19 pandemic once used WAR metaphor in their news discourse on epidemic prevention and control to some extent. However, no country has employed WAR metaphor to the extreme in epidemic-related reports like China. There must be specific motivations behind the uniqueness, mainly reflected in the particular social situation, history, and culture of China.

SPECIFIC PANDEMIC SITUATION IN CHINA

The situation of the pandemic diverges in different countries and regions at different times for the quick

mutation of the virus and various country conditions. It is not surprising, therefore, that China, the most populous country in the world, witnessed the extraordinarily complicated and serious epidemic situation. These years, there have been several large-scale outbreaks and massive relatively small ones in both metropolises and small towns in China. At the beginning of 2020, the mysterious virus first hit Wuhan, then swept the whole country in a quite short time. The virus has spread faster and wider than any other since the founding of the People's Republic and has proven to be the most difficult one to contain. It is both a crisis and a major test for China, resulting in a nationwide lockdown. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Chinese people have united as one and stood together through thick and thin and waged an all-out people's war on the virus. In 2021, the Delta mutant outbreak occurred in multiple cities in a short time, affecting more than 20 provinces. Similarly, in April 2022, the Omicron variant swept Shanghai, a metropolitan with a population of 25 million, making it face an unprecedented ordeal. Furthermore, from 2020 to 2022, epidemic prevention and control in China experienced different stages including emergency containment of sudden outbreaks, exploration of normalized measures, and all-round comprehensive efforts countering the pandemic. In the face of such a changing and complex pandemic situation and stage, effective and accurate communication to the public through news media is in demand, hence WAR metaphor stands out for its powerful framing function mentioned above. There are various war expressions that could be used to portray different stages of pandemic prevention and control in China; there are different roles engaging in a war, and they could be referred to different characters (e.g. medical workers, government leaders, experts, Delivery staff, civilians.) bearing corresponding responsibilities during the pandemic; there are a variety of weapons utilized and strategies adopted in a war, and they could be applied to describe different measures taken and medical resources mobilized to cope with the pandemic...It may be pointed out that the convenient mappings between the war domain and pandemic domain also made WAR metaphor once pervasive in the pandemic coverage in English-speaking countries.

However, despite voices against metaphorical military language from the academic circle, news media in China continues the extensive use of this framing structure. It is the exceptionally changing and complex pandemic situation and social condition of China that makes the WAR metaphor a particularly apt option in the communication of pandemic-related information to the common audience lacking expertise on the virus and the way to deal with it. Moreover, Chinese WAR metaphor boasts great vitality and acceptability endowed by a wealth of war expressions (the related explication

will be presented in the next section), which can enable journalists to choose more appropriate ones according to different contexts and situations. This could be supported by the finding of Flusberg et al. (2018) which shows that the value of metaphors including WAR metaphor is largely linked to the context where they occur. Also, he argues that it is overly constraining or misguided to draw a quick conclusion on whether a war frame is appropriate or not without considering the specific situation. Naturally, there would be positive or negative consequences of war-like language usage, depending on the situation. Hence, in order to figure out what contributes to the great prevalence of WAR metaphor in Chinese pandemic coverage, an investigation of the situation of pandemic prevention and control in China is necessary. In 2020, it only took about three months to bring the Wuhan epidemic under control, taking the lead globally in resuming economic and social development through the rapid resumption of work and production. In 2021, more than 30 localized outbreaks were quickly extinguished through collective cooperation from all walks of life and the rapid concentration of resources. In 2022, the Chinese government effectively handled the cluster epidemic in Jilin, Tianjin, Shaanxi, and other places in a short, and won the final battle against the virus in Shanghai. Evidenced by the great achievement that China made in the work of pandemic prevention and control, the outcomes of extensively using WAR metaphor in the pandemic-related news discourse seem to be positive, which again further enhances the belief of Chinese journalists that their choice of WAR metaphor works well and deserves to be maintained.

Furthermore, another important social factor resulting in the great success of the WAR using the WAR metaphor fully and supplied all the necessary entailments, which is reflected in the occurrence of necessary policy action that is consistent with the WAR metaphor (Bates, 2020). For example, since a stereotypical war will eventually end with a victory or defeat, the positive and universal use of WAR metaphor in the pandemic coverage has an entailment that we will finally survive this health crisis. This entailment is one of the reasons causing some Western linguists (Hanne, 2022; Semino, 2021; Sered, 2020, etc.) to discourage the news media from extensively applying WAR metaphor in the pandemic coverage, for they believe that the crisis would not go away in a short time and the victory expectation will gradually wear down the public's patience and energy. However, the victory implication of the WAR metaphor in Chinese pandemic coverage is less criticized under the situation that the massive use of WAR metaphor not only matches with effective prevention and control measures but also matches with the successful progress mentioned above. Therefore, it is another social factor contributing to the retention of the universal application of WAR metaphor in China's epidemic reports.

LONG-LASTING WAR HISTORY OF CHINA

In the long history of 5,000 years, China has witnessed great social and historical changes from a primitive society to a socialist society, and each stage and its changes are accompanied by wars of all sizes. According to statistics, since the pre-Qin period (351-394 AD), there have been more than 12,800 wars in China, of which 3,791 have been recorded, accounting for about one-third of the total wars in human history (Fan, 2004). Undoubtedly, a large number of direct or indirect war experiences make the war framework clearer and more concrete in the minds of Chinese people, and the prominent cognitive framework can often provide a cognitive "template" for understanding new things (Chen, 2020). Therefore, when the COVID-19 epidemic broke out suddenly, in order to inform people of its nature and severity promptly, the Chinese President and journalists unconsciously appealed to WAR metaphor to cover the pandemic situation for the economic nature of war-related expressions. Despite this fact, it deserves extra exploration of the reasons for its unremitting predominance in Chinese pandemic coverage. Based on a thorough investigation of China's unique war history, we claim the specific historical motivations underlying the phenomenon as follows: (a) the abundant reserves of Chinese war expressions provide vigorous vitality for WAR metaphor that can be utilized in the pandemic coverage. To some extent, the more than 5,000-year history of civilization of the Chinese nation can also be described as the history of war. A large number of related records, such as various Chinese ancient military books (e.g. *Sun Tzu's Art of War*), poems, and rich military theories in modern times, make the war-related terms extremely rich and diverse. For example, when it comes to emphasizing the great determination of Chinese medical workers in the war against COVID-19, some journalists quote the verse, '不破楼兰终不还' (We will not leave the desert till we beat the foe), quoted from the poetry, 《从军行》 (*Army Life*), written by Tang dynasty poet Wang Changling. Also, when the news media try to mobilize the readers and promote unity, some workers use '修我兵甲，与子偕行' (Let's make our armor shine! And march your hand in mine!), originated from a battle song written in ancient China. Such poetic expressions are an integral part of Chinese culture and language with specific allusions. Undoubtedly, the occurrence of them is the choice made by journalists for specific purposes like the above ones, and such deliberate uses of metaphorical war expressions would win more attention and therefore be more effective (Beger, 2016), which makes them the reigning champion among various metaphors in Chinese pandemic coverage. In addition, these verses are full of Chinese characteristics, and in most cases, they can only be translated into conventional phrases or even non-metaphorical ones, thus, partly contributing to the more application of WAR metaphor in Chinese pandemic coverage compared with English ones.

Furthermore, there are other war expressions, especially the four-character idioms, repleted with Chinese features and originated from Chinese history concerning wars, and they are frequently employed by Chinese media in reporting the pandemic.

(5) 连日来，广大医务工作者冲锋在前舍生忘死，<u>筑起了抗击疫情的钢铁长城</u>，谱写了感天动地的生命赞歌。（《人民日报》，2020.1.26）

In the past few days, the majority of medical workers have <u>rushed forward and risked their lives</u>, <u>building a great wall of steel</u> to fight the epidemic, and writing an earth-shaking hymn to life. (People's Daily, 2020.1.26)

2020年疫情暴发之初，医务工作者白衣执甲，人民子弟兵闻令即动，社区工作者、公安民警、基层干部和志愿者挺身而出、坚守一线……最精锐的力量向风暴之眼驰援，最优质的资源向决战之地汇聚。（《人民日报》，2020.8.20）

At the beginning of the outbreak in 2020, medical workers were dressed in white with medical supplies in their hands, people's soldiers were ready to move on command, community workers, public security police, grassroots cadres, and volunteers stepped forward and stood firmly by the front line ... The most elite forces rushed to the eye of the storm, and the best quality resources were gathered in the decisive battle place. (The People's Daily, 2020.8.20)

'钢铁长城' in (5) literally refers to the Great Wall, an ancient Chinese military fortification, a strong-built fortress to resist the invasion of enemy horsemen. Here, it metaphorically means the great and united efforts of Chinese medical workers. More war expressions like '冲锋在前' (charge ahead), '白衣执甲' (dressed in white with weapons in hands), '闻令即动' (ready to move on command), '坚守一线' (stood firmly by the front line), and '决战之地' (the decisive battle place) can also be found in the above sentences. Apart from the ones mentioned above, there are numerous other idioms that originated from Chinese ancient battlefields and become conventional and useful expressions to mobilize people to knit together, that is, to promote their morale (Shiqi 士气) (Shi et al., 1982). All the above WAR metaphor expressions are derived from the specific war history of China. At the same time, such four-character expressions conforming to the economy principle of language and cognition, are easy to retrieve, understand, and remember (Yang, 2017), thus resulting in the greater popularity and distinctive use of such metaphorical expressions of war in the discourse of epidemic prevention and control in China.

As mentioned above, WAR metaphor, a conventional and universal metaphor in almost all languages, is a preferential rhetoric choice for reports in countries during the pandemic. However, a large number of military expressions and related words accumulated in modern Chinese endow WAR metaphor with more vitality (Liu, 2007), which is evidenced by a large number of novel

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WAR metaphor expressions employed in the discourse of epidemic prevention and control in China. These metaphorical war idioms with Chinese characteristics help the recipients understand the complicated pandemic situation at home and abroad more accurately without delay, so as to actively coordinate the prevention and control work and abide by keeping social distance, mask-wearing, self-quarantine, lockdown restrictions, and relevant regulations. These metaphors used in the reports are helpful in creating a tense war-like atmosphere, making it possible for the rapid concentration of national resources. It is documented that, during the first outbreak of the pandemic in Wuhan, 19 provinces provided emergent support to 16 cities in Hubei province. Also, 1/10 of the country's intensive care forces are mobilized to the epicenter of Wuhan, and 1/4 of Extra-corporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO) is allocated to Hubei province. Such an amazing achievement further enhances the priority of the WAR metaphor in the subsequent pandemic reports in China.

The second motivation related to the Chinese war culture is (b) the specific national psychological characteristics formed by the Chinese nation under the background of modern anti-aggression war and liberation war. After the Opium War (1840-1842), the capitalist powers presented themselves to China as aggressors and carried out crazy and barbaric aggression against China. They successively launched the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the Sino-French War (1883-1885), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and the Eight-Nation Alliance's war of aggression against China (1900-1901), which caused China to suffer the largest number of invasions during the longest time span in the world. The Chinese people suffered unprecedentedly during these intensive wars, making the characteristics of war a basic cognitive concept rooted in their minds (Wang, 2019) and also leading to a national psychological characteristic of abhorring the invaders and uniting as one in front of them. As mentioned above, the operating mechanism of metaphor is the systematic mapping from concrete conceptual domains onto abstract conceptual domains (Lakoff, 1980). Additionally, not only does it help people construe unfamiliar things and concepts, but it also transfers people's cognition and emotion from the source domain concept to the target domain concept, known as the "source resonance" effect (Chen, 2020; Landau, 2018). However, this mechanism works only if the source domain concepts are meaningful for the audience, that is, those concepts are in accord with their interests, beliefs, and values including the psychological characteristics. Therefore, the use of WAR metaphor can quickly inspire the national consciousness to save the nation, because they are in line with the national psychology of Chinese people who exceptionally hate the aggressors. COVID-19 is a dangerous invader and poses a serious threat to the lives and property of people,

and the confrontation with it cannot be said less fierce than any war in Chinese history. What's more, the media, especially the mainstream media, should not constrain its responsibility to provide authoritative and reliable information in the face of such public health emergencies. More importantly, it is supposed to play its role in guiding public opinion and creating a favorable social atmosphere in response to the great pandemic. It is not surprising, therefore, that the WAR metaphor has a uniquely large distribution in China's epidemic prevention discourse, as the special psychological characteristics of Chinese people evoked by the war schema can help the media fulfill this responsibility.

Moreover, modern China was plagued by external troubles as well as internal ones. In order to overthrow the rule of the Kuomintang (1927-1949) and establish a socialist system, the Communist Party of China (CPC) led the people in an arduous war of liberation, which was a just war for the Chinese people, and an uncompromising war against the exploiting class. After the victory of the War of Liberation, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established, enabling the broad masses of peasants and the working class who had been long exploited and oppressed by feudalism and capitalism to finally stand up and win their own voices in the country. This results in part to the Chinese nation's worship of righteous fighting, i.e., uniting against all evil forces and struggling for happiness. The emphasis on the importance of adhering to and developing a fighting spirit in the reports of the 20th National Congress of the CPC can also demonstrate the specific psychological characteristics owned by Chinese people. This national psychological characteristic has reinforced the war confrontation mindset and military terminology habits of the general population in China, and is, therefore, one of the factors contributing to the greater and remaining universality of WAR metaphor in the pandemic-related news discourse because they conform to the culture-specific conventions and conceptual preoccupations of the Chinese nation (Ahrens & Zeng, 2022). So far, the historical and social factors underlying this phenomenon have been discussed, and the collectivism values of the Chinese nation will be revealed below.

THE COLLECTIVISM VALUES OF THE CHINESE NATION

Collectivism is the belief that the collective interests of a group should take precedence over individual needs and interests. It emphasizes the importance of community and collective responsibility and encourages individuals to put the needs of the group ahead of their own. Collectivism is often contrasted with individualism, which emphasizes the importance of individual rights and freedoms. Although the concept of collectivism was first introduced from

the West, it has been a driving force throughout Chinese history, with its roots dating back to ancient times. In ancient China, collectivism was seen in the form of ancestor worship and the philosophy of Confucianism, which put a strong emphasis on family values, respect for elders, and responsibility for the well-being of the entire family (Kim, 1994, 1997). These values were further reinforced by the teachings of Legalism (one of the Various Schools of Thought in the history of China), which advocated for a strict, hierarchical society and the importance of following the laws and mandates of the ruler. During the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), the concept of collectivism was further strengthened through the implementation of a centralized government and the promotion of a unified culture among its citizens. This included the promotion of shared values, such as loyalty and obedience to the ruler. During the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), the collective attribute was further solidified by the implementation of a strict social hierarchy and the enforcement of Confucianism as the official state ideology. This results in the further promotion of traditional values, such as filial piety and respect for authority. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), collectivism was further enhanced through the promotion of Confucianism, which emphasized loyalty to the emperor and the importance of filial piety. During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), a system of joint responsibility was implemented in order to ensure the safety of the empire. This was known as the *Eight Banners System* and it was used to organize citizens into eight separate divisions, each of which was responsible for different tasks. This system also established a system of collective responsibility, as each division was expected to contribute to the overall well-being of the empire. In addition, collectivism has twisted with the patriarchal clan system throughout the history of China and evolved into patriarchal collectivism. This patriarchal collectivism strengthened the emotional connection among members of society, which was conducive to safeguarding national unity and promoting the relatively stable development of ancient China (Liu, 2018). Generally speaking, collectivism has been developing and reinforcing into a major part of Chinese culture since ancient times. If we look at the 20th century, we will find that the rise of communism further strengthens the idea of collectivism, as the CPC encourages citizens to fight for the greater good of the nation through official speeches and documents. Studies (Hong, 2017; Liu, 2018; Yu, 2021; Zhu, 2022) have shown that collectivism is still a major part of Chinese culture today, as evidenced by the strong emphasis placed on tradition, family values, and communal responsibility.

Actually, the value of collectivism indeed saves modern China through a lot of tough times. It guides all Chinese people to unite at the time of national peril, resisting foreign invasions again and again, and establishing a new China. During the period of social reform and construction in China, the economic system with public ownership as the main body helped the country to quickly concentrate manpower, material, and financial resources to resist various natural disasters and achieve development, which is another concrete manifestation of the collectivism attribute of the nation. After thousands of years of development, collectivism has been formally established as the basic principle of socialist morality in China and has become the subconscious value orientation of the people. In the event of major disasters, people are willing to answer the call of the government, put the overall interests of the country and the people first, and unite as one to tide over the difficulties. The relatively quick and appropriate response to SARS and the Wenchuan earthquake are the best examples. The COVID-19 pandemic, a sudden public health crisis, seriously threatens the safety of people's lives and property, constituting another national disaster. In the face of this new catastrophe, China's news media, especially the mainstream media, need to take up their social responsibility in guiding the emotions and actions of the public and help them understand the epidemic quickly while creating a good social atmosphere of unity. In this situation, WAR metaphor can be a powerful weapon to help them realize the above mission. The WAR metaphor can build a dichotomous cognitive framework between "our side" and "the enemy" in the audience's mind (Flusberg et al., 2018), with "our side" being the participants in the fight against the epidemic including medical personnel and volunteers, and the "enemy" is the mysterious and unknown covid-19. This dichotomy constructed through WAR metaphor, effectively evokes the collectivistic spirit that runs through the blood of the Chinese nation, inspiring the public to join the fight against the enemy and to quickly enter a wartime state, accepting the unified and strict "military" control measures such as city closure and quarantine. Also, due to their collectivism tendency and the diverse wording of WAR metaphor mentioned above, metaphorical war expressions are more acceptable for the audience of Chinese pandemic coverage. As Cox (2012) argues "if audience members accept the applicability of a metaphor, then the course of action suggested by the metaphor is seen as a viable option", therefore, the strict "wartime measures" are, to some extent, credible and justified for Chinese people. This kind of acceptance caters to the needs of pandemic control work, thus partly causing the media to stick to the application of WAR metaphor in a way to realize their social responsibility.

In addition, Chinese media outlets such as the *People's Daily* use words like '全国' (national), '我们' (we\us), '人民' (the people), and so forth in their coverage of COVID-19 alongside with WAR metaphor, which further

induces the collectivism values that can promote the positive function of WAR metaphor mentioned above. For example,

要在以习近平同志为核心的党中央坚强领导下，全国上下同舟共济、众志成城、共克时艰，坚决打赢疫情防控阻击战。（《人民日报》，2020．2．10）

Under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core, the whole country should unite as one to overcome the difficulties with joint efforts, and resolutely win the war of epidemic prevention and control.
(People's Daily, 2020.2.10)

During the outbreak of the pandemic in China, there are quite a lot of sentences like (7) in the related reports that employ war language with collective pronouns as the subjects. In this way, it replaces the specific social identities of the individual with a common collective identity (Cohen, 2011), which can be accepted as a necessary expedient by Chinese people with collectivistic values deeply ingrained in their minds. Furthermore, because of their collective acceptance of regulations and policies countering the pandemic, the Chinese government has successfully managed to control the crisis and restore normal life and production again and again. The remarkable achievements obtained in the fight against the pandemic in China, in turn, prompt the war frame to remain as the preferred metaphorical structure in its relevant coverage, so as to make full use of its positive functions to further promote the prevention and control of the pandemic.

In contrast, WAR metaphor in Western media reports related to the pandemic shows a decreasing trend due to the objection and criticism from critics. This phenomenon is linked to the individualistic values it espouses, as Tisdall (2020) argues that WAR metaphor in pandemic coverage and speeches contributes to the normalization of mandatory measures that undermine human rights such as freedom of movement and freedom of speech. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment, two intellectual liberation movements that took place between the 14th and the 18th centuries, contributed to the development of Western intellectual culture, which over time formed an individualistic value orientation (Wang, 2021). In other words, the Western public tends to emphasize and value the strength and freedom of their own. As a result, WAR metaphor that can arouse collective emotions and group identity are more likely to evoke Western audience's aversion. On top of that, the media are more interested in catering to the audience's needs and interests, so they intentionally reduce the use of WAR metaphor in pandemic reports. However, Chinese news media, especially the mainstream ones, are more likely to follow the expressions that are used in the official political discourse like the reports of the 20th National Congress of the CPC. This also, in a way, explains why WAR metaphor enjoys high frequency in China's media coverage of the pandemic from start to finish.

CONCLUSION

War frame provides a convenient reference system for perceiving the conceptual structure of epidemic prevention and control due to its cognitive salience and helps to reduce the cognitive barriers for the audience of pandemic coverage, making the WAR metaphor a popular choice among other alternatives for Chinese and Western news media workers. However, contrary to Western media's diminishing use of WAR metaphor, Chinese media shows an unrelenting preference for WAR metaphor in their pandemic-related reports. We ascribe this to China's unique war history, national collectivism values, and the specific situation of pandemic prevention and control after a relatively thorough scrutiny and analysis of them. First of all, the serious and complex pandemic situation in China embraced the WAR metaphor actively and made it an apt and acceptable choice. In addition, owing to the deeply-rooted war memory and the accumulated war expressions in Chinese people's minds, the employment of WAR metaphor in epidemic reports can maximize its positive function for emotional guidance. Lastly, the dichotomy between "enemy" and "in-groupness" created by the WAR metaphor can effectively evoke the collectivism spirit in the blood of the Chinese nation, making people more receptive to the unified and strict "militarized" control measures during the epidemic. Under the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this study examined the unremitting favor for WAR metaphor in Chinese news media reports during the epidemic. It is an attempt to help the global public better understand the epidemic prevention and control discourse in China. Besides, it can enrich culture-bound metaphor study and provide some insight for studies of metaphors in news discourse. Furthermore, we believe that it can be enlightening for further research to investigate how dominant a specific metaphor like WAR metaphor can be in other languages and cultures.

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